

Knock and they will open

Great doors don't shut out the world, they offer it a hint of welcome within

BY PEDRO ARRAIS, TIMES COLONIST MARCH 27, 2010



Entrance to 4828 Ambleswood Dr in Victoria, B.C.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, Times Colonist

The front door of a house is what greets the world, to welcome friends or to stop strangers. It sets the tone for what to expect behind the door. It opens to reveal the personal style of the occupants. But, like other architectural elements of a home, the door must also fit in with the overall design.

A memorable front door can be a personal statement of the creative imagination of the owner. Or it can speak volumes about the house.

"It just felt cheerful and friendly," says Penny Tennenhouse of the teal-coloured door of her 68-year-old Fairfield house. "And people coming up to my house say the same thing."

She says the previous owner also put in two colourful stained-glass sidelights as a birthday present for his wife.

Builders and real estate agents use the term "curb appeal" to describe a welcoming front of a house. For prospective buyers, first impressions count and can create a memorable experience

"People won't buy a house just because of an attractive entryway," says Cindy-Lee Robbeson, a real estate agent with Re/Max Camosun. "But a phenomenal front door that welcomes you into the home can make a huge first impression."

Although modern entry doors generally have a metal or fibreglass skin over an insulated core, the appeal for real wood endures.

"People love wood doors," says builder and renovator Rov Dosanjh of Rayn Properties. "It's still the gold standard."

He says he decides on the front door of a new house only after the front of the house has taken shape.

But others, such as Bob Stinson, do it differently. In 1997, he bought a 19th-century door and designed his house around it. Stinson collects stained glass and the door, now 125 years old, gives visitors a preview of the display inside.

"It was exciting to incorporate old elements into a new house," says Stinson, who built his retirement home in Sooke 10 years ago. "When I bought the door I didn't have a house to put it in, but knew it would make a welcoming front door."

Fortunately for Stinson, an old door can fit into a new home and look as though it belongs there.

But most new doors are mass manufactured, in a limited number of standard dimensions. For homeowners wanting to make a statement, artists such as Don Bastian can create one-of-a-kind doors that are functional art.

"Most doors are boring," says Bastian, who exhibits his work at his gallery, West Coast Wood Designs in Sidney. "While every door has rails and stiles, what's inside them makes them unique."

Customers sometimes give him objects, such as horseshoes, beach glass or starfish, and he goes about creating a design. The ideas frequently start off on a napkin until it emerges from his workshop seven to nine weeks later as a work of art -- and a functional door. He uses different woods and objects so no two doors are alike.

A custom door can range between \$4,000 to \$10,000, but sometimes all it takes to spruce up a house is a fresh coat of paint to transform an ordinary door. A bright colour, such as red, can contrast with the rest of the house and draw the eye.

Some may prefer to go the other way. With lots of elbow grease a homeowner can strip coats of paint off an old door to reveal original wood underneath.

"Old doors may not be as energy efficient," says Dosanjh. "But if you remove and replace it with a modern door, you will lose the character of an old house. I always try to refurbish the original."

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