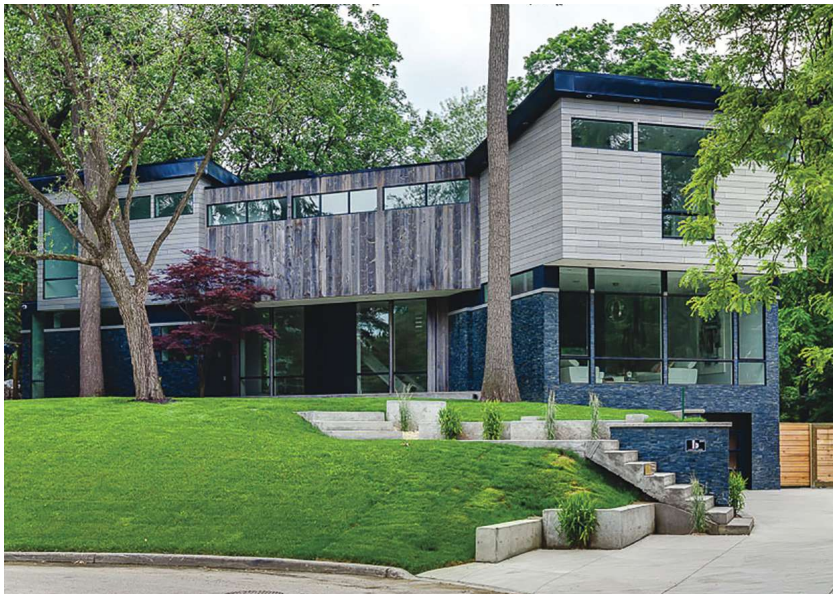
A modern outlook

An upscale home builder's gamble pays off in a traditional neighborhood

By Shelby O. Mitchell

Rose Barroso had been building high-end homes for a decade when she bought her first property in Toronto's affluent Humber Valley Village. The owner of Barroso Homes, based in Etobicoke, Ontario, was drawn to the neighborhood's wooded, rolling landscape as she sought locations for her signature homes.

She bought a small, traditional home overlooking a natural ravine — or rather, she thought it should overlook the beautiful setting. "The older homes in this neighborhood have smaller windows, and thus smaller views," she says. As Barroso considered a new home design, she realized she was envisioning a very modern style of architecture with wide-open spaces and walls of windows.



Barroso also understood the risk involved. Most of Humber Valley was built between the 1930s and 1960s, with a mix of homes including Cape Cods, Tudors, cottages and bungalows. Although a local real estate agent warned that building a modern home would limit her pool of buyers, she reasoned that a one-of-a-kind design might have a better chance of selling to the right buyers.

The home sold before construction was completed, generating an instant demand for her modern designs. Five years later, as an exclusively modern homebuilder, Barroso had the opportunity to build another modern masterpiece on the Humber Valley ravine.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

When she bought the modest 1950s bungalow at 20 Taylorwood Drive, Barroso envisioned transforming the home into an upscale haven amidst the trees. "The ravine is over 300 ft. deep, filled with mature trees," she says. "It's nearly impossible to find in Toronto."

The home's footprint was dictated by neighborhood bylaws, which required 60 percent of the original footing walls to remain intact to maintain existing setbacks. About half of Barroso's projects involve building on existing foundations, so she was familiar with the process. "This is an exclusive area with very strict bylaws to prevent monster homes from disturbing ravines and riverbeds," she says.

The builder kept approximately 75 percent of the foundation walls intact by completing demolition on

COMPANY INFORMATION
Barroso Homes
Toronto; Barrosohomes.com
Employees: 3, plus trades
Annual remodeling projects: 2 (very custom)
Residential: 100 percent
Single-family: 100 percent
Design/build: 100 percent

PROJECT INFORMATION
The Hillside House, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada
Square footage before: 3,200
Square footage after: 7,500
Cost: $1.6 million

PRODUCT INFORMATION
Roofing: Asphalt
Doors: Modex
Windows: Pella
Locksets and hardware: Barcres
Engineered lumber: Central Fairbank Lumber
Garage doors: Aurora Overhead Doors

Photos: Birdhouse Media - Rob Holowka

the 100- by 300-ft. lot without the use heavy machinery. Although the process added several months to the construction schedule (13 months total), it gave Barroso time to consider how the new 7,500-sq.-ft. home would work with the original structure.

"The bungalow had a strange crawl space in the center of the basement floor — about 12 by 10 ft. and 5 ft. high with a concrete bench along one wall," she says. "Considering the time period in which the home was built, it may have been a bomb shelter." The space became the new home's mechanical room, and the "brain" of the Control4 automation system that would control all of its electronics (see sidebar).

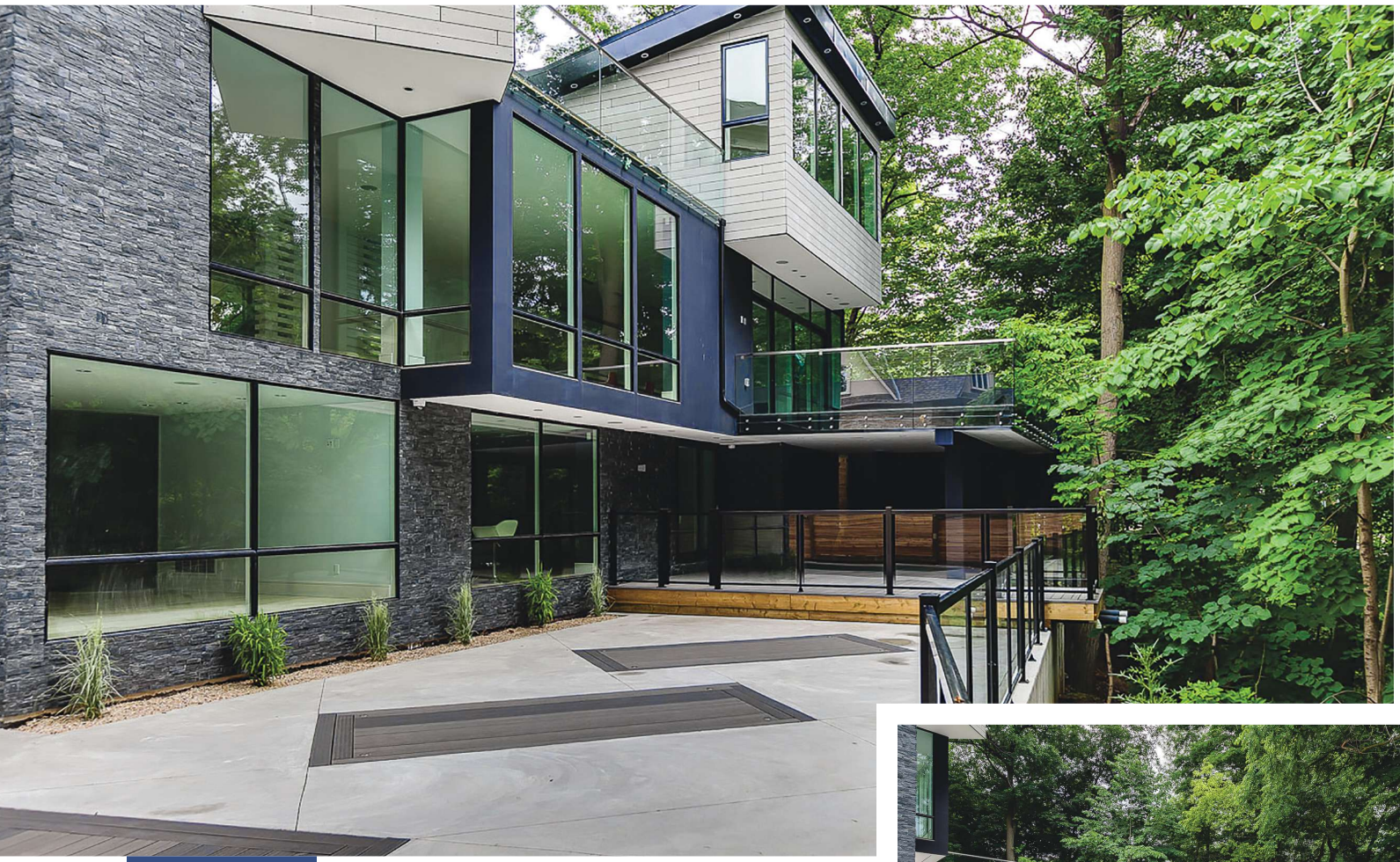
Barroso maximized the remaining basement space while adding support for the upstairs floor plan. "I wanted a very open concept area on the main floor, so we created a bearing wall that would be almost invisible but at the same time large enough to support part of the second floor," she says.

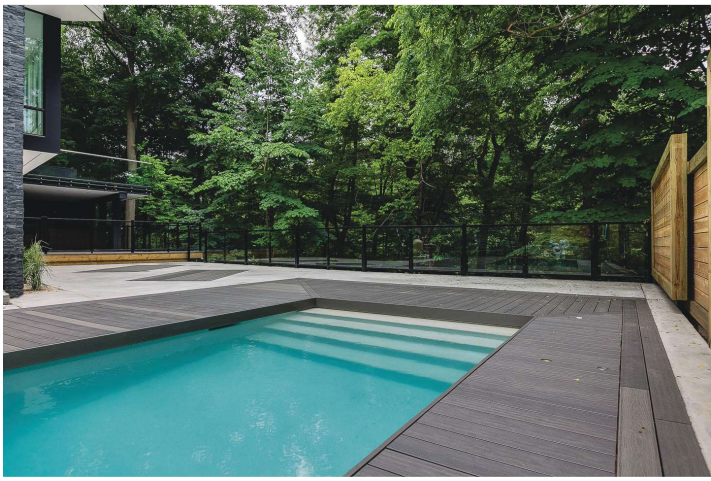
The builder used four columns to distribute the weight along the main staircase. On the main floor, horizontal beams connect the columns from floor to ceiling, disguising their true purpose. Large spaces between the beams allow light to fill the space, from one wall of windows to the other.

BUILT TO LAST

The home's exterior structure was designed with the same balance of style and function — specifically energy efficiency. Its 2- by 6-in. walls were coated with spray foam insulation before fiberglass insulation and cladding materials were placed. Flat roofs were engineered to endure extra weight of snow in winter. The entire envelope exceeds required R-values, with walls generally rating higher than R-30 and ceilings above R-50.

Sustainability was also a high priority for Barroso, and the builder did not cut corners when it came to selecting durable cladding. "I tried to use maintenance-free





Above: Natural textures and colors were chosen to blend into the landscape.

Outdoor spaces were designed to extend "into" the wooded ravine.

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materials with the homeowners in mind," she says. She chose natural textures and colors befiting the surrounding landscape.

The main floor is clad in black stone with a granite-like shimmer. Most of the second story is covered with gray Öko Skin concrete composite slats made in Germany. The builder constructed a wooden frame over the exterior waterproofing material and attached the slats with special screws and screw covers. The additional eight to 10 weeks of labor and delivery time should pay off, as the material is said to be maintenance-free for up to 50 years.

Reclaimed barnwood covers the façade over the front doorway. "I didn't want the home to feel too sterile," says Barroso, "and the authentic wood adds a gorgeous natural touch." Although the wood is not entirely maintenance-free, it was kiln-dried to kill bugs and bacteria, and add weather resistance.

INTO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Barroso also used low-maintenance materials to create multitiered outdoor decking, extending the homeowners' living space "into" the wooded ravine. She replaced an existing wooden deck with two large patios — one outside the kitchen on the main floor, and one on the lower level — made of composite fiberglass Enviroboard that resembles wood. "The composite material never has to be stained, sealed, or pressure washed — just swept or rinsed with a hose," says Barroso.

Glass railings offer an unobstructed view of the ravine, while the owners enjoy the deck's amenities: a sound system, TV and outdoor kitchen. The railing extends past the end of the house, along a ground level concrete patio and 13- by 20-ft. swimming pool. Instead of traditional tile or concrete coping, Enviroboard also surrounds the pool.

"The neighborhood regulations for building a pool are extremely strict, and space was tight," says Barroso, "so

Home automation

The $4 million Hillside House features a Control4 home automation system designed to make its owners' lives comfortable, easier and more secure. "It gives you peace of mind to know you can close your garage door or monitor security cameras, even if you're traveling in another country," says home builder Rose Barroso. "Once you've lived with it, you never want to go back."

Homeowners can control virtually household operation with the home's touchscreen control panels, or remotely from an iPad or iPhone:

- Interior & exterior lighting
- Garage door
- Window shades and drapery
- Heating and cooling system
- TVs and sound system
- Security system
- Sprinkler system
- Video surveillance cameras
- Master ensuite shower controls

See Control4.com.

we designed a smaller pool that can double as a water feature." She installed three water jets along one side of the deck that project arcs of water into the pool, creating the sound of a waterfall.

MAKING A HOUSE A HOME

In every detail, inside and out, Rose Barroso considered the comfort and lifestyle of the family who would live in the home, now known as "Hillside House." As she had with the exterior design, Barroso incorporated natural materials to add warmth to distinctly modern elements inside.

The master bath features both a white Italian bathtub resembling a shoe, and a shower stall with darker, veined marble. In the wine cellar, stainless steel wine racks are mounted on a wall of the same reclaimed barn wood used on the home's façade. "The owners can create a very modern look, or something more traditional, depending on their furnishings," she says.

As Barroso designed the common living areas, five bedrooms and seven baths, balancing open spaces with private retreats, she envisioned day-to-day life as well as special occasions for entertaining. "I'm not in the business of building houses," she says. "I build homes. And every home needs to work for a *real* family." | QR

Shelby O. Mitchell writes about remodeling and design from Berwyn, Ill.

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