



SUPER MODELS

# Home 'suite' home

Behind the scenes with the designers of model homes and suites

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Have you ever overstayed your welcome at a model home? Envisioned throwing intimate dinner parties in the sumptuous dining room, meeting deadlines in the functional home office and reading the Sunday paper in the light-filled den?

It's hard not to take these trips down fantasy lane when you've got such thoughtfully and innovatively designed model homes and suites cropping up in and around the GTA. They're the work of some of the city's superstar interior designers who, to the delight of both home developers and the public, instinctively know how to imbue these suites with that elusive "feels like home" aura.

"Our models tell a story to demonstrate that our visitors can easily live in the project," says 45-year industry veteran Bryon Patton. "The look has to be warm and inviting. It has to be up to date, but not trendy. It has to be sophisticated yet comfortable. It has to show quality. We are creating a 'set' for living."

That "set" culminates from a lengthy and involved conceptualization process carried out by Patton and his colleagues at Bryon Patton & Associates, which begins with Patton's favourite part — a free-for-all group brainstorming session.

"We always have lots of ideas, so the concept is the easy and fun part," he says. "It's the implementation of the 'big idea' that takes a tremendous amount of time — there are lots of details to pull together. Collaboration, I feel, is the key to creating a successful project. We are fortunate to have a terrific team."

Once they establish a design

goal, he says, they focus on finding a suitable decor solution. The look is actually the last thing on the list, he says.

"We feel that this approach is extremely important. The result isn't just design that looks beautiful, but design that works beautifully," he says.

There's no patented Patton look — and he's proud of that. His team has the expertise to develop designs that range from sleek and minimalist to plush and traditional. They regularly apply their know-how to model projects ranging from cosy urban condo suites, such as Benvenuto Group's 83 Redpath, to expansive suburban family homes, such as Country Lane by Heathwood.

"We can create different interior design schemes to suit the client," he says.

While this client-centred approach is key to good design, the fact that, with models, designers are working for imagined — versus actual — clients allows them more freedom and flexibility, says designer Brian Gluckstein.

"Model suites are probably the most fun to do because you really have a fictitious client and you can create an environment without [anyone] dictating," says the designer whose company, Gluckstein Design Planning, is behind such model suites as the Four Seasons, Camrost-Felcorp's The Avenue and Daniels' Kilgour Estate.

"It's not so personal and much more conceptual, much more of an expression of a personality."

In his 22-year career, Gluckstein has become known for his straightforward, uncluttered design concepts and his ability to apply his know-how to a wide variety of spaces.

"I like working with both modern and traditional spaces — as

long as they're done well," he says. "Whatever kind of space I'm working with, my philosophy is that I like a cleanliness to it."

It's the variety that fuels Gluckstein's ongoing interest in his work, and that extends beyond the different kinds of models he's hired to do. He likes to keep things fresh by constantly testing out new concepts, using new materials and working with new manufacturers and suppliers.

"This is really an ever-changing job, and I love the change and the fact that I am always creating something new," he says. "All this newness really keeps you stimulated."

For designer Mike Niven, the biggest thrill comes from witnessing his vision for a space transform into reality.

"I like the creative ideas — knowing that something should look a certain way in my mind and having it carried out," says Niven.

The dozen or so model spaces his team at Mike Niven Interior Design Inc. take on each year range from sumptuously styled family homes, such as those at Monarch's Markham project, Heritage, to spicy and eclectic midtown condos, such as Monarch's Legacy.

"Small condos are the most interesting," he says. "How to plan the many home-oriented activities in smaller spaces is very challenging."

Ultimately, his main goal with each design concept is to make people feel like they're at home. "A sense of warmth and the inviting quality that a space gives you is always the most important thing to any model," he says. "It pulls you in."

So if you're prone to model-home loitering, that just means that he and his colleagues have done a good job.



Opposite page: Designer Mike Niven created a spicy and eclectic model suite at Monarch's midtown condo Legacy. This page (from top): Benvenuto Group's 83 Redpath was designed by Bryon Patton & Associates; Heathwood's Country Lane model home was the work of designer Bryon Patton; Four Season's model suite designed by Brian Gluckstein.