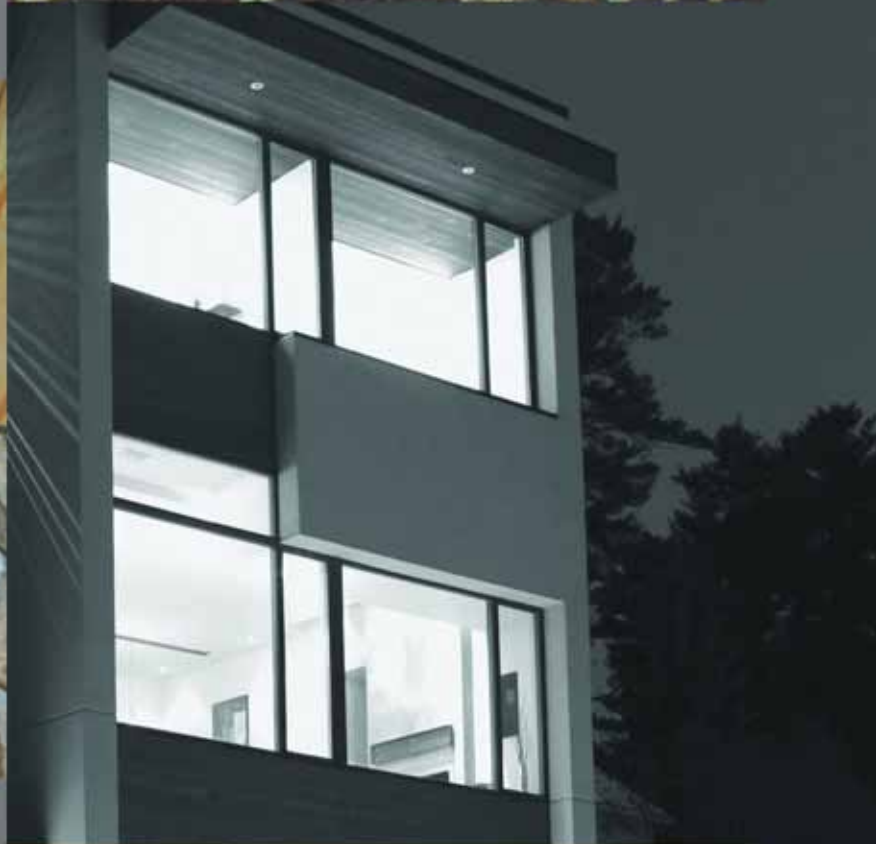


Perspectives

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THE LOLLEY HOUSE, GANANOQUE

by Tomislav Knezic B.E.S. M.Arch, with Christine Lolley

Perched on a rock overlooking an eighty-acre wetland this home provides luxury with minimal environmental impact.

You Can't Quit on Your Parents:

In the spring of 2005, my then girlfriend Christine and I were presented with a great opportunity: to design and build a house for her parents, James and Brenda Lolley. Although the timing was less than perfect, we jumped at the opportunity. Christine wrapped up her master's thesis at the University of Waterloo, I quit my job at KPMB Architects in Toronto and we moved to Gananoque, Ontario, population 5200.

The Lolleys had always been interested in environmental issues, so we had no trouble convincing them to build a fully "green" home. Since our design used unconventional materials, we decided to act as general contractors and perform much of the labour ourselves. We built the structure, framed the interior partitions and installed the windows, electrical wiring, insulation and vapour barrier.

Initially we all had reservations about working together on such a large project, but once we started, we knew that we would have to remain committed until the project was complete. This was a job that we could not quit. We understood early on that the project would be a team effort and everyone would be involved. The Lolleys were our partners rather than our clients. James worked on-site everyday as the principal builder, while Brenda worked part-time, splitting her week between her medical practice and site work. Brenda diligently bent all the rebar for the house, helped install the in-floor heating system and spent countless hours cleaning the construction site. We persevered because we all had a common goal: to build a great house for the Lolleys, one that we would be able to visit for years to come.

Building the house brought us all closer together, but for Christine and I, especially so. I proposed to Christine shortly before the permit application and we were married just after interior doors were hung.

Being The General Contractor

Being the General Contractor with only limited construction experience meant that we had to keep the design fairly simple. This simplicity was further reinforced by the fact that we had little familiarity with the building systems that we had chosen — insulated concrete forms and steel/concrete composite floor systems. On the other hand, the building's simplicity improved the quality of the spaces and established

a design clarity. Through this we gained an understanding of the construction processes that will be invaluable in future design work. We also learned a lot about dealing with all the other participants in a construction project, including building officials, suppliers and trades.

We came to realize that design work accounts for only ten per cent of a construction project. The other ninety per cent, including scheduling, trades, hiring, firing, negotiating with trades, fixing mistakes, organizing the site, and maintaining safety, are all exciting parts of a project that architects don't usually get involved in.

Starting a New Company

From start to finish, construction lasted eleven months. Empowered by the experience we realized we wanted to continue working together and build more homes like the Lolley House. In September 2006 we started Solares Design Build Inc., which specializes in the design and construction of Environmentally Integrated Homes.

Environmentally Integrated Homes are:

- durable and lasting
- energy efficient
- passively heated and cooled
- healthy and non-toxic
- made of renewable, recycled and local materials
- respectful of their surroundings
- tailored to their residents

During the construction of the Lolley house, we conducted many tours for curious and seriously interested potential clients. From this interest we received two further commissions. We are currently working full time for ourselves and love it. We really enjoy going back to the Lolley house and never cease to be impressed by what we achieved as a team.

Tomislav Knezic and Christine Lolley are co-founders of Solares Design Build Inc. which provides residential design and construction management services for custom homes with a reduced ecological footprint. For more information please visit <www.solares.ca>



Photo: Tomislav Knezic



Photo: Peter Lolley



Photo: Tomislav Knezic

Top left: James and Brenda Lolley inspecting their new roof trusses
Bottom left: Christine and Tom's wedding reception on the deck of the nearly-completed Lolley House
Above: North East Corner of the Lolley House