



# Cultural Success

This home represents the success of cultures coming together to create beauty

BY Connie Adair.

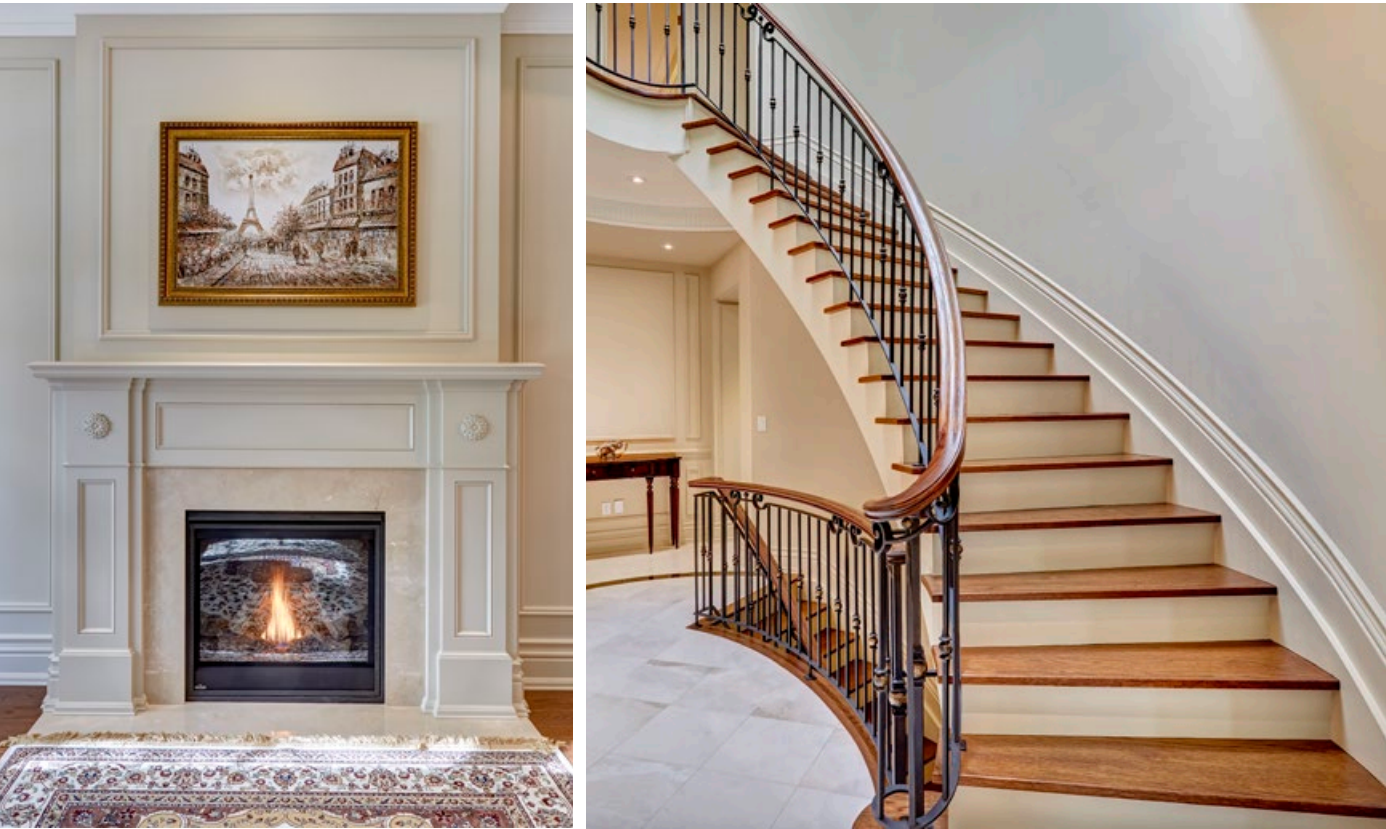
PHOTOS BY Aaron Mason Photography

**T**here was a language barrier and cultural differences between the homeowners and builder of this 6,500-square-foot home, but it made for one of the most interesting projects builder Amedeo Barbini has worked on since it was based on respect, professionalism and fun.

The homeowners of this five-bedroom, eight-bathroom home are from Harbin in northern China. Barbini says, "They always had an interpreter but the client told me he would learn to speak English by the time the house was built."

There was one language they shared from the start: construction. The homeowner, an international businessman who has a background in engineering, had construction experience from projects around the world. He understood the importance of features such as the building envelope that a layperson may not appreciate because it's complexities are hidden inside the walls. ➔





**ABOVE**  
The owners like architectural details. Lots of walls have tone-on-tone panelling.

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
The foyer's focal point is a staircase that sweeps upward in a gentle curve and is topped by a skylight.

**RIGHT**  
In the kitchen, the island is made of dark wood for contrast against the white cabinetry and marble.

"As well, his home city in China is farther north and is colder than Toronto so he understood the importance of good windows and insulation," he says.

The homeowners originally wanted to renovate their house, but once they saw Barbini's home, they decided to build a new one instead.

"They loved my home so much and asked me to reproduce my oval foyer. It has a unique shape that's difficult to build," Barbini says.

The foyer's focal point is a staircase that sweeps upward in a gentle curve and is topped by a skylight. Rooms radiate from the foyer, with a library on one side and the living/dining room on the other.

The family entrance/mudroom and the kitchen, breakfast and family room extend across the back of the house and also originate off the foyer. This space offers views of a ravine.

In larger homes, the front entrance is an important part of the home and is devoted to guests and occasions. It must be grand and have wow-factor.

In this house, guests enter and can stand in the middle of the foyer, looking up at

sweeping staircase railings, ceiling and sky.

"In the old days, in Roman and Moorish architecture, open courtyards were common. They brought light into the house rather than having light just entering the perimeter where the windows are," he says, adding that in this home, the skylight achieves the same thing.

The foyer has marble floors and an arched wood door. "The wife chose the carved medallion for the middle of the custom door and was much involved with the choice of colours and kitchen layout. The husband dealt more with the structural and actual construction decisions," Barbini says.

However both clients wanted the front façade to be real stone. The original plan called for more brick, but they opted for natural Indiana limestone and the same tonality of brick on the side and back, he says.

The kitchen has custom-made cabinets that extend to the ceiling, with upper cupboards that have glass and lighted display space. The same marble was used on the island and for the cooktop backsplash. Dark brown granite counter tops grace the white cabinetry and the island is made of dark wood for contrast.



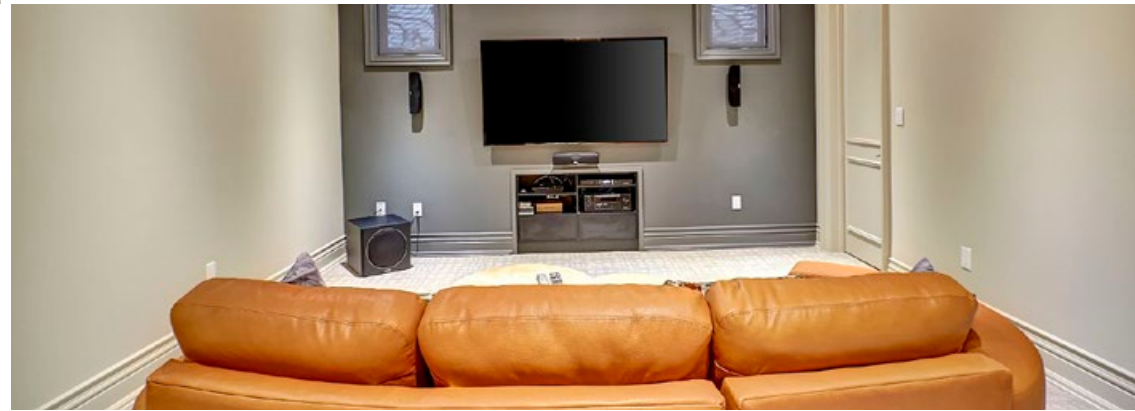




**TOP RIGHT**  
The lower level was treated like the main floor because people cocoon down there - it includes a home theatre.

**BOTTOM RIGHT**  
The homeowner is a connoisseur of Chinese teas, so the wine cellar holds wine, spirits and tea.

**LEFT**  
The master suite with a cozy fireplace overlooks the backyard.



Every time he came to the site, he knew new words. He also had an app. He would spell the word and the app would translate it into Mandarin.

Another large dark wood cabinet, with a red interior, is featured in the breakfast room. The family entrance is at the side of the house, with a mudroom and a powder room nearby. An entrance from the garage also leads to the mudroom. During the design process, Barbini says he noticed the owners liked architectural detailing. Lots of walls have tone-on-tone panelling, which complements the space. “There is a lot of architectural detailing on the lower level as well. The lower level needs to be treated like the main floor because

people cocoon down there,” he says. The owners wanted a home theatre, hobby room and wine cellar, which has a grotto atmosphere, he says. “It was filled within a week of them moving in. He is a connoisseur of Chinese teas, so the wine cellar holds wine, spirits and tea.” The lower level also includes a big room for family gatherings and a suite for a nanny or guest. The second-floor master suite with a cozy fireplace and sitting area overlooks the backyard. Built-in cabinetry provides additional storage space. The airy sleeping area has doors to the dressing room and the en suite bathroom has double sinks, a whirlpool tub and steam shower. Heated floors keep the lower level and bathrooms toasty underfoot. Barbini says it was an interesting job because the owners weren’t “familiar







**Feng Shui**  
The plan for the 6,500-square-foot home was sent to the homeowners' Feng Shui master, who added a few landscaping components – a water feature at the back and a statue at the front – but left the rest of the house untouched. “When I designed the first oval foyer, I took Feng Shui principles into account,” Barbini says.

**ABOVE**  
A palette of cream colours is warmed by medium-toned hardwood flooring.

with the type of architecture we have in Canada, what works in Canada, and were respectful of our suggestions.”  
The owners were given ample opportunities to choose many of the finishes, he says. “They love it and feel as if it’s their home, not just a house they built and moved in to.”  
The more than 6,500-square-foot home, which was designed for family comfort and entertaining, took almost a year to build.  
As promised, “About 11 months from

the start of the project, the owner could communicate somewhat in English,” Barbini says. “Every time he came to the site, he knew new words. He also had an app. He would spell the word and the app would translate it into Mandarin. That’s how he learned.”  
As they got further into the project and the owner saw the results, he acknowledged how happy he and his wife were with the home Barbini says. At the beginning of the project the relationship was formal, but the last meeting ended with “very warm hugs.” **HC**