



BRENDAN CHARTERS

# CUSTOM HOME COLLABORATIONS

An architect, designer and builder outline how to create project synergies

**Embarking on the design and development of a new home is a big decision.** It requires a clear outline of goals, the assembly of specialists, the management of egos, budgets and a pinch of added stress. Some experience greater success at it than others. To help guide those looking to undertake a custom home project of their own, we talked with the architect, Brad Abbott, Abbott Design Ltd, designer, Meghan Carter, Meghan Carter Design, and the project manager, Jim Cunningham, Eurodale Developments on a recent project we collaborated with. By connecting, we gain insight on how they help guide their clients to create both a beautiful finished project, and a smooth process, all while working together. Sounds impossible, right? It's really not.



**Firstly, what makes the perfect custom home client for you? (i.e. style preference, personal character type, or other significant detail)**

**Architect Brad:** A variety of tastes and styles is fine. Ideally the client has trust in the ideas and expertise of the architect and allows freedom of creativity.

**Designer Meghan:** Our ideal client seeks to follow the design intent for creating a seamless esthetic, versus a choppy and piecemeal one often found through design on-the-fly type projects.

**Builder Jim:** The client is someone that understands challenges arise during any project. Nothing is seamless, you need to break an egg to make an omelette...so to speak. There has to be trust as you are working on their

behalf at all times. Most importantly, respect and value for our role in the process.

**Do you prefer to have the architect, designer and builder involved along all steps of the process, or just in their defined segment?**

**Architect Brad:** The architect is integral to the overall design of the space, including the interior, such as: trim and door packages, post and beams and the overall structure. Continuity between the exterior and the interior can be critical. Involving the interior designer and builder early ensures a shared vision, as well as cost implications for the owners to use in their approval of the design direction. If possible, involve all parties at key design and budgeting milestones in advance of the build.

**Designer Meghan:** The clients need to understand the roles of each party and use them accordingly to obtain ultimate value. With increased collaboration throughout come the best ideas and the smoothest process from design to execution. If the architect is not doing the interiors, the interior designer should be involved at the first design stage to ensure details (such as window placements) work with furniture placement and flow on the inside.

**Builder Jim:** The involvement of all three is key when something is identified, which will not allow for the execution of the original design intent. While we do not require our hands held, we understand our role in the process is to execute the vision, and if it's not possible, we are not tasked to design the solution—though we surely will make suggestions, the architect or designer will need to be the one to recommend and design the ultimate change for the homeowner to approve.

**Introducing each other – when is it appropriate?**

**Architect Brad:** If retained first, we prefer to do high-level budgets upon creation of floorplans and elevations. We recommend contacting two to three design-build firms for a meet-and-greet and reputation review. This review includes historically guided budgets, not trade/supplier firmed pricing. It can help guide final designs and set the relationship path.

**Designer Meghan:** In years past, people would hire the builder first, then reach for the designer. This has now flipped, for the better. Once floorplans are about 85 per cent complete, a lighting plan and scope

document has been created, we then look for one to two contractors to ballpark. They can then scale back, if needed, while it is still relatively cheap to design.

**Builder Jim:** As early in the process as possible, so that everyone can understand the goal from a space, style and budget perspective, as well as help the owners create a list of their priorities, which will govern how we allocate their budget throughout the project. It also helps build the team relationship approach if everyone starts from the first phase.

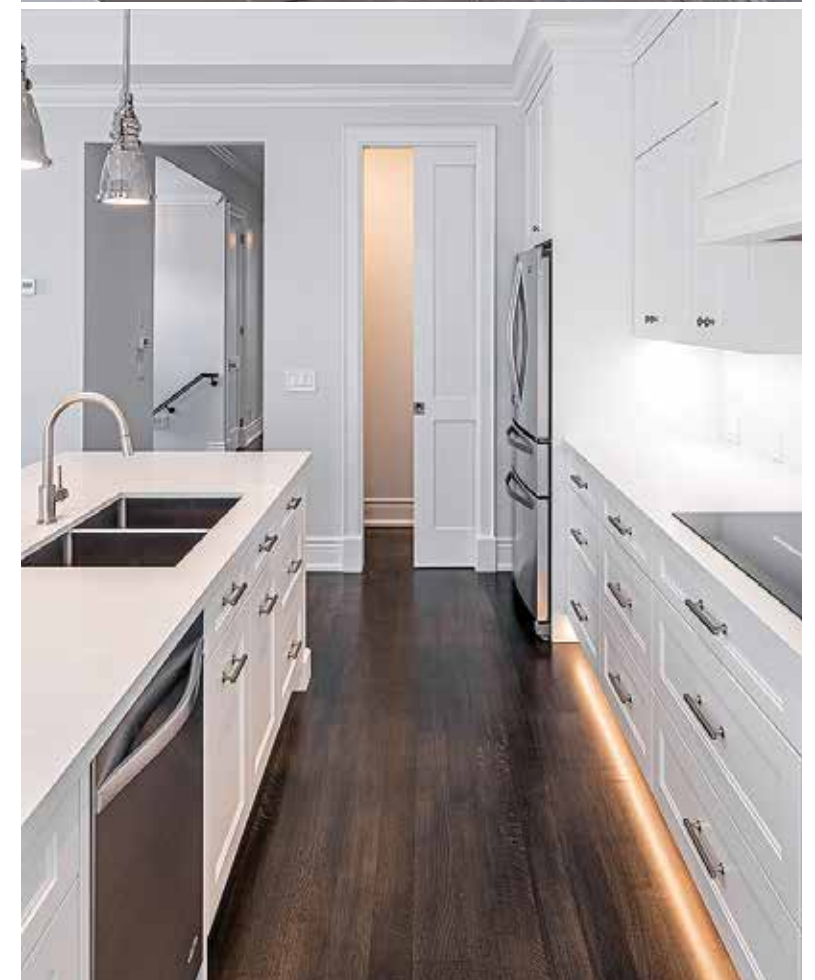
**What to do when issues arise vs. that which is planned for?**

**Architect Brad:** Don't cut the architect and/or designer out of the conversation, just because they aren't on site that day. A misguided or misdirected solution to a perceived problem can horribly impact the overall design. Keeping all involved can avoid diluted projects and relationships.

**Designer Meghan:**

Start the build off with a project walk with all team members to try and flush these out at the get-go. Failing that, continue that method in the spirit of collaboration to ensure continuity of ideas and process for the benefit of the homeowner and the project!

**Builder Jim:** I would personally call the architect and ask them how they would like to handle the situation. Sometimes this can be flushed out by phone. Failing that, I would call an on-site meeting. If the client is unable to attend, I would brief them on the meeting and get their final approval on decisions before making the change, and document it.



PHOTOGRAPHY: VALERIE WILCOX (EXTERIOR SHOTS), PETER SELLAR (INTERIORS)



## EXPERT-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

*“Working with an architect and interior designer provides another level of design, which raises the profile of the project.” -BUILDER JIM*

**Architect Brad, you work about 50 per cent in the city and 50 per cent in cottage country in Collingwood—what are the differences for you?**

**AB:** In the country, clients tend to be slightly older, more experienced and are often moving out of the city. Typically, my country clients are better heeled and are more relaxed, having undertaken a few renos in the past. City homes offer unique challenges, such as this site with tight confines, whereas more rural settings provide ample views, along with more siting process to capitalize on topography, prevailing winds and lake views.

**Designer Meghan, you acted as designer here, but you also undertake permit drawings and some project management duties for clients—how does this process differ for you?**

**DM:** We know to enter with a low ego when working in collaboration as everyone at the table is skilled at what they do, hence their reputation and why they were retained. When we run from start to finish for the client, the project has more of a singular vision—our vision—

which can make things easier but can also be limiting. When working as a group versus working independently, a clear outline of roles, responsibilities and deliverables of each member is a necessity to avoid overlap or conflict between professionals, which confuse clients.

**Builder Jim, you acted as the project manager on this build, but your firm also undertakes an in-house Design-Build approach to projects—how does this process differ for you?**

**BJ:** Our design process is more function-based in nature. Working with an architect and interior designer provides another level of design, which raises the profile of the project. It also tends to remove some of the copycat DIY design direction that is so prevalent in the industry. It's not the right solution for everyone, however, and the Design-Build method works very well to help people undertake their dreams of expanding, updating or recreating their space to suit their tastes or needs. About 75 per cent of what we build is designed in-house, but we love building interesting and challenging projects designed by other professionals, too.◆