

Eye candy: Smashing model homes designed to tempt and tease win honours

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They're the eye candy of the housing industry, the fancy, sometimes exotic model new homes that help propel sales for their builders.

The models and their accompanying marketing campaigns of the past 24 months were honoured Friday at the 23rd annual Sammy Awards.

Richcraft was the big winner, taking away four trophies for three model homes in the community of Riverside South and for the Giverny, a sunny condo in Place des Gouverneurs at Ogilvie Road and Aviation Parkway.

Another builder, Claridge Homes, took away the Grand Sammy award, which honours the best marketing campaign. Claridge won for the launch of its planned development for LeBreton Flats. The launch included the opening of a lavish sales centre filled with multiple plasma televisions that tell the the story of the area's past, present and future in the shadow of the Parliament Buildings. The centre also features a scale model of the Flats and decorated rooms that paint a vignette of finished condos in buildings still many months away from construction.

The goal was to help make the future community "real" to potential buyers, who may not be adept at reading floor plans or visualizing finished rooms, let alone the streets that will eventually define the community.

Claridge's lavish sales brochures also won top honours.

"Claridge has done everything right," says Brent Corbeil, marketing manager for CTV Ottawa and a member of the Sammy Awards judging panel. The awards were presented by the Ottawa-Carleton Home Builders' Association in partnership with the Citizen.

"There is a great sense of welcoming at the sales centre and an unbelievable sales brochure that shows how the development will evolve and be sited on an important piece of land," says Corbeil.

If you had to pick a standout among all of the hardwood, granite and curvy staircases in the model homes, then top honours would go to Richcraft's Jefferson, an Arts and Crafts-inspired two-storey home in Riverside South.

"It lives large," says Shawn Bellman, the veteran marketing manager for the leading builder. "It also has a big wow factor." And it should. The 2,835-square-foot home carries a basic price tag of \$370,000, and the Richcraft team pumped well over \$100,000 of upgrades into the house, including \$40,000 into the country kitchen.

The strategy worked because the model, which has been open since Christmas, has sparked sales. One family liked it so much they ordered their house with all of the upgrades, says Bellman.

The Jefferson was up against the Fountainbridge, which is a dramatic stucco bungalow by Cardel, and Holitzner's solid performer, the Hawthorne. All of the single homes ranged between 2,500 and 2,999 square feet -- the most competitive category of the awards.

This is the third time Holitzner has introduced the four-bedroom Hawthorne into one of its west-end communities. A slightly different version sparked sales in Barrhaven, then in the Stittsville community of Timbermere and now across the western community of Coachman Estates, says Marc Lalonde, who designed the house. It features a dramatic staircase and open design.

"The house accounts for 30 to 35 per cent of our sales," says the architectural technologist. Lalonde suggests the home is a sales success because it has good traffic flow and generous proportions.

"Many people can't read plans so it's important to have model homes."

But even a good design on paper has to translate into a winning home with the proper colours and good finishes, says Lalonde. That's where decorators and kitchen designers come into the mix, he says.

"Model homes are critical when selling homes," agrees John Herbert, executive director of the home builders' association. "Ottawa is more conservative than bigger markets, including Toronto. Buyers like to see and touch what they are going to buy."

"It is hugely important for a person who is spending that kind of money to see the finishes and to see what is included in a model," says Nancy Nesbitt, marketing director for Tartan, which took home honours for the Santo, an 890-square-foot condo priced at less than \$200 a square foot to build. The Santo is part of Tartan's Java series of homes, which are aimed at first-time buyers. Affordability is a top priority.

Model homes often show off the latest paint colours and upgrades, which can quickly push up the price. But it is key to also have models that show standard finishes, says Nesbitt.

Tartan has 10 model homes, with another six under construction. There are bigger players in town, including Richcraft, which has 35 decorated model homes, and Minto, Ottawa's largest builder with more than 40 model homes.

At any one time there are more than 200 model homes across the city. Some are loaded with upgrades, others feature decorated rooms on the main floor and simple combinations of paint and window coverings in the bedrooms. Some builders opt to skip all furnishings in their models, simply putting a couple of silk plants by a window or a bowl of fruit on a kitchen counter.

Even designers working for builders have budgets, says Richcraft's Bellman, who ran out of money after equipping the kitchen in the winning Jefferson's main-floor rooms and master bedroom.

It's best to have a mix of dreamy and practical models, says Nesbitt. The fully loaded homes bring out lots of visitors, many of them looking for decorating ideas. Ultimately, however, builders want potential buyers to stop, sit down and visualize themselves living in the space, she says.

Thousands of visitors were ready to do a whole lot of dreamin' earlier this year when they trekked out to Manotick Station to see Princiotta's bungalow built for the Ottawa Hospital Foundation's home lottery. A team of designers and retailers pumped thousands of dollars -- including leather couches, a wine cellar and an outdoor hot tub -- into the bungalow, which carries a price tag of \$1.2 million. The bungalow won the Sammy for estate homes on 60-foot-wide lots.

But that is too much unrealistic dreaming for judge Corbeil. The marketer and his wife Connie spent a year looking for a home -- deciding whether to buy old or new, cruising websites and visiting more than 15 models. Eventually, they headed to North Gower and bought a new bungalow by Braebury.

"In my opinion, the best model home gives a sense of home," says Corbeil. "It is not overly decorated because that can confuse and you end up looking at the paint colours and the shag rug.

IMAGES



Phoenix Homes

Blend bold colour, high ceilings and an impressive marble fireplace and you end up with a winning model home by Phoenix. Holitzner also impressed judges with simple, yet sophisticated details in the bathroom of the Hawthorne, a model home in the Stittsville community of Coachman Estates. **(FPinfomart: Restricted, Canada.com: Restricted)**



Rod Macivor, The Ottawa Citizen (Bathroom) **(FPinfomart: Allowed, Canada.com: Allowed)**



Campanale Homes

Sunlight fills Campanale's condo, the Ravello, above, which was a contender in units costing less than \$200 a square foot to build. **(FPinfomart: Restricted, Canada.com: Restricted)**



Campanale Homes

Tartan was also a contender with its simple, yet dramatic single home, the Lindsay, bottom right. **(FPinfomart: Restricted, Canada.com: Restricted)**



Campanale Homes

Cardel went for drama and big helpings of black in the Fountainbridge, a luxurious bungalow model home. **(FPinfomart: Restricted, Canada.com: Restricted)**



Campanale Homes

Campanale's Milano earned top honours for a model home with less than 2,000 square feet of living space, yet it feels large thanks to an angled ceiling. **(FPinfomart: Restricted)**

"A better strategy when marketing new homes is to have them lightly decorated with safe tones and timeless decorating so you can imagine yourself in the house.

Restricted, Restricted) Canada.com: Restricted)

"Builders should give buyers as much realism as possible. It's fun to walk into a lottery home and every room is different, but a model home should stress reality and simplicity, and allow the buyer to walk through and picture their stuff here."

Sheila Brady is the Citizen's Homes editor. You can reach her at sbrady@thecitizen.canwest.com.

Dream maker: Amy Talbot is the spark plug behind many advertising campaigns for new communities.

Illustration:

- Colour Photo: Phoenix Homes / Blend bold colour, high ceilings and an impressive marble fireplace and you end up with a winning model home by Phoenix. Holitzner also impressed judges with simple, yet sophisticated details in the bathroom of the Hawthorne, a model home in the Stittsville community of Coachman Estates.
- Colour Photo: Rod Macivor, The Ottawa Citizen / (Bathroom)
- Photo: Campanale Homes / Sunlight fills Campanale's condo, the Ravello, above, which was a contender in units costing less than \$200 a square foot to build.
- Photo: Campanale Homes / Tartan was also a contender with its simple, yet dramatic single home, the Lindsay, bottom right.
- Photo: Campanale Homes / Cardel went for drama and big helpings of black in the Fountainbridge, a luxurious bungalow model home.
- Photo: Campanale Homes / Campanale's Milano earned top honours for a model home with less than 2,000 square feet of living space, yet it feels large thanks to an angled ceiling.
- Colour Photo: Princiotta Homes / There's a whole lot of dreaming going on in Princiotta's bungalow in Manotick Station. The bungalow, built for the Ottawa Hospital Foundation Lottery, won for estate homes.
- Colour Photo: Richcraft Homes / Get ready to cook up a storm in this Arts and Crafts-inspired kitchen in Richcraft's dressed-up model home in Riverside South, the Jefferson.



Princiotta Homes

There's a whole lot of dreaming going on in Princiotta's bungalow in Manotick Station. The bungalow, built for the Ottawa Hospital Foundation Lottery, won for estate homes. (FPinfomart: Restricted, Canada.com: Restricted)

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Richcraft Homes

Get ready to cook up a storm in this Arts and Crafts-inspired kitchen in Richcraft's dressed-up model home in Riverside South, the Jefferson. (FPinfomart: Restricted, Canada.com: Restricted)

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