

Mariner's delight

Coastal pilot's retreat an award-winning navigation for builder, designer. **E4/5**





Mariner's Retreat renovation that was carried out in John Smulders' South Surrey home. The work, which won a recent reNOVATION award, involved the installation of a suite above Smulders' existing garage.

HOME RENOVATION

Smooth sailing in Surrey

An award-winning garage-addition ends a coastal pilot's quest for quiet in the family home

BY FELICITY STONE

There are many stories about renovations gone wrong. This is not one of them. No reno is all smooth sailing, of course, but an award-winning addition in south Surrey demonstrates that it is possible to remodel a home without the relationship between the homeowner and the builder ending up on the rocks.

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In this case, homeowner John Smulders is a marine pilot who steers giant cruise ships and freighters into Vancouver and up the Inside Passage. He clearly needs his wits about him, so a good night's sleep is critical — not so easy for someone who works shifts and whose sleep time can coincide with play time for his two children, aged seven and nine.

Deciding that the answer was to renovate, and knowing the importance of having someone experienced and trustworthy at the helm, Smulders contacted builder Harald Koehn, who had carried out a major renovation to the Smulders' house 10 years ago.

Smulders told him: "I need a place to sleep and for the kids to run around." That place needed to be beyond hearing range of the piano, built to code and not cut into the existing house.

Smulders says the builder was not only familiar to him, "Harald [also] has all the guys who can do the job." One of them is designer Ron van der Eerden of Pacific Image Home Designs, who also had worked on the previous reno and whom Koehn called in at the beginning of the latest one. Three sets of



Every square foot of space is used to the fullest extent, such as the retreat's bathroom, which features a shower stall. The biggest luxury is the room's raison d'être: the prospect of a good night's sleep without disrupting the family's daily routine.



Three sets of drawings later, builder Harald Koehn, designer Ron van der Eerden and client John Smulders had a plan to add a third bay to the existing double garage and a new 828-square-foot suite above it.



drawings later, they had a plan to add a third bay to the existing double garage and a new 828-square-foot suite above it: a mariner's retreat.

'Trust is No. 1'

It is the builder's job to interpret the client's needs to the designer, says Koehn, but this was the ideal situation where the client, builder and designer worked together from the beginning.

"You can get to know one another and develop trust before construction," he says. "When you bid, it's just dollars, and contracts are fine, you need them — but trust is No. 1." It's also advantageous for the builder to be involved in the design process, so he understands what's going on and can give input regarding cost-effectiveness.

A priority for Smulders was that the house look unpretentious from the street. It is a 1960s rancher, and although the roof was raised to accommodate vaulting during the previous reno, it is still just one storey. The challenge was to build a second storey above the garage that would tie into the main house, while allowing enough head room for the six-foot-two Smulders.

The construction was another challenge. "For the size of the space and the amount of time, you could build a house," says Koehn. The tight space limited the number of workers who could be there at one time, so coordination was required every step of the way. The intricacy of the details also added to the complication. "As you go along, sometimes drawings don't work, so you have to improvise and come up with solutions," says Koehn.

Attention to Detail

The craftsmanship, attention to detail and efficient use of space of the finished retreat evoke a ship's cabin. The ceiling, with multiple vaults covered in tongue-and-groove cedar, is stunning. The 24-foot crossbeams were brought in from Oregon — and when it was installed, "Harald was up there checking the height," says Smulders. The voids under the eaves were used for a drawer-like, pullout queen-

sized bed (the walls were too low to accommodate a Murphy bed), a huge walk-in storage closet ("Narnia" to the Smulders kids), a built-in saltwater aquarium and a sky-lit ensuite tiled on the ceiling, walls and floor because of the effects of condensation from the shower in such a compact room. In the main room, all the furniture had to be designed and custom-made for the space because it is so tight.

Small and unpretentious does not mean uncomfortable, however; the retreat includes in-floor heating, an energy-efficient gas fireplace facing the bed, a home theatre with discreet speakers in the ceiling and a wet bar with granite countertop. Large windows on either side of the room admit copious light and a refreshing cross draft.

The biggest luxury is the room's raison d'être: the prospect of a good night's sleep. So that Smulders can sleep without disrupting his family's daily activities and vice versa, the room is completely soundproofed. Soundproofing measures include a denser form of insulation called sound batts and resilient metal furring strips to isolate the drywall from the framing and create an air barrier. All the doors are solid core.

Happy Landing

It also helps that the retreat is over the garage, essentially a separate wing to the main house. This meant the family could stay in the house during the renovation. "You become part of the family," says Koehn, "but there needs to be respect on both sides and total transparency. The builder needs to keep the client in the loop, and if the client doesn't like something, they need to tell me. You can only do that with a solid relationship."

Like any other voyage, when you embark on a renovation the key to a happy landing is a captain you can trust.

Mariner's Retreat won a Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association reNOVATION award for Best Renovation \$250,000 — \$399,999. For more photographs of this and other homes by Harald Koehn Construction, visit www.haraldkoehn.com.

Special to The Sun

The craftsmanship, attention to detail and efficient use of space of the finished retreat evoke a ship's cabin. Photo (at right) shows John Smulders and his wife and children (seated) with builder Harald Koehn standing behind them.



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