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DESIGN FROM THE GROUND UP » BY DAVE MCGINN



Statement staircases

Stairs might seem boring and utilitarian – used for juggling up and down. But for architects they are often the starting point of a design – the organizing factor of a house that has more than one level.

Done right, “It really becomes a piece of art work,” says Cindy Rendely, of Cindy Rendely Architecture.

Plenty of other architects are creating showcase stairs: think Frank Gehry’s serpentine wooden staircase in his redesign of the Art Gallery of Ontario, the plunging glass stairs of the Apple Store in New York and the Vatican Museums’ mesmerizing spiral staircase.

Even in residential projects, steps are not only a chance to make a statement, they can also channel the natural properties of a space and riff on its surroundings.

Kevin Vallety, of Kevin Vallety Design in North Vancouver, pegs their appeal to a simple fact: “The stair is a great opportunity, architecturally, to do something really cool.”

Classic combo:
glass and steel
Designed by Cindy Rendely Architecture in Toronto, the stair is made of oxidized steel with solid oak treads and handrails, glass guards and polished stainless steel “button” connections. Rendely, who trained as a goldsmith, jeweller and metal artist before becoming an architect, wanted to work with steel to play off the exposed steel throughout the rest of the house.

PHOTO BY SHAI GIL



PHOTO BY PETER POWLES



PHOTO BY MICHAEL AWAD

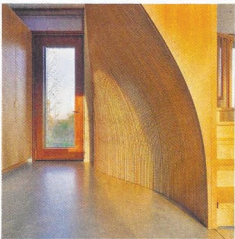


PHOTO BY BOB GUNDU

A West Coast interpretation

Glazing on one side of the staircase helps give it an open feel, and fir slats on the other were used to keep the wall translucent. They also connect the inside of the West Vancouver home to its outside, with those same slats used on the carport. Designed by Kevin Vallety, while he was with Kallweit Graham Architecture.

Ripple effect

The board-form concrete walls in this Brampton, Ont. house have the texture of concrete but the impression of wood – the treads are made of jatoba, or Brazilian cherry, and are set at uneven heights to suggest cascading water, a subtle nod to the nearby river. Designed by Agath-on Co.

On the lighter side

Made from CNC-milled plywood – a computerized process that allows wood to be specially cut into various shapes and sizes – and assembled by hand, this staircase maximizes space in the entryway. “It was also designed to channel light from the clerestory window above down to the main floor,” says Betsy Williamson of Williamson Chong Architects. The home is on the Niagara Escarpment overlooking Georgian Bay.