HOMES • RESALE & RENTAL

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OTTAWA ARCHITECTS AT HOME • SHAWN LAWRENCE

The sunken big room — which measures nine by nine metres — is surrounded by pillars, rather than walls, and features soaring ceilings.

PHOTOS BY WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

The kitchen has cherry stained cabinets, black granite countertops and an island that is often the focal point at parties.

Expanding spaces

The Lawrence family found it's faster to sell a modest townhome, then build a flashy home tucked into Rideau Forest. **Jennifer Campbell** paid a recent visit.

The Lawrence family learned a valuable real estate lesson when they traded a Barrhaven townhome for the chance to build a flashy, open-concept home tucked into Rideau Forest.

It takes less time to sell a modest townhome than to design and build a 4,300-square-foot home with soaring ceilings, a minimum number of interior walls and separate spaces for Shawn Lawrence's architectural firm.

The lesson taught the family a new reality — living in modest, temporary accommodations in a senior's residence — while waiting for their new home to be finished.

The closing date on the townhome came quickly and the family of four was forced to take a one-bedroom apartment in a senior's home that Mr. Lawrence designed.

"In the end, it was a good experience," says the architect. "It gave me good insight to actually live in something I designed."

Now the Lawrences — Shawn, his wife Monique and children Amanda, 14, and Brandon, 11 — have more than enough room to relax or find a private corner.

Their Manotick home is 12 times larger than the 350-square-foot apartment, and there is lots of outdoor space and trees in Rideau Forest.

From the outside, the home appears as sprawling as it does on the inside.

"That's our bush — we can walk around here without worrying about people behind us," says Mr. Lawrence, while pointing out stacked windows in the giant solarium. "It's fun not having anyone back there."

From the outside, the home appears as sprawling as it does on the inside, with the doorways flanked by two large arched windows. Arches are a recurring theme in the home's many windows. A turret, which houses the master ensuite and Jacuzzi, juts off to one side, while the three-person office of S.J. Lawrence Architect Incorporated enjoys a separate entrance on the other side.

The focus of the entire house is the big room.

"Everything flies around it and works around it," he says. "We had a party — about 125 people — and everyone stayed in the kitchen and solarium."

The sunken room — which measures nine by nine metres — is surrounded by pillars, rather than walls, and features soaring ceilings.

Its sheer size and elegance gives the home a grand feeling, but the leather furniture and burning fireplace, complete with a mantel from Old Ottawa South's Yardley's Antiques, warm it up considerably.

Indeed, the only walls in the open-concept living space are two short ones that house coat closets on either side of the entry — one for the family and one for guests — and walls surrounding the powder room, says Mrs. Lawrence with a smile.

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What looks like a nook is a formal dining space, above left, with a large table and chairs. The solarium is a year-round room that sits next to the kitchen and features a small table for four.

I spy with my little eye

STEVE MAXWELL
House Works

Periscopes are cool even, if you aren't a submarine commander. Just ask any kid. Periscopes let you spy on the world from behind a fence, tree or around the corner of a building. And making one from wood and a few pieces of mirror is easier than it looks. These plans and instructions are for a periscope that's more than two feet long — just what you need for keeping kids occupied on a bleak winter weekend.

You'll need: two pieces of mirror 1/8 inch thick by 2 3/8 inches wide by 3 inches long (you can prep these using a glass cutter or have them cut for you at any glass shop).

The six pieces of wood shown in the plans include: two side members 3/8 inches thick by 2 1/8 inches wide by 25 3/4 inches long; two front and back parts 3/8 inches thick by 3 3/8 inches wide by 23-inches long; and two triangular mirror blocks 2 1/8 inches thick by 2 9/16 inches wide by 2 3/4 inches long.

Start work by cutting the wooden parts you need. You can use plywood or pine for the sides. Glue up several layers of thinner solid wood if you can't find pieces thick enough for the hefty mirror blocks.

If you go to a glass shop to have mirror cut, bring the mirror blocks with you so they know exactly what size you need. Both pieces of mirror shouldn't cost more than a few dollars.

Glue one mirror to each angled face of the mirror blocks using silicone caulking. Set these aside to dry overnight as you work on the next construction steps.

Clamp one side member to each side of the mirror blocks, then place the front and back pieces over the sides for a glue-free trial fit. The plans show how the front and back are shorter than the sides. The back piece extends to the top of the scope and the front piece to the bottom, leaving the mirror blocks open for you to look at during a secret mission.

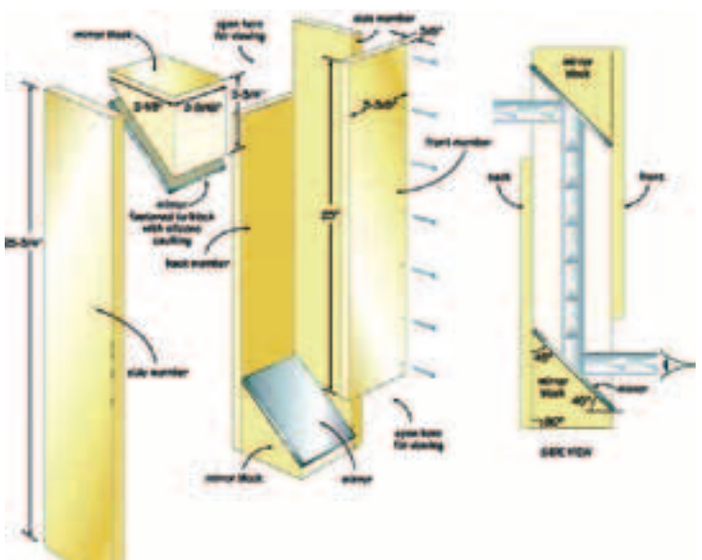
When everything's lined up, join the front back and sides permanently with carpenter's glue and one-inch finishing nails. Whatever you do, don't glue the mirror blocks in place yet. They must be free to move around for adjustment later.

Now flip the periscope up and peer down the end. You'll probably see some glue oozing from the joints. Be sure to remove this squeeze out at the ends, where the mirror blocks will sit. Without this step it may be difficult to install the mirror blocks if hardened glue gets in the way.

After letting the body of the periscope dry overnight, remove the clamps and slip the mirror blocks back in position, after smearing glue on their sides. If the blocks don't stay put by friction, hold them still with a few small clamps across the sides of the periscope.

Now it's time for adjustment.

Pick up the periscope and look through one end. It doesn't matter which. How do things look? If you can see a clear, rectangular view of the world, that's great. Just set the periscope aside until the mirror blocks dry. If your line of sight seems tilted and wonky, adjust the angle of each mirror block up or down until you're happy. You won't have to move the blocks much to get it right.



Finish-up by sanding the periscope to level the joints and remove splinters. If you really want to go all-out, give the wood a camouflage paint job. Start with a base coat of drab green, followed by irregular passes with a spray can of olive green and dark brown paints. It's just the colour scheme you need for youngsters with hiding and spying on their minds.

Steve Maxwell is technical editor of Canadian Home Workshop magazine. Send him questions at smaxwell@onlink.net.