

# WELCOME from VHF



Vancouver Heritage Foundation is a registered charity supporting the conservation of heritage buildings and structures in recognition of their contribution to the city's economy, sustainability and culture.

Through educational walking and house tours, lectures, talks, workshops, and special events, along with grants to maintain older buildings, VHF is helping create a city that repairs and reuses its older buildings rather than demolish them.

For more information on any of our tours or events we invite you to visit our website: [www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org](http://www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org)



## THANK YOU

The Vancouver Special House Tour is only possible through the tremendous effort of over 80 people who volunteer their time, expertise and homes. We appreciate all of their contributions to ensure the success of this tour.

Special thanks to all of the 2014 homeowners who are generously opening their homes!

Thank you to Martin Knowles for all of the 2014 tour photos. [www.mkphotomedia.com](http://www.mkphotomedia.com)

Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers:

Jack & Debbie Allen, Don Archibald, Carol Attenborrow, Christine Austin, Gillian Beattie, Sehr Bokhari Latif, Gloria Burgess, Stu Burgess, Sheila Butt, Annalies Camfferman, Anna Camporese, Marlene Conway, David Dove, Brenda Draney, Lexie Evers, Peter Genge, Eleanor Gregory, Imbi & Phillip Harding, June Harrison, Jeannette Hlavach, Laurie Holst, Livia Huang, Heidi Hunchak, Jan Johnston, Misty Jorgensen, Louise Klaasen, Chi Le, Webster Licaros, Anne Lidstone, Nancy Love, Bonnie Low, Laverne MacFadden, Keri MacLeod, Ursula MacLeod, Shirley McCall, Kim McCarthy, Ina McLay, Stephanie McWilliams, Elizabeth Minish & Chris Petty, Sara Mitchell, Marie Moonen, Ciara Mooney, John Morse, Peter Mustard, Sandra North, Kate Rexin, Brenda Sawyer, Patricia Simpson, Maria Szydłowska, Bev Taylor, Carolyn Taylor, Hillary Taylor, Lindsay Wilkinson, Lynda Winslow, Paul Wong, Evelyn Wong, Helen Wood, Wayne Worden and Carol Yun.

## Strathcona



**THE JOE WAI SPECIAL.** In the 1950s the city made plans to extend a freeway system through Strathcona into downtown, claiming the area was severely affected by urban blight. By the time the plan was defeated by massive locally organized resistance, many Strathcona residents had already been relocated and their properties demolished in anticipation of the highway and social housing projects. New housing was needed and Architect Joe Wai was asked to design a simple housing style that was economical and quick to build. The Joe Wai Specials of the 1970s are only found in Strathcona, but follow similar design principals to traditional Vancouver Specials. Typically Joe Wai Specials don't stay on the market long. Those who purchase them often complete thoughtful renovations that respect their heritage.

Few modifications had been made to this home until the recent renovation that began in 2011. The main level flooring was pulled up and replaced with solid wood floors. An enlarged opening allowed for the addition of a double-glazed front window with a view to the park. A wall between the living room and kitchen was removed, and the kitchen was built from scratch and included updated windows. The period-perfect 1970s spindle chairs were inherited. Frosted glass on the basement door allows light to the lower level while clever storage is achieved through custom built-ins.

During renovations the main floor received added insulation while fireplaces were fitted to gas allowing them to serve as the primary heat source. The new kitchen stove was hooked up to the gas line, and a barbeque hook-up was added on the patio.

The upstairs is still in progress. The bathroom has been updated, but the flooring and windows will eventually be replaced, and the owners plan to remove the vintage popcorn ceilings in the bedrooms.

The unfinished basement, where the owners lived during the renovation, now houses a family room, full bathroom and laundry and enjoys added light from new windows. The basement flooring is marmoleum, a linoleum made from linseed oil. The fireplace surround stone was a lucky find on sale and echos the pattern in the flooring. When the designer suggested under cabinet lighting in the laundry, the owners scoffed. Now they love having the extra light, and were grateful for choosing to work with a designer whose ideas dramatically improved their renovation decisions.

View the pre-tour lecture of Architect Joe Wai talking about how Strathcona was saved, and the design of the infill housing: <http://youtu.be/71kW8wX1kl>

THIS BROCHURE IS YOUR 2014 TICKET  
SATURDAY APR. 26<sup>th</sup> 1pm - 5pm



VANCOUVER SPECIAL  
HOUSE TOUR  
VANCOUVER HERITAGE FOUNDATION

## THIS BROCHURE IS YOUR 2014 TICKET

PRESENTED BY

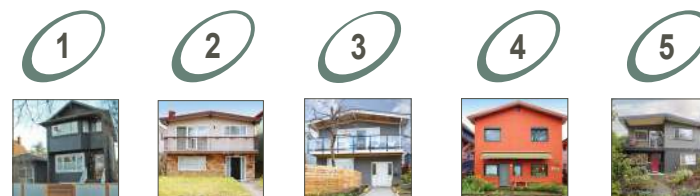


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## IMPORTANT TOUR REMINDERS

- **Wear Slip-on shoes** that can be easily removed. You will be required to remove them at the entrance to every house.
- Bring a **Vancouver street map** to help you find the houses.
- **Bring this brochure to every house.** Volunteers will check off each house upon arrival.
- **No Photography or cell phone use on tour properties.** Anyone who does not adhere to these guidelines may be asked to leave.



## PRE-TOUR LECTURE 'SPECIAL' INSIGHT: TWO DISTINCT PERSPECTIVES ON THE VANCOUVER SPECIAL

Wednesday, April 16 7:30pm - 9:00pm  
Unitarian Church - 949 W 49th Ave  
Tickets \$12

Hear from two speakers who have unique perspectives on the Vancouver Special: Guido Wimmers, on adapting 'Passive House' standards to the Special, and Architect Joe Wai on the Strathcona story. Both talks will be followed by Q&A. Sponsored by CMHC.



## GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS

- Houses are open from 1 - 5pm only, no earlybirds or latecomers.
- Photography is strictly prohibited.
- All attendees must have a ticket & be at least 6 years of age (infants in front carriers are permitted without a ticket, no other exceptions).
- Please do not bring large bags & backpacks.
- No food, drink, smoking, or pets on tour properties.
- Cell phone usage is not permitted inside homes.
- Do not park in driveways, or block driveways or streets.
- Refrain from touching furniture, art, and household items.
- Expect a line up outside some of the homes.
- No washroom facilities are provided in the houses.
- You will be asked to remove your shoes at each home.
- We regret the tour is not mobility device accessible.

## THE VANCOUVER SPECIAL

After Vancouver Specials first appeared around 1965 as a way to provide quick, inexpensive housing for a rapidly increasing immigrant population, the estimated number swelled to over 10,000 dwellings by the mid-80s. These homes were a unique Vancouver product because they were designed to optimize standard Vancouver lots under the RS-1 District Zoning Schedule. Standard designs could be purchased from a stock plan office for about \$65. Building permits were issued quickly and construction was completed in a few weeks. The flexible floor plan and large footprint provided room for extended family to live together, or for an entire floor to be rented out as a mortgage helper.

The Vancouver Specials' flat fronts, raised basements, boxy shapes, and low pitched roofs make them ideal for personalization and many homeowners make alterations to suit their own lifestyle. Modern owners are taking down interior walls to create light airy spaces, installing state of the art mechanical systems, insulating walls and ceilings and installing energy efficient windows, making them an excellent fit for current concepts of flexible space and sustainable living. We hope you gain inspiration from the homes on the tour and enjoy learning about a piece of Vancouver's architectural history.

## Vancouver Heritage Foundation

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## 2 Cedar - Cottage



A family who were unconvinced about Specials became converts after seeing how much potential they have. Coming from an older 1135 sq ft duplex with a young son, they wanted a larger home, but didn't want to leave their school district. This home offered 1800 sq ft, which the owners first thought would be too small, but they arranged a viewing anyhow. After offering on the home, they discovered it was actually 2000 sq ft, but it hadn't seen any updates and needed work.

The first renovations focused on revamping the kitchen with custom cabinetry, replacing windows, and adding skylights and a new metal roof. They also renovated the bathrooms and snapped up new solid wood flooring from an architect friend whose client had a change of heart. The 'tile' flooring was also an economical choice as it is actually cleverly disguised linoleum.

The popcorn ceilings were removed to add insulation and pot lights. The stonework on the fireplace is original and matches the exterior of the home. It was almost removed but the owners realized it was one of the few remaining elements they liked, so the stonework was kept and the fireplace converted to gas. The ground floor hearth has not been touched and while the façade is currently the mid-century stone, they intend to paint the siding and repaint the railings in black. While the configuration matches the original, the front door is a custom ordered new door and side lights.

The master bathroom was enlarged by taking some space from a closet. The living, kitchen, and dining areas were converted into one open space, and some room from the central hallway was repurposed to enlarge the second bedroom. The original entry had a small closet to the left which was removed, a larger closet added down the hall, and the den opened, all to create an airy main floor.

A new hotwater tank had been installed by the previous owner, and the current owners decided to replace the furnace with a high efficiency unit. A dated rental suite was removed from the lower level in favour of a guest room, reconfigured bathroom, and additional spare room. The two-car garage provides storage and space for laundry.

For people who did not originally love Specials, this house has retained a significant amount of original character while meeting their housing goals economically. As true converts, they attended their first Vancouver Special House Tour after finishing their renovations, and were eager to become participants on the 2014 tour.

## 3 Riley Park



Purchased four years ago, this Special had previously not been on the market in 40 years. Besides small upgrades to increase its appeal during its recent listing, little had been changed. The current owners snapped it up because of its great location and fabulous view of the mountains. With two small children, it offered the chance to keep extended family under one roof. The majority of renovations were therefore focused on converting the ground floor into an in-law suite for the grandparents. The homeowners plan to renovate the upper floor next.

The exterior façade was updated with modern grey paint and the soffits clad in exposed cedar. New fascia boards were added along with a glass railing across the balcony. The original front porch was already extra deep, but the homeowners extended it slightly adding french-doors to create a more grand ground-floor entry. The original brick planters that extended across the width of the house were removed to connect the entry and deck with the front yard.

Minimally finished when they bought the house, the main floor was opened up with the removal of a load-bearing wall. The upper floor is now supported by an enclosed, cross-wise three-ply structural beam and reinforced footing pillar. The hotwater tank and furnace were relocated allowing for the creation of an L-shaped living space with a large kitchen, dining area and casual seating area. The fireplace is original with a matching one on the upper floor which will also be retained. Potlights were added to the high ceilings along with new drywall throughout.

Towards the back of the suite is the bathroom and a generous bedroom. Behind those are the garage and a utilities room with a new single 140,000 BTU gas unit that heats both the radiant floors and an on-demand hot water system. When the nearby bathroom showers operate, energy is diverted away from the in-floor radiant heating to the hot water unit. The system can be controlled and monitored remotely online.

Costs for the renovation were kept low with a handy homeowner completing much of the work himself. Savings were also found in high-end appliances purchased in as-is condition for a fraction of list price. These appliances along with custom kitchen cabinets make the renovation appear more expensive, even with an economical counter top finish. The family congregates often in the kitchen and so it was designed to be beautiful and kid-friendly. The owners plan to upgrade the finishes when the children are older.

## 4 Mt. Pleasant



This one-of-a-kind Special is constructed in a method more commonly found in Europe than in Vancouver. With many aesthetic details of a Special, this home differs in that the standard wood frame is replaced with concrete cinder block construction. When the current owner purchased it twelve years ago, she enlisted a contractor familiar with this type of construction to remove walls and cut precision holes with a masonry saw for cement formwork windows. Also unusual to Canada are the double-glazed tilt-and-turn windows with European-style steel shutters, sinks in all the bedrooms, and a roof built to structurally support a third floor.

As the stairs were not to modern code, the city wanted them reconfigured. However they are cement formed and structurally integral to the house, so a compromise was made to level out the most uneven steps. The cement floors were leveled at the same time allowing for radiant heat in the entrance and bathrooms. The original exterior stucco was painted some years ago with a natural 'old world' mineral paint from Europe that allows the material to breathe. The owner wanted a glass-cantilevered awning at the front however when the city objected, the 'temporary' fabric awnings were installed and have remained ever since.

The completely rebuilt kitchen sits in roughly its original location but the island's NE corner represents where the original kitchen ended. A wood stove was replaced with a new airtight Danish model. Most of the original radiators were removed and sandblasted, however the ones in the bedrooms retain pre-existing gold paint. Some interior cinder block walls were also sandblasted to expose the cut patterns and highlight the unique construction.

The carved oak entry door and the yellow mosaic tiles on the back patio are original. Some wrought iron was retained on the porch and front gate but window grills were removed from the ground floor windows. Fire proof, glass block windows were installed in poured cement casements to the side walls. Inside, hollow-core doors were replaced with solid teak salvaged from a bank. Wood paneling once covered all the walls and ceilings but was removed and new drywall studs installed allowing for commercial grade spray-foam to be added to all exterior walls. Some remnants of the paneling can be seen on the entry stairs.

Inherited dining chairs and salvaged cabinets that became the kitchen island were given a coat of autobody paint to create a thread of continuity through the living area. The house is furnished with a collection of found items, fine design and repurposed Ikea, an ode to the homeowner's creativity.

## 5 Dunbar



The homeowners purchased this Special in January 2004 because they wanted to be in the Dunbar area but had a limited budget to work with. The space offered in a Special was ideal for the growing family and a fully legal lower-level apartment sweetened the deal. The two bedroom income suite offered higher rental income potential than the average units found in a traditional home, and could be counted as income when qualifying for a mortgage. As an interior designer and a contractor, the homeowners utilized their own skill sets to make the most of their budget. The original layout worked well and only received fairly modest renovations as compared to some Special renovators who take the home back to the stud walls. By doing much of the work themselves they were able to work at their own pace, and keep the expenses modest.

A large portion of the original budget went towards a bathroom renovation to remove dated pink fixtures. Over the next five years windows were changed from single pane aluminum to double glazed vinyl which required cutting the stucco to put trim in around the windows. The exterior stucco was painted with varying shades of grey to create definition between the top and bottom sections and the trim and stuccoed support beams at the roof line. The deeper lot allowed for the lush garden where earthy greens play off the vibrant red of the door and adirondack style chairs.

In 2006 a second larger renovation saw the wall between the kitchen and the dining room removed to make the living space more open. Minor interventions modernized the laundry room, added built-in storage and a built-in bed in the master bedroom and created space for a small powder room. In future the family plans to take over the lower level suite and open up the living area for a family room. They may also change the suite to a one bedroom or a guest suite. Also on the to-do list are repairs to the sidewalk, changing out the front door and possibly replacing the deck rail.

The owners had always thought that they would move to a more traditional Vancouver house at some point in the future, but have come to love the space that a Special offers. Its innate versatility continues to adapt to their growing children and the changing needs of their family.