

# Extra Touches Win the Day

## In a tough field of stellar contenders, Herb Lagois finds a way to stand out

By Paula McCooey, Ottawa Citizen October 29, 2011

It was a tough choice for the judges, but it was the extra touches by builder Herb Lagois that tipped the scale in his favour as renovator of the year.

The award, given out at the glitzy annual housing awards gala put on by the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association last Saturday, was the second time Lagois Drafting & Construction Inc. (lagois.com) took home the coveted prize.

Unlike other categories in the 2011 Housing Design Awards, which involved judging finalists blind (no reference to company names or logos), the Renovator of the Year award took a more hands-on, personal approach, where the contenders - there were five - were interviewed by the judges, who asked them questions about their submissions and their business approach.

After the win, Lagois was beaming with joy. "It's awesome, considering the competition and who we were against, considering it's the best of the best in Ottawa," said Lagois, who also won the award in 2003. "I'm elated."

Each finalist was asked to submit customer testimonials and four examples of residential projects that show the breadth of their work. Then the judges - Chris Hewett, a professor of architectural technology at Algonquin College; architects Shawn Lawrence, Michele Dredge and Richard Briginshaw and interior designer Susan Firestone - pored over them.

This category also involved conducting personal interviews with the contenders, who included Michael J. Martin Luxury Renovations, OakWood Renovation Experts, RND Construction, and Amsted Design-Build, which won the award the past three years in a row.

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They were questioned about their company, the kind of projects they take on, and how they deal with glitches during construction because there are always unknowns.

"You open up the wall and it's not what you expect," says Hewett. "So how do you deal with unknown conditions on a site. Because that's just a normal thing, especially when you are dealing with untrained clients, they are expecting to pay a certain dollar, and get a certain product, but obviously, depending on what's uncovered, it could add (to the final cost)."

Judging the renovator of the year category was extremely challenging, Hewitt says, because the interviews were very even "across the board." But it was Lagois' touches that gave him and his company a slight edge.

"It was the quality of the work that they did that made them stand out a little bit more from the rest," says Hewett. "Just the quality of the products and attention to details in those renovations. It's not sort of a one-off; they deal very closely with the client to give the client exactly what they are looking for. So even though it's a standard renovation, it turns into being very customized towards the clients' needs and requirements."

Lagois Drafting & Construction was established in 1984 as an architectural design and construction company providing design and build services for custom homes, renovations and additions. They take a "holistic" approach to their business, offering conceptual drawings, to working drawings to construction, while considering esthetics, space planning and energy efficiency.

Repeatedly interrupted by congratulations from peers as Lagois spoke about his win, he says that after all the long hours and dedicated work he and his team of 10 put in finishing the projects, winning the renovator of the year was truly rewarding - which is why he allowed himself to enjoy some much-needed downtime at the gala.

"I'm just going to soak it in," he said. "It's kind of nice just to relax a little bit."

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