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Labour of love

Home is where the art is in creative couple's west-side casa



By L. Sara Bysterveld
Photos by Don Molyneux

THE DREAM FOR MANY IS FOR HOME to be a concentration of all the things they love most—the people, the art, the belongings and the activities. The jury is still out on how many of us achieve that, but there is no doubt it perfectly describes what Paul Van Ginkel and his wife Kristin have created with their west Calgary home-cum-art gallery-cum studio.

Designed by Kristin, a retired commercial architect, around a selection of pieces the couple purchased in Mexico and built by Laratta Homes, the home perfectly reflects the couple, who live there with their two-year-old daughter, Isabella. Paul also works in the home, which was designed to include his studio, gallery, office and art storage room.



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cover feature



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1. A collection of masks from their travels, which two-year-old Isabella loves to peer up at.
2. A storage and framing space was paramount for the resident artist to run his business from home.
3. A towering, eight-foot entry door was custom designed to match centuries-old passage doors in the home.
4. Above the rustic curved mantle is the ideal spot to house Paul's original artwork.
5. Pieces from trips to Mexico, family portraits, and a mix of Paul's and other artists' work grace every room.

"By and large, (if we had to go back and do it all again), nothing would change," says Paul of their experience designing and building the just-under-6,000-square-foot house, which, from breaking ground to the move-in date, took only 13 months.

Everything about the home was a labour of love, from the unique design, which accommodates the narrow, pie-shaped lot and steep slope, to the time the couple spent making sure each component of the design was installed correctly. There are one-of-a-kind elements throughout, such as the reclaimed barn board floors (rough side up), curved and weathered mesquite fireplace mantle, a selection of heavy (and far from standard-sized) mesquite doors and floor-level, under-cabinet lighting in the bathrooms. Because these features are so far from what contractors are used to installing in new homes, some extra vigilance was needed as the house was built and finished.

As Kristin explains, the hardwood installers installed the boards upside-down (smooth side up) to start, but she was there to correct them. Later, when it came time to stain, they began to fill the gaps that she and Paul actually wanted showcased.

"It wasn't until they were finished staining the floors that (the contractor), who has done so many hardwood floors around the province said, 'I finally got it, it's such a beautiful floor—at first I thought you were off your rocker, but it's beautiful!'"

Similarly, the heavy and oddly-proportioned, 400-year-old mesquite doors (of which there are four sets in the home) were difficult to hang and special accommodations had to be made in the door frames so that they would fit.

"I think everybody was pretty proud by the time it was finished," says Kristin.

Paul elaborates: "Despite some initial resistance, the trades are now very proud of their unique work—they're also artists, and we have given them, as patrons, an opportunity to do something they would not have normally done."

The couple's goal to create a home that would also double as a gallery has been fulfilled, and they hold exhibitions for Paul's collectors (existing and potential) every four months. Since Paul represents himself as an artist, these parties are his main promotional and selling tools.

"First and foremost it's our home ... but I also work at home, and we wanted to have a space big enough, and aesthetically pleasing enough, to host events," he says. "That's my chosen way of marketing



cover feature

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and conducting business—to have people over in an interesting environment with a breathtaking view and with my art displayed. It’s not a hard sell, if people want to buy a painting they can talk to me directly—but it’s more just to set up an interesting evening.”

Paul’s art, which focuses mainly on western scenes and characters, is displayed throughout the home, and created in his soaring studio space on the lower level. What the couple calls “the backbone of the home” runs the full length of the main floor and consists of a long, mainly open hallway crowned by the “vertebrae” of rich, wood beams. This, along with a hallway of the same length on the lower floor directly below, acts as the main gallery component of the home.

Paul’s paintings co-ordinate well with the rich selection of south-western art and artifacts displayed in the home, much of which the couple handpicked on a 2004 trip to San Miguella de Allende, Mexico. On the same trip, Paul sprung a surprise proposal and wedding on Kristin. “We weren’t engaged or anything,” says Kristin, adding that because she had nothing to wear as a bride, and part of her brief engagement was spent purchasing a Flamenco-inspired wedding outfit.

The couple was married in a small chapel, and as they walked out, a mariachi band (which Paul had arranged) began to play. Photos of the day are prominently displayed throughout their home, many of which were taken by Paul.

The main hallway also showcases their growing collection of portraits of their daughter, Isabella, of which Paul paints one each year for Kristin’s birthday. “Eventually over the years this whole wall will be covered with Isabella portraits,” she says.

For parties and showings, Paul’s art is displayed throughout the home. Scenes depicting horses, cowboys and Natives comprise the bulk (about 65 per cent, he estimates) of his work. He was a part of the Calgary Stampede Western Art Show for 14 years and painted last year’s Calgary Stampede poster.



1



1. Mexican pottery dishes were the inspiration for several vessel sinks.
2. The couple also purchased a full set for holding dinner parties in their open, rustic designed cooking and eating space.
3. Paul’s studio is awash in light, views of the Rockies, and a mechanical hoist to always have his canvas at optimum height.
4. The artist takes a break from a commission piece he’s been working on.
5. The master bedroom is a private retreat in the live-work-oriented home.



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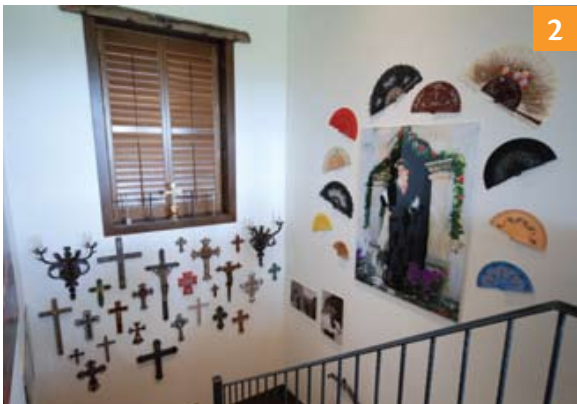


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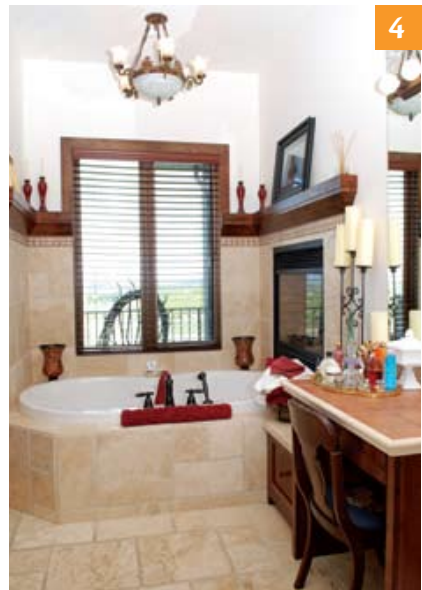
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Originally from Winnipeg, Paul moved to Calgary with his family in 1973, and was taken in with the culture of the old west through his first Calgary Stampede. When it came time for the young artist to choose a subject matter, western themes were an easy choice.

“I was inspired by western art, but there is also a market here for it,” he says. Because of the variety of scenes he can paint which include horses—ranging from romantic to very aggressive—he finds it easy to continue to be inspired by horses as a subject, and he can move from there to include human subjects as well, giving him the opportunity for even more variety.

The house and its contents act as an ongoing inspiration. On their matrimonial trip to Mexico, Paul and Kristin scored enough pieces to fill a 55-foot shipping container; including old doors, light fixtures, sinks, furniture, a ten-foot spiral staircase for Paul’s studio and plenty of art. Being in such a beautiful and western-themed environment makes it that much easier for Paul to continue to create beautiful artwork.

“Most experiences and lessons in life are transferable. One should choose to be surrounded by things that really move them, and I’m no different. I’m certain that the way I set up my environment directly impacts on my work.” **NL**

1. A clawfoot tub and custom vessel sink greets visitors in the guest bath.
2. A collection of crosses (a passion for the couple), fans, and wedding-day photos grace the stairwell to the lower level.
3. A private deck off the master bedroom overlooks the mountains.
4. An ensuite bath off the master suite is sized for two.

Paul Van Ginkel’s work can be viewed at www.PaulVanGinkel.com