

Globe Real Estate

Homes with the designer touch



ON SITE, S5

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Far left, a tube from the master bedroom exits at the dinner table, while another leads down to the basement bar. Middle, the motorcycle gallery. Far right, the screening room.

RENOVATION

For a stuntwoman, a home to flip over

When you get run over by cars for a living, sometimes you really need a place to sit back and relax

BY MASAJI TAKEI

You've seen Melissa Stubbs before. You've seen her in a red nightgown over black bra and panties, crash through a window and plunge out of a 23-storey building. Or cringed as she flipped and rolled a speeding SUV into a crumpled mess. And that was probably her jumping a motorcycle while firing a machine pistol.

If you watch TV or movies, you've seen Ms. Stubbs or her work. One of North America's top stunt women and stunt co-ordinators, she's the action girl on more than 90 movies and over a hundred TV episodes. She's doubled for Jessica Alba, Angelina Jolie, Lucy Liu, Milla Jovovich and more than sixty other Hollywood starlets and worked in such movies as *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, *Scooby Doo 2*, *Batman & Robin* and *Blade 3*.

After getting "hit by a car at four in the morning," and pulling the notoriously long hours of the film business, her home is her refuge. This stuntwoman's home is her castle. Literally.

Five years ago, Ms. Stubbs, 36, coordinated one of her biggest jobs yet, the conversion of her West Vancouver family home into a 4,800 square-foot castle, complete with turret and drawbridge. The project, expected to cost \$500,000, went way over budget, adding up to \$800,000 by the time it was over. Still, you're not likely to have seen a castle like this one.

Apart from the fortress design, the home's most unusual feature is the system of indoor slides that extend from a trap door in Ms. Stubbs's master bedroom through to the main floor, then from the main floor to the basement bar and motorcycle gallery.



RAFAL GERSZAK FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Stuntwoman Melissa Stubbs reads over a script in her West Vancouver home. A stunt double for such Hollywood stalets as Jessica Alba and Angelina Jolie, Ms. Stubbs spent \$800,000 turning her family home into a turretted fantasy land.



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INSURANCE

Before starting work, check your liability



MIKE HOLMES
MAKE IT RIGHT

Should you get liability and property insurance for your renovation job?

Construction work can be dangerous, and your home, when it's

under renovation, is a work site like any other. A renovation involves risk to the owner, the contractor, the workers on site and any strangers who might happen by. If you've gone to a bank to finance a renovation, you'll find it wants to limit its risk as well, and may insist on extra insurance coverage. So, to protect yourself during a renovation, you'd better make sure you have insurance.

I had an email from Ken in Toronto, who asked whether the liability component of his home insurance policy would cover his

renovation, or if his contractor is supposed to have his own insurance. I've said it a thousand times: Make sure your contractor has full liability and Worker's Compensation insurance. Ask for the policy number. Call to check it's still valid.

But, that insurance still may not be enough. And don't automatically count on your homeowner's insurance to cover construction.

Your homeowner's policy might cover renovations. Check with your insurance agent — you might need an extension of coverage to include the planned renovation. Tell your

agent what kind of work is going to be done and who's going to do it — you or a contractor.

So here's the question the insurer might ask: Is your contractor licensed or unlicensed? If you know anything about me, you know how I feel about that: Go licensed all the way. Fortunately, some insurers feel the same way, and depending on where you live, they may insist on licensed contractors. Insurers like to limit their risk, and hiring a licensed contractor does that.

There's another bonus: If you hire a licensed contractor, chances

are the person's work will satisfy the building code requirements. An unlicensed contractor increases the risk that things won't be done according to code, and that might become the homeowner's responsibility to fix. What's more, licensed contractors are also more likely to carry workers' compensation.

I've seen cases where an uninsured homeowner became responsible for personal and property damage that was caused by their renovation.

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ARCHITECTURE

Design is the mortar in social housing that works



TREVOR BODDY
DWELLING

Housing the homeless and affordability for the rest of us generates a lot of talk these days in Vancouver. A few — a very few — are also doing something about it.

One doing very much indeed is Gregory Henriquez, the Vancouver architect at the forefront of social housing innovation as a partner at the design firm founded by his father, Richard. Henriquez Jr. is the key designer for three highly original designs at the leading edge of social housing thinking — not just for this city, but continent-wide: Bruce Eriksen Place; the Lore Krill Co-op; and the massive Woodward's mixed-use redevelopment.

All three projects are found in a handsome new book on the young architect's work to date, an amply-illustrated volume with the somewhat ponderous title of *Towards an Ethical Architecture: Issues Within the Work of Gregory Henriquez*.

As documented in the book's extensive illustration of these three publicly-funded housing designs and the diverse residents who have now moved into two of them, Gregory Henriquez is a wizard at extracting poetic architecture out of the thin gruel of the tight budgets handed him by city and province.

It is perhaps no wonder that he started out by studying poetry. After architectural studies at Carleton and McGill universities that tended to the esoteric, the literary and the theoretical, Mr. Henriquez got thoroughly grounded in the tough realities of inner-city social housing with his first major project, Bruce Eriksen Place, on Main St. near Hastings St.

This eight-storey block contains 35 studio apartments, each 430 square feet each, and is named after a pioneering advocate for housing for the poor and community improvement in the Downtown Eastside. At the architect's insistence, a large mural and conceptual art piece featuring painted words associated with the activist's causes covers portions of Bruce Eriksen Place's Main Street façade, its extended concrete frame a good neighbour to the 1950s Modernism of the police headquarters next door.

Bruce Eriksen died nearly a decade ago, but he set the template for Vancouver's subsequent advocates for our poorest of the poor — ex-councillor Jim Green, the Portland Hotel Society and its offshoots, and most recently, the hardcore anti-poverty advocates who are pressing our now-nervous city's hot buttons by occupying empty buildings.

While my heart is with Eriksen, my mind knows that the calls by these advocates for social housing in the Downtown Eastside — and the Downtown Eastside alone — is doing neither the neighbourhood nor their cause any good by over-concentrating low-end housing in the only Vancouver district that does not resist its construction.

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