

maison d'être



design-build inc.

Transforming Spaces Across Vancouver



2023
winner

By: Paul Harrison

maison d'etre



Rob Capar is the owner and president of maison d'etre design-build inc, a Vancouver-based company specializing in residential condo and house renovations. He has held this position for 28 years.



Back to the Beginning

Initially, Rob got into renovations by helping his dad around the house and cabin. "My two uncles were also in construction, one in building and the other in teaching construction." In spite of this involvement, Rob chose a different route. He went to university and after graduating, entered the corporate world. "But I soon discovered that this career path was not for me. It actually made me physically sick. I found myself gravitating back to what I liked doing - renovations and working on the side. After a couple of years, it went from being a sideline to a full-time enterprise where I hired some other people to work with me. Initially we did small projects like painting, minor repairs, then bathroom and kitchen projects. This led to our doing entire condos and houses."

Although Rob claims that he hated working in an office while in the corporate milieu, he now quite enjoys his own office at **maison d'etre**. "Now I'm on my computer much more as well as meeting potential clients and making future plans together. My hands don't get very dirty anymore."

In addition to running his company, Rob served as Past President of CHBA BC. "We actually did the design for the CHBA BC office building."



Since Rob's company does both commercial and residential renovations, he claims that one's approach in doing these projects differs. With house or condo renovations, the project is driven by the homeowner and the project is very personal. Rob explains: "With a condo there are more restrictions than with houses. We are limited in our amount of space and where plumbing and lighting fixtures can go.

The Process

"First, we sit down with our client(s) and develop conceptual drawings and plans for their consideration. Once they finalize their selections, we put together a budget allowance to assist them in refining their project or design elements.

"Usually, we can stay within the budget, unless the client decides to do more than was originally intended. Or sometimes there are unforeseen issues that come up. If we can come in under budget, this is an added bonus.

"It's great to get positive feedback from our clients, even years later. One of our client families had young children when we worked for them. The children were two, four and six years old when we did the housing project.

Recently I ran into the owners, who said that their children were now grown and that the youngest had just graduated from university.

"The house had served the needs of a very young family, then catered to their teenage years and beyond." It makes Rob happy knowing that his company has helped people realize their housing dreams, and in some way, helped to shape their lives. "You deserve to live in a home you love" is a good tag line for **maison d'etre**.

Subcontractors & Partnerships

As for the people who help Rob's company, he states that he has a core group of vendors and subcontractors. "We've been working with two main electrical companies, two main plumbers and two main painters for the past 20 year or so. There's a bond of loyalty and friendship that's developed over the years. We get together at our annual Christmas parties and often reminisce over the houses and condos we worked on years earlier."

Rob knows that a company's reputation is important. You have to plan realistically and price properly. When Rob served as President of the CHBA-BC, he worked to develop a licensing program for new home builders. "Unfortunately, there are some unlicensed, unscrupulous builders who take advantage of homeowners. The customer wants to know that the builders they employ are honest, industrious and have integrity."

"You can't expand the space, but even so, these renos require more innovative detailing and are sometimes more fun to do. With a commercial project, there is less of an emotional factor to deal with than there is when doing residential projects." Rob continues: "When doing residential renovations, we are dealing with the owners, who intend to live in the house for several years, or even decades. There is a more personal, emotional component involved.



Recent Projects

Regarding recent projects, Rob tells of one he completed in West Vancouver. "We did the pre-planning and design work during the first year of Covid. The home was outdated and in need of some repairs. We built an addition and created a second master bedroom with an accessible bathroom, just in case the clients should ever have to use a walker or wheelchair in the future. In addition, we constructed a massive pantry for storage since the kitchen was an open concept one and needed more room. The clients like to entertain and needed extra space.

"We've entered that project in the current Georgies, so we'll see how that goes. But we did enter it in the National Kitchen and Bath Association Awards for Western Canada, and the pantry and bathroom both won for the best designs. We're quite proud of that recognition within the design industry."

Advice to Future Clients

When asked about any tips he has for staying on budget, Rob stresses the importance of pre-planning very carefully. With the materials pre-ordered and selected, and major contractors providing quotes, this only leaves around 20% of the project open to construction variables. "I love having happy clients, especially when the project runs on or under budget, when it's on time and when we deliver the look the client wanted."



Since **maison d'etre** brings over 28 years of knowledge and experience, they give their clients many options before going ahead with a project. They discuss the design and any new ideas the client may not necessarily have thought about beforehand. New types of lighting and heating are just some examples. "There's nothing worse than having a completed project, only to find that something could have been done a different way."

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maison d'être

Advice to Homeowners

Rob offers some advice to those seeking to renovate, or build new homes: "In conclusion, when looking for a company, choose one that shares your vision and has a sense of what you are trying to achieve. Also choose one that will help you understand your options and provide relevant information. The clients must understand their options so that they can make the final decisions. Then, if for any reason, they are disappointed, they know that it was their decision, not the contractor's. Always keep the clients involved in the entire process."



AWKWARD TO FUNCTIONAL

maison d'être project



"It's satisfying to drive by renovations that our company worked on years before and see that the homes still look great. Some people, who renovate their homes, only do so in order to sell them and make a quick buck. We stay away from those projects." Instead, Rob likes working with people, who have a stake in their homes, and who want to live there for a long time. They understand the importance of working with a reputable company, such as **maison d'être**.

For more information on maison d'être, visit <https://maisondetre.ca/>



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