



It's only natural. Homes that respect nature win big at Housing Design Awards

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Christopher Simmonds Architects Inc. was the big winner at the 31st annual Housing Design Awards at the Ottawa Convention Centre on Oct. 4.

For the third year in a row, Simmonds and company swept the awards gala, taking eight awards including best Custom Home with Maple Leaf Custom Homes, best Custom Kitchen, two best Renovations prizes, two prizes for outstanding exterior living spaces with RND Construction and the Anywhere in the World award for the Gatineau Hills House, a sensational modern limestone home that perfectly blends style, function and comfort with the surrounding natural environment.

It was a fitting return to form for Simmonds, who in 2013, won a record nine GOHBA trophies.

"We wanted to create a sense of well-being that connects people with nature," Simmonds said after the gala. "I think there's a growing interest in Ottawa to good design, homes that are thoroughly modern and yet warm to live in, with lots of natural light, and are a part of their natural habitat."

The big event of the year for Ottawa's home building industry, 475 industry guests watched anxiously as the Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association presented glass statuettes in 43 categories to honour the best in home and condominiums, infill and renovation designs over the last year across the capital region.

And there was no shortage of visionary talent. With 157 nominees from 50 companies, the talent competing for best-in-show this year was amongst the largest, and most eclectic in the award's 31-year history.

Judging by the entries, the variety of home choices in becoming increasingly crowded with Craftsman, Country, Prairie and Contemporary designs trending strong. Given the diversity of designs, the panel of eight judges must have found it challenging narrowing the field down to a single winner in every category.

But how a design looks is only half the equation of what makes an award-winning design. Increasingly, a home's green-ness, its sensitivity to the surrounding environment, is as important as its aesthetics, said architect John Donkin, who won an award for Green Custom Home of the Year.

"Modernity doesn't simply mean attractive new design anymore," said Donkin. "Design excellence means that the homes we build are actually better than the homes we built 10 years ago."

Another designer who demonstrated just how well a modern design can harmoniously interact with its landscape was architect Barry J. Hobin & Associate Architects Inc. The architectural juggernaut grabbed three awards including best Production Detached Home under \$750,000 with 2H Interior Design, best Urban Infill for the Rockcliffe Park Custom Residence, and best Condominium Unit with Urban Keios Design Inc. for their Craig St. project.

One of Ottawa's latest, and hottest builders, Roca Homes' President Roberto Campagna made two trips to the podium for best Urban Infill on Hobin's Rockcliffe Park project, and was named Custom Builder of the Year.

"This is a great validation for the work we do," said a grateful Campagna. "Thanks to the internet, the industry here's become very competitive. Consumers are more tuned in to what out there, what's on trend, and what they want to see in a new home."

Not surprisingly, bathrooms and kitchens got a lot of attention. Deslaurier Custom Cabinets was a three-time winner, including two best Production Kitchens as well as best Production Bathroom with Cardel Homes' for the Moradshahi model home.

By the end of the gala evening, Friedmann Weinhardt of Design First Interiors office in Westboro was juggling five glass trophies, including two for Custom Kitchen for its Chef's Paradise and the playful Building Blocks layouts, and best Housing Detail their dazzling floating staircase.

"I'm pleased to receive so many awards," said Weinhardt. "Our design differential is we work with the client closely to determine how the space will be used, who's using it, what materials they want. People respond to designs that are individual."

Best Bathroom winner Linebox Studio Inc. also dazzled the judges with their unconventional use of industrial materials and colour, while Ottawa's Irpinia impressed with rustic Italianate style of their Custom Bathroom.

Busy builder Richcraft took two prizes, including one for its single-family Canmore model, while Greely's Greenmark Builders corralled top honours for its Ironwood bungalow. Amsted Design-Build was named Renovator of the Year winner after winning best Renovation costing more than \$500,000 for its Granville Avenue build with Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development.

Building giant Cardel Homes took top honours in three categories including Production Kitchen, Production Bathroom and the coveted Production Builder of the Year.

"To say we're thrilled would be an understatement," said Cardel's President Greg Graham. "We pride ourselves on being innovative, adding custom elements to our production homes, and responding to our client's increasing expectations."