

HOMES

RESALE & RENTAL

Editor: Sheila Brady, 613-596-3709 • sbrady@thecitizen.canwest.com



PHOTOS BY JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

In less than four years, photographer Jonathan Hayward and interior decorator Lori Steeves bought two virtually identical bungalows on the same street, renovating and then selling them for a tidy profit.

Buy, renovate and sell

An interior decorator and globe-travelling photographer are certainly reno weary, but almost debt-free after making over two identical west-end bungalows



Clockwise from top right: Interior decorator Lori Steeves took two virtually identical bungalows on the same street, gutted and renovated them, giving each a distinctive edge. The living room of the second bungalow is classical and comfortable, while the bathroom of the first home retains a vintage charm. A fireplace warms up the new basement family room of the second home.

BY KAREN TURNER

When opportunity knocks, Lori Steeves and Jonathan Hayward don't just open the door. They hand over the keys to their house.

In less than four years, the newlyweds have bought and sold two virtually identical bungalows on Highcroft Avenue on the fringe of Westboro, following weeks of extensive renovations that cost more than \$225,000 combined.

"Our friends think we're absolutely nuts," admits Ms. Steeves, an interior decorator and owner of Simply Home Decorating, of their rapid turnover of the 1950s bungalows.

But she insists they didn't buy either house with the intention of selling so soon. "We're influenced by our real estate agent," she says, referring to their friend Randy Carrol of Coldwell Banker Sarazen Realty who suggested last October they put the first bungalow up for sale to test the market. It sold the same day.

The couple bought the brick three-bedroom in December 2003 and spent close to \$125,000 transforming it from an outdated box into a contemporary home with a party-size dining room, vintage '50s bathroom and slick gym in the basement.

"We poured our blood, sweat and tears in-

to that house," says Mr. Hayward, who proposed to his girlfriend on a mountaintop in Italy after covering the 2006 Winter Olympics. They were married in their backyard last summer.

"We had no plans of selling, but we're always exploring our options," says Ms. Steeves, who ran her decorating business from a pale green home office at the back of the house.

Their motivation to sell was simple: With the profits from the sale, the couple could propel themselves closer to being mortgage-free.

Surrounded by family keepsakes and framed photographs from their many adventurous vacations together, both admit to being sentimental. But they say there's more to a home than bricks and roof shingles.

"Home is where you make it," says Mr. Hayward, 36, a freelance photographer who travels the globe at least 10 weeks a year on assignments for The Canadian Press, the *Toronto Star* and *Time* magazine.

"It's not that we aren't sentimental. It's more about experiences for us. Not about things," adds his wife whose idea of a holiday is spending seven gruelling days hiking the West Coast Trail in Vancouver or cycling more than 600 kilometres around the Gaspé.

See RENO WEARY on PAGE H2

HOMES • RESALE & RENTAL

Reno weary: A string of happy coincidences



PHOTOS BY JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Sunlight dances over the bedroom of the couple's first renovated bungalow, while in the hallway of the same home, Lori Steeves used strong accent colours and art to dress up a long corridor.

Continued from PAGE H1

Not surprisingly, the couple spent their honeymoon in Africa.

"We don't get attached to things the same way," Ms. Steeves says.

Ironically the day their house went on the market, a For Sale by Owner sign was hammered into the lawn of a brick bungalow two doors down. Worried about the lower-priced competition, Ms. Steeves called her father in New Brunswick for advice.

"Dad said, 'You have to go over and buy it,'" recalls Ms. Steeves, 33, who often relies on her father's business savvy to make decisions. By 8 a.m., she was ringing her neighbour's door bell with an offer to purchase.

The timing of the two sales is only part of the coincidence. The "craziest twist of fate", she says, is that the bungalows once belonged to two sisters who lived in their homes well into the 80s and 90s.

"Knowing they were owned by two sisters — that's cool — we wanted to treat them like separate personalities," says Mr. Hayward, who grew up in Newfoundland.

From the outside, the brick homes could pass as twins, but inside their layouts are completely different.

"It was a disaster," Mr. Hayward says of the bungalow they bought last fall. A rental for more than a decade, the interior was original with dark, cramped rooms, cracked plaster ceilings and garish wallpaper on the walls.

"It was a dude place. It didn't have many feminine touches," he says.

To bring more light into the house, archways were enlarged and the original wooden doors were replaced with contemporary doors fitted with frosted glass panes.

The wall between the dining room and kitchen was cut down to about waist height and a long stretch of glass block installed above the back staircase to take advantage of the west light coming in through the back door.

In the first house, the floors were a medium hardwood and the walls were painted in

rich earthy hues. Ms. Steeves opted for a lighter, more sophisticated palette for the new house, painting most of the rooms in soft taupe trimmed in crisp white.

Vivid colour was reserved for the kitchen where tangy apple green walls are a fresh contrast to the dark brown cabinetry. In the main bathroom, cool aqua was paired with deep chocolate to give the small space a more masculine edge.

"I see every move as an opportunity to re-decorate," says the decorator, who has a storefront office on Wellington Street. "I don't want to do the same thing twice. It's just wrong."

Rather than build another gym in the new basement, the couple decided to divide the sprawling space into a spare bedroom, a cosy family room with a raised gas fireplace and a deluxe laundry room that could easily be converted into a kitchen for a future nanny suite.

"Knowing our past, we try to make decisions for the future, which for us is uncertain," says Ms. Steeves who refuses to cut corners when renovating to save a few bucks. "We're big believers in doing quality work."

If they were just flipping houses to make a quick profit, Mr. Hayward says they wouldn't have spent thousands of dollars reinforcing the foundation and roof, installing porcelain tile in the bathrooms and laundry room or hiring a master plasterer to repair the original cove mouldings in the living room to preserve the home's '50s charm.

But everything has a price so when their real estate buddy came knocking again, the reno-weary owners were ready to sell.

Next month, home for this adventurous couple will be a new two-bedroom loft condo in The Exchange in Westboro on Richmond Road.

The best part? "We will be mortgage-free when the second house closes on April 30th," says Ms. Steeves.

KAREN TURNER is a Style Weekly Homes writer.