



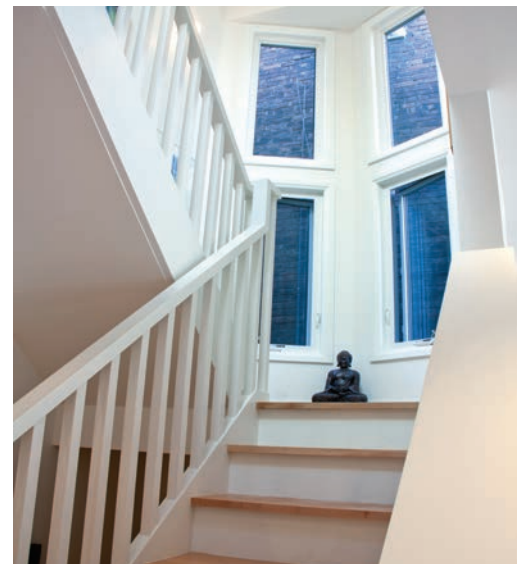
November 2013

When Mick received the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, he and his wife Cathy thought it would be impossible to stay in their semi-detached Toronto home. With three floors, lots of stairs and a front porch eight feet higher than the street, they were certain they would have to move. They began by looking for a new, fully-accessible house and soon discovered that it was no easy task! Generally speaking, accessible houses are built as-needed and don't tend to be on the market very often.



Mick and Cathy then started looking for a new house to convert or property on which to build new. However, they quickly realized that buying new and still having to renovate would end up costing as much or more than renovating their own house. Furthermore, it would take them away from the neighbourhood they love. That's when they came to Solares. With their children in their late teens and themselves only in their mid-fifties, they had decided to reinvest in their own house to make it a home they could live in for another 20-plus years.

We are honored to have had a role in their journey, and are proud of what we accomplished together. The house now meets their needs and remains a warm home in which everyone can move about freely and with ease. Accessibility measures include a rear entrance at grade, a residential elevator, barrier-free washrooms, and customized kitchen counters and cabinetry.



The largest intervention was to solve the puzzle of how Mick would access the house and move between the floors. We wanted the home to be fully accessible by everyone throughout, rather than limiting Mick's use of the house to one floor. The lot is situated higher than street level, with the main floor eight feet higher than grade at the front and ten feet higher at the back. In order to keep the home's cohesion with the neighbourhood, we decided to keep the front yard and façade of the house untouched, which left us with the rear of the property for the barrier-free access point.

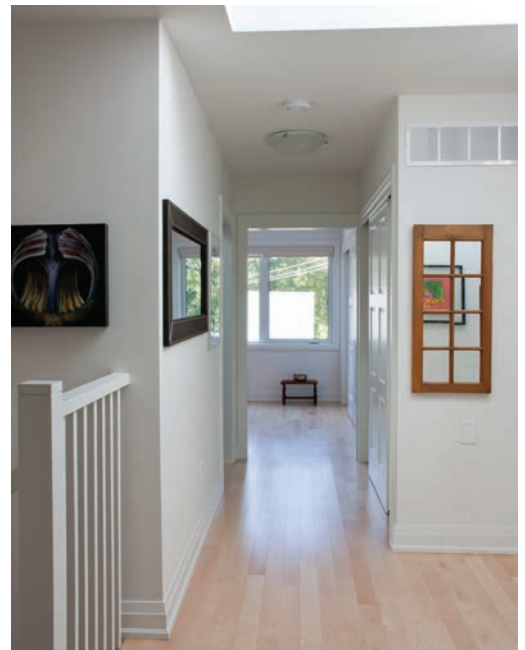
The back of the house originally had a raised backyard with no laneway access. All other houses on the lane have detached garages connecting the lane with their backyards. This gave us the idea to remove the entire backyard, lower the basement to the same level as the laneway, and build a garage over the whole space as a link between the lane and the house. The resulting spacious garage serves as both at-grade entryway and parking for a large accessible van. The house is only the third in from the nearest cross-street, which makes Mick's access visible, and helps it to feel like a normalized part of the community rather than a back-alley door.

Building an attached garage was outside the typical zoning bylaws, however with enormous support from the community we were able to get special permission from the City – Cathy gathered 30 letters of support from the neighbours! Above the garage is a huge, 750 square foot outdoor patio, which is level with the main floor and equipped with full-depth garden beds and lots of south and west sunshine.

When Mick enters the house he comes in on the lower level, from which he can access the other floors via a residential elevator. We made special effort to blend the different types of circulation in order to limit the distinction between accessible and non-accessible. For this reason, we rebuilt and relocated the main stair perpendicular to its original location so that the landings are right next to the elevator door on each level. This way everyone arrives at the same place!

The builder, Kurt Schmidt of [Spaces Construction and Renovation](#), carried out the entire process with care and high quality work, including fostering continued good relations with the neighbours, making Mick and Cathy's absence and reintroduction to the street that much smoother. The finished 2,000 square foot home is bright and open; fully accommodates Mick, Cathy and their daughters; and has the high level of energy-efficiency commensurate with the Solares [green home design philosophy](#).

We are so happy with this project and are pleased that Mick and Cathy can remain in their home and continue to be near their long-time friends and neighbours. For floor plans and photos, please visit [our website](#).



And, as always, please visit our [blog](#) for updates on Solares founders Tom and Christine's own major renovation!

Client Testimonial:

Dear Solares and Spaces,

It is hard to know where to begin to thank you all.

Little did we know 2 years ago that when I met with Solares in our old dining room that we were on an adventure of such incredible magnitude and fulfillment.

Solares, you created many beautiful designs and then the final wonderful design with Mick's every need and those of our family in the forefront of your creative minds. You guided us through an incredible process which led us to the much admired Mr. Kurt Schmidt.

Both Solares and Spaces held our hands during a difficult renovation, every moment honouring our wishes that our neighbour's lives be affected in the least possible way. For this there aren't enough words except those of our many neighbours who repeatedly told us how respectful and neighbourly the Spaces crew was. Thanks also to the many trades who treated our home with respect and brought such professionalism to this incredible project.

Our entire family is most grateful for each one of you for your kindness, attentiveness, fairness, calm demeanour, troubleshooting, and general awareness of the enormity this project imposed on our little family of four.

I feel confident speaking for each one of us when I thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for returning our home to us. We have already begun making new memories here.

You've produced a home that is not only accessible but the envy of the neighbourhood. Good on you all.

- Cathy and family

