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TOM ARBAN; SHAI GIL PHOTOGRAPHY; SHAI GIL PHOTOGRAPHY

Andre D’Elia and Meg Graham founded superkül 11 years ago. The architects have a sleek, minimal design sensibility, but their houses are still comfortable and friendly.

DESIGN FROM THE HIP

Superkül’s husband and wife team of architects know how to make a house a stylish home



KELVIN BROWNE

both working at KPMB (an astounding incubator of great architects) and eventually started a business together. They now have a firm of 15, including them. In addition to award-winning houses, the firm has designed the Fielding Estate Winery, the head office for St. Joseph and other commercial projects.

What have Meg and Andre learned about designing houses since they started their firm? “Every project has a different team,” says Meg. “It might seem like if you’ve built a house before, the client is all that changes, but it’s usually different relationships each time that are what realizes a project.”

As I’m speaking with Meg and Andre, the word “trust” comes up quite often. Clients trusting the architect, of course, but architects trusting that they can push and question a client sometimes to get the best result.

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NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

Wasaga poised for more growth

BEACH

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The steady growth — Wasaga Beach has grown to a year-round population of more than 17,000 from just 6,457 in 1991 — has in turn created demand in the retail sector, which has brought in box stores, chain restaurants and a new recreation centre creating jobs and business opportunities for young families.

And that means young families are now buying up homes in the “Beach” and the community is now vibrant year-round, says Ray Kelo, Wasaga Beach’s manager of planning and development.

“It’s pretty much changed, it used to be pretty bleak here in winter,” says Mr. Kelso, whose father was a police officer at the Beach in the 1960s.

While Abigail Hitchens, 33, has enjoyed living in Wasaga Beach for seven years with partner Rob Wharry, she always thought she would have to move away once the couple started a family.

Baby Issac was born one year ago in June 2012 so the couple began preparing their Vice-roy home on the banks of the Nottawasaga River for sale in preparation for moving to a younger community.

Then they discovered that, far from being retirement only communities, many of the Wasaga Beach subdivisions are now a mix of young and old.

“And that’s a healthy community and a good place to raise a family,” says Ms. Hitchens.

The couple still plans to sell their home, but instead of leaving town, they are in search of a home in one of the Wasaga Beach subdivisions.

Also Ms. Hitchens didn’t have to leave town to fulfill her dream of opening a floral design studio.

“At first I thought I would have to move to somewhere like Collingwood to open my store, but then I realized there was an opportunity right here in Wasaga Beach,” she says.

As Wasaga Beach welcomes more than two million visitors annually and is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, perhaps Ms. Hitchens is onto something.

Ms. Hitchens opened Petals in Thyme Floral Design Studio late in 2012 and sales have exceeded her expectations and many of her clients are young people.

“I am already at my 12-month sales target,” she says.

Mr. Kelso says he is not surprised that young people like Ms. Hitchens are seeing the business potential the “Beach” offers, as the town is poised for even more growth now that upwards of \$30-million is being



TOP: ROBERTA AVERY; HANDOUTS

New England Village by Baywood Homes is one of four major developments moving forward in Wasaga Beach.



JONATHAN RIVAIT / NATIONAL POST

says Ms. Del Riccio.

While New England Village is seeing a 50/50 split between retirees and young families, the majority of resale home purchasers at ReMax of Wasaga Beach Inc. Brokerage are retirees, says broker Jason Ruttan.

“Although we do get a few families who move here and commute to Collingwood or Barrie for work as home prices are more affordable here,” says Mr. Ruttan adding that the average price of a single family home in Wasaga Beach is \$275,000.

Meanwhile, the outlook for the commercial area around Beach Area One is more upbeat now that Belcub Management Inc. has pur-



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The husband and wife who are the principals of superkül, Andre D'Elia and Meg Graham, are cool, but not so cool they don't understand how people want to live in houses today. "I think people are attracted to our houses because they sense they can be comfortable there, not just because they like the look of them," says Meg. Indeed, surfing through their portfolio, the houses are sleek, somewhat minimal and yet definitely not unfriendly. Andre points out this is not accidental. "We like a certain modesty; we focus on light, the materials and proportions. Great proportions are essential." Elegant proportions are indeed super cool. No amount of marble and fancy fixtures can redeem a space that begins with the handicap of thoughtless proportions.

Superkül has been in business for 11 years. Andre studied architecture at Carleton University and then worked at KPMB. Meg graduated from architecture at Waterloo and then Harvard. They met while

both working at KPMB (an astounding incubator of great architects) and eventually started a business together. They now have a firm of 15, including them. In addition to award-winning houses, the firm has designed the Fielding Estate Winery, the head office for St. Joseph and other commercial projects.

What have Meg and Andre learned about designing houses since they started their firm? Almost in unison, they say "a lot."

"Working on a commercial project, even when your clients are dedicated, isn't like designing a house," says Meg. "A house is personal." Andre continues: "Our clients are typically very busy people, but when it comes to the design of their house they'll make time to understand all the details."

"It takes time to appreciate what a client wants and needs," says Meg. "Some start with clippings of our work or other houses but it's never that easy as just build this. It's a process." Andre adds, importantly, "You're realizing someone's dream for them, it's a big financial commitment, but it has to be enjoyable, fun too, or it's not going to work out."

Another learning was the realization that it takes a village to build a house. Not just all trades who construct a house but the myriad consultants involved in any project, many of whom the client never meets.

"Every project has a different team," says Meg. "It might seem like if you've built a house before, the client is all that changes, but it's usually different relationships each time that are what realizes a project."

As I'm speaking with Meg and Andre, the word "trust" comes up quite often. Clients trusting the architect, of course, but architects trusting that they can push and question a client sometimes to get them to end product that will make them happy, rather than be something they saw in a magazine. Meg mentions a phone call she'd had recently from a client who had some doubts about an aspect of the house, but went ahead assuming the architects knew best. "It was really nice," said Meg. "He said 'I just now got why you did those doors that way.' He was pleased that he'd trusted us, and pleased that we'd pushed a bit." It must be very reassuring when you're an architect to have clients validate your recommendations, especially when they're not design decisions that are standard.

I can't resist asking about the firm's name. "Well, we were having a drink ... and we didn't want a name with people's names in it ... and we wanted something that was memorable" How lucky to be cooler and more savvy a decade after you gave yourself the challenge to be super cool.

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