

Life / Homes

## Attic renovation turns roof into a greenhouse

Inspired by Toronto's Evergreen Brick Works, a new addition on a Riverdale home takes the urban garden to a next level.



**By:** Brendan Charters *Special to the Star*, Published on Thu Feb 21 2013

Tucked neatly into Riverdale, one of Toronto's most vibrant neighbourhoods, stood a 2½-storey home with an underused attic.

The space provided overflow storage, a place for guest to sleep, and a catch-all area for stuff that was rarely used. Depending on the season, it also provided discomfort for the occupants— either a relative sauna in the summer, or an icebox in the winter.

Through a miniature red door was a rooftop deck where the owners would grow the odd tomato or habanero pepper plant, which served as a nightly buffet for the area's raccoons, which seem to run Riverdale like a gang of thugs. The deck was not an enjoyable place to sit, either, given the scorching all-day sun radiating off the black asphalt shingles, coupled with the mess often left by the raccoons. As a downtown semi-detached, though, every square foot counts, so a plan to make it usable was critical.

After a few trips to Toronto's [Evergreen Brick Works](#), with its vibrant garden and farmers' markets, Stephen Young and Roseanne Berry, the owners of the home, felt a call to build beyond the elaborate ornamental gardens in their yard.

A self-professed "foodie," Young is obsessed with cooking. One can easily see from the setup in the kitchen, the barbecue and permanent wood-fired oven he has in the backyard, that his dinner guests are likely leaving full and satisfied.

But it was during a trip to [Canada Blooms](#) (March 15 to 24 at the Direct Energy Centre this year), they came across what looked like a perfect solution to the challenge of protecting their food plants from

the animals and the elements. It was there they discovered [Rogers Custom Greenhouse](#), which manufactures stock and custom greenhouses that can be used for the basic hobbyist or the gardening enthusiast.

Young and Berry called my firm, [Eurodale Developments](#), to design and build a renovation and addition to the existing attic space in order to allow for the integration of the greenhouse and create a working urban farm.

The design was the easy part; cutting into the existing dwelling and opening the whole house to the elements (and the raccoons) for a few months without damaging the living space below, was definitely more complex. With an exterior scaffolding system, every piece of material that came out of the house during demolition and went into the house for the remodel was done from the exterior, ensuring minimal disruption to the occupants living inside.

But the result is fabulous: a slick new greenhouse that is going to be used as a vegetable farm. Irrigation lines, automatic roof louvers and a ductless HVAC system help ensure optimal (and easy to maintain) growing conditions year round. It also provides the owners with fresh, pesticide-free, real food that did not travel hundreds or thousands of kilometres to their table, ensuring a healthy and environmentally responsible meal.

The main living space can be closed off from the greenhouse with a sliding wall of thermal glass doors, for energy efficiency and to create the ideal growing environment, but also creating a comfortable lounge space in the remodelled attic. When opened fully, the attic is now close to twice the original size. With the inclusion of a large skylight and the 10-foot wall opening into the glassed enclosure, the attic is now bright and airy and has created “a real destination space,” Young says.

With organic seeds obtained from the farmers at the Brick Works, where Berry, who is now retired, volunteers with school groups, the couple is gearing up for an exciting growing season. In the winter, Young plans to harvest lettuce, and in the summer a whole crop of fresh toppings for his meals.

Since completing the project, it sounds as though one of the best uses for the greenhouse has been Christmas dinner, where the couple hosted a dinner party for 20 people. “It looked really cool in the glass space, all decorated” says Young, “but now we are setting up for growth mode — we’re going to be co-farming with another couple!”

I’ll be keeping an eye on the mail for a fresh dinner invite!

*Brendan Charters is president of Eurodale Developments, the 2011 BILD Renovator of the Year, and writes periodically for ReStyle Your Home. Contact him at [eurodale.ca](#).*