

NEW IN HOMES & CONDOS

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ON ON2

> HOW WE LIVE

Climbing up the real-estate ladder

Couple scored a fixer-upper in their dream neighbourhood

JACKIE BURNS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Six years ago, Ben and Heidi Kelly purchased their first house together, a Victorian in Leslieville, for \$633,000.

Today, they are kicking back in their newly renovated Forest Hill home, worth almost \$2 million.

There was no lottery win or inheritance responsible for propelling the middle-class parents of two daughters into this upper-class real-estate bracket. They made a few smart decisions in Toronto's red-hot housing market and now find themselves living next door to a \$5-million house with a movie theatre, swimming pool and a wine vault.

It's still a bit mind-blowing for Ben, 40, who works at LinkedIn, and Heidi, 41, who works at IBM, but they're part of a growing community of Torontonians who are reaping the rewards of having climbed on the real-estate ladder at the right time and in the right places.

The road to luxury living was paved with plenty of speed bumps for the parents of Keira, 4, and Maleah, 6. Their marriage was also put to the test in the process.

Back in 2013, Ben and Heidi were tiring of their Leslieville home, which had a concrete backyard, too many stairs for aging grandparents and street-only parking.

They spent a year and a half trying to move to a more family-friendly home in a pocket of Forest Hill with good school ratings — but they repeatedly lost out in bidding wars.

"We always made it, unfortunately, to the top two; and we never got it just right," Heidi says. "It was really bad."

Things finally went their way in the summer of 2014, when their agent came upon a new listing for a three-bedroom home backing on to the Beltline Trail along the Forest Hill/Chaplin Estates border. Surprisingly, the listing didn't have an offer date. The Kellys rushed to see it the next morning and by 6 p.m. they were handing over their deposit cheque with an offer for the full asking price of \$1.2 million.

"Because we acted so quickly, it was non-competitive. So we were in a really unique situation where we didn't need to get into a bidding war — which was nice after what we went through in our search," Ben says.

They also managed to sell their Leslieville home for a cool \$900,000.

FOREST HILL continued on H6



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

Ben and Heidi Kelly, with daughters Maleah, 6, and Keira, 4, at their recently renovated Toronto home.



EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS COURTESY OF ANDREW SNOW PHOTOGRAPHY

NOW: The kitchen is now open and airy, with a walkout and a window built into the backsplash.



EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS COURTESY OF ANDREW SNOW PHOTOGRAPHY

THEN: The original, galley kitchen meant being separated from the rest of the family when busy with food preparation.



Renovation allowed couple to customize

FOREST HILL from H1

But they didn't have much time to celebrate; their biggest challenge was yet to come: completely gutting the virtually original 1939 Georgian home they'd just purchased, and transforming it into a more open-concept, modern space for their family. All this while working full-time and parenting their girls, who were 2 and 4 at the time.

While Ben and Heidi knew that it would be a stressful ordeal, the couple had always planned to buy a home that needed to be renovated in order to be in their preferred neighbourhood. Plus, they wanted to customize it with their own personal touches.

They rented a house for the duration of the seven-month gut-job to help conserve a level of sanity and hired Eurodale Developments to oversee the project, a decision Heidi credits for keeping everything running smoothly thanks to the on-site carpenter, weekly status reports and daily checks.

Brendan Charters, Eurodale's development manager, says a priority for this renovation was highlighting the family's beautiful backyard, so they did things like use a window as the stove's backsplash and put a 12-foot sliding door system into the back of the house. "I wanted to do that to be able to capitalize on the view of the ravine in the back," Charters says.

While he says the original layout of the home had awkward elements, and was very segmented and dark, the bright new design makes use of the abundant space much more effectively.

"What we tried to do was create a house that was more reflective of how a family lives in a space today, more communal spaces that are more open-concept and a little bit less formal."

While hiring a builder was a saving grace, the couple still admits they underestimated some of the mental strain such a big project could have on their family.

"It's hard on the marriage; not so much that you're butting heads on

> BY THE NUMBERS

\$633,000

price of home couple bought in 2010

\$900,000

price of home couple sold in 2014

\$267,000

amount couple made on their Leslieville home

\$1.2 million

price of their new home

0

Grandparents living in the city to help with babysitting during the renovation

1

Number of months it took for the Kellys' contingency budget to get eaten up

13

Length, in minutes, of the Kellys' walk to the subway.

9

Length, in kilometres, of the Beltline Trail that the Kellys' home backs onto.

decisions, it was the hemorrhaging of money," Heidi says.

"You're not focused on one another and your relationship. Your entire life is focused on this renovation."

The cost of the massive project came in at \$400,000 before furniture — nearly double their original budget — because of some necessary structural work and their decision to choose higher-end appliances and fixtures.

"It was well worth the spend," admits Heidi, adding they recently had their home appraised at \$1.9 million.

The family is thrilled with the local school, Oriole Park Jr. Public School, as well as their massive, leafy backyard with its play structure for the girls.

"You don't feel like you're in downtown Toronto," Heidi says, adding they are just a 13-minute walk to Yonge St. and the Davisville subway.



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

The new, open-concept design of the kitchen and family room makes a great space for the family.



EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS COURTESY OF ANDREW SNOW PHOTOGRAPHY

NOW: Pale floors, neutral walls and double windows create a light-filled sanctuary for the Kellys' daughters.



EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS COURTESY OF ANDREW SNOW PHOTOGRAPHY

THEN: A second bedroom would soon have a new future as the girls' shared room.



EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS COURTESY OF ANDREW SNOW PHOTOGRAPHY

NOW: The contemporary dining room, formerly the living room, features a fireplace.



EURODALE DEVELOPMENTS COURTESY OF ANDREW SNOW PHOTOGRAPHY

THEN: The home's original living room was in need of an update.