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REAL ESTATE TODAY

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Luxury-home renovations going big and custom

Integration with technology also a growing trend

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

When it comes to home renovations, consumers are looking way beyond the typical retouches and upgrades of the past. A new backsplash, coat of paint or updated floor tiles pale in comparison to the posh installations growing in popularity today. The demand for luxury renovations is increasing among homeowners of all income levels. The Gazette caught up with Walter Assi, owner of Renovco, a Dorval-based company specializing in design and renovation, to learn about the latest trends in luxury home renovations.

"In terms of options and customization, the sky's the limit," Assi said.

Some of the most commonly sought lavish installations right now are a smart kitchen, luxury bathroom, wine cellar, home theatre, a home spa and a yoga/gym studio.

"These are becoming popular because the consumer is expecting more from every product," Assi said. "Everyone is so busy today, so consumers are trying to get the most out of their homes in the little time they spend in them."

For home theatres, there is a wide range of products available to cater to every budget, from audio-visual equipment to soundproofing.

"For example, if a client wants studio-quality soundproofing, the investment is much more costly than simple sound insulation, due to the complexity of construction that goes into such a project," Assi said. "The same could be said about sound system quality and different visual options."



MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER/GAZETTE FILES

Home spas are a popular luxury installation these days, with options suited for any budget.

A fun new feature among home cinemas is the installation of popcorn machines. With the goal of adding to the movie theatre ambience, the machines are becoming an affordable and common addition to entertainment centre rooms as they allow consumers to enjoy the full cinema experience in the convenience of their home.

On the other hand, home spas have long been a popular luxury installation, and that's due in part to the fact that there are options available at just about every budget.

"It depends on the size of the spa and how sophisticated it is," Assi said. "It's possible to create very intricate at-home concepts that can even compare to professional commercial settings."

In addition to home the-



ALLEN MANNIS/GAZETTE FILES

Wine cellars are growing in popularity across the board, from in-kitchen units to fully equipped spaces.

atres and spas, wine cellars are quickly becoming one of the most in-demand luxury installations. They range

widely in scope, but are growing in popularity across the board.

"It could consist of a sim-

ple storage unit installed in kitchen all the way to a fully equipped wine cellar room," Assi said.

These large cellars are typically built in the basement, and can fit hundreds, if not thousands of bottles, rivaling any professional commercial grade cellar as far as temperature control and preservation go.

Regardless of which high-end renovations consumers seek out for their homes, owners are generally investing more in luxury construction than ever before.

"This is primarily because of advances in technology," Assi said. "In the past, the emphasis was on being able to mass produce products, now that mentality is shifting toward the concept of mass customization."

An attitude adjustment on behalf of the consumers has contributed to this movement as well.

"Even bigger homes used to have small kitchens and bathrooms," Assi said. "This minimizing attitude of the old days is now gone; today, it's considered almost a necessity to have bigger rooms with deluxe components; today's consumers are more demanding and less patient, they expect more and they're willing to pay for it."

This held true even throughout the recent economic downturn as well, during which Assi says homeowners continued to invest in their properties.

"Consumers look at their homes as a safe investment for the future," he said. "So when times are tough, people take fewer vacations and go out less, but they tend to improve their personal space because they think of their home as an oasis; as a general rule of thumb, people in the industry know that renovations actually tend to increase during economic crises."

While Assi says he doesn't expect this to change moving forward, he is anticipating advancing technology to influence how owners decided to upgrade their homes.

Specifically, as smart technology improves, more and more consumers want to incorporate it into their homes.

"It means remote control and Wi-Fi operators for things like lighting, heating, shower timed water flow and appliances like automated coffee machines," Assi said.

Green home technology is growing in popularity as well. This includes energy efficient appliances and devices and is an area in which the pace of innovation is greatly impressive.

"Ultimately, consumers are looking to maximize comfort and convenience," Assi said. "This will only increase alongside advancing and more accessible technology."