

Metric Homes introduces the home-within-a-home

By Randy Ray

Innovative Ottawa homebuilder Metric Homes has introduced the “Home-Within-a-Home” concept, which enables older people in the National Capital Region to live close to their adult children and grandchildren in a way that reduces housing costs and maintains each generation’s independence.

Home-Within-a-Home, developed by Metric co-owners Pierre Bernier and Michel Charlebois, is two homes in the same building.

“From the outside it looks like a large single family home so it fits with the family home subdivision profile where it is built,” says Bernier, who like his partner has more than 25 years of building and development experience in the local residential, commercial and industrial building industry.

“But in fact, it is really two completely separate dwellings with their own private entrances plus common areas between them. Each home has its own electrical, water and heating system allowing for two family groups to live independently of each other. There’s also fireproofing between each home for added security,” says Bernier.

The concept was born about five years ago after the City of Ottawa agreed to allow conversion of existing single-family homes into two units to increase urban intensification. Metric latched on to the program and with the cooperation of city staff, applied it to new home construction. Metric was the first builder in the city of Ottawa to apply for a building permit under the new program and received the first permit issued by the city, which led to construction of the first new home under the program.

The home was designed for two young sisters, one newly married and one living alone. Individually, they couldn’t afford a single-family home in a nice neighbourhood, but by combining their financial assets, they were able to cover the cost of their new home on a large 50-foot-wide lot backing on parkland. Their two-storey home was split vertically in half and they shared a double car garage and a front porch that serviced separate entrances to each home. They also shared their front and back yards.

To date, about a dozen similar homes have been built and sold by Metric, mostly to people in the 55+ age group. The builder offers the homes at all of its sites, including Arbourbrook Estates/Westlake South Estates in Stittsville/Carp, Deer Run in Stittsville, King's Grant in Richmond, Notting Hill in Orleans, Camelot Estates in Cumberland, Emerald Creek Estates in Ottawa South and in Navan.

About eight different floorplans are available. However, these plans are just for inspiration purposes as Metric offers to custom design all of its homes and add as many custom features as owners desire.

A model in the King's Grant subdivision consists of a two-storey home with four bedrooms in 2,475-square-feet of living space attached to an 850-square-foot, one-bedroom bungalow. The residences share a common laundry room, which is the connecting point between the two homes; each has its own entrance from the outside and its own basement, which could also be shared by the two homes and developed with a guest bedroom, bathroom and family room. The homes share a double garage.

The two-homes-in-one concept offers a variety of advantages, says Bernier, not the least of which is price. Putting two living quarters under one roof can reduce the overall cost by as much as \$150,000, he says, mainly because one lot, rather than two, is required.

By pooling resources with the older generation, adult children and their families can live in a neighbourhood that may otherwise be beyond their reach. Backyard facilities such as decks and pools can be shared from a cost and maintenance perspective.

"The older generation may not want to live in an 'adult lifestyle' community or a retirement residence and can continue to live in a regular neighbourhood with help on hand with the yard that perhaps they can't or don't want to maintain. By contracting nursing help a nursing home could be avoided altogether, resulting in tremendous savings and a much greater sense of independence...and grandparents see more of their grandchildren," says Bernier.

In addition, parents wishing to travel have the added security of not leaving their home empty for weeks or months at a time.

The homes work best on lots at least 60 to 65 feet wide that provide sufficient space for living quarters and a shared garage. They can be built in urban subdivisions (narrower city lots) or in rural estate lots subdivisions.

The homes can be built in a variety of configurations, such as a bungalow attached to a two-storey family home, one bungalow on top of another or two bungalows attached side-by-side.

“The Home-Within-a-Home concept is a way for family members to assist each other in achieving their dream lifestyle in their dream location. It can also enable adult children to help their aging parents remain independent indefinitely by being close on hand for day-to-day tasks, with the added benefit of instant babysitting. Either way, a Home-Within-a-Home provides a greater sense of family for all generations,” says Bernier.

Although most families are buying the Metric homes to be close to one another, Bernier expects some older couples to purchase them to rent out one of the units to supplement their income. And in cases where parents live in an attached bungalow beside their grown children, once the parents are no longer using the bungalow, the kids will rent it for extra income and later may move in themselves and “sell” their attached bigger home to their own children, continuing the cycle, he says.

“The homes will be able to service three generations or more,” he notes.

The sky is the limit when it comes to customization, says Bernier. Upgrades such as granite counter tops and cathedral ceilings cost extra but there is no fee for moving walls and doors or complete redesigns. And when customers ask for customization, they always deal with one of the owners or the company’s general manager, Stephan Keedwell.

“Our models are here to inspire people to do anything they want. Our clients have specific needs and wants. We show them models so they can see the concept. Then, we sit down with each customer to discuss their needs and desires and we use our experience to custom design the dream home they are looking for,” says Bernier.

“We build just 20 homes a year ... and we attach no premium to changing an existing floorplan or to create a new custom design for our clients. It is part of our service,” he says. “We focus on quality construction and service and energy efficiency.”

In 2005 Metric built the first energy efficient Energy Star home in Canada in Carp.

For more information, call (613) 296-7000 or visit, www.MetricHomes.com

