



MODEL HOMES SHINE AT ANNUAL SALES AND MARKETING AWARDS

Want people's attention? Then pay attention to them and dress your best. That's the message emerging from this year's SAM awards.

PATRICK LANGSTON
Reporter, Ottawa Citizen

Organized by the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association, the 32nd annual awards presented Thursday afternoon honour the best in model homes, sales staff and centres, and print and digital marketing programs. Formerly known as the Sammy awards, the name has been shortened to the more direct SAM (Sales and Marketing).

Tartan Homes scooped up the lion's share of awards this year with a total of seven. They included one in the sales and marketing category and a clutch in the model home section. Tartan also won most environmentally sensitive builder and took the Grand Sammy for garnering the most awards overall.

"We're really pleased; it's a nice reward for the hard work of a lot of people," said Tartan president Ian Nicol. Asked what it takes to market in a tough housing environment, he said, "the key thing is to differentiate yourself."

Judges — six in all — were struck by everything from the tender, loving care now lavished on models to the professionalism of sales teams.

Veronica Druta, marketing manager/designer for Cornelis Grey Construction and back for her third year, noticed a trend toward more natural themes in the models.

"They're lighter, brighter. In previous years, I've seen a lot of contrasts — dark floors and a bright couch, for example. This year was very light, very subtle cream on cream on wood."

Druta said eQ Homes' The Rosewood, done up in rustic beach decor and winner for low-rise condo model, was among the models that "really resonated" with her.

Greg Wheeler, a professor of advertising and marketing at Algonquin College, was a judge in the sales and marketing category. It includes awards for best builder marketing campaign (Minto won

for Quinn's Pointe in Barrhaven) and best builder sales representative (Cardel's Dale Laurie).

A newcomer to SAM judging, Wheeler says he was "amazed" at the sales teams' training, knowledge and connection with potential buyers.

"They honed in on finding every need, answering every objection ... I think they were all seeing themselves as problem-solving and helping (families) with a major transition in their lives."

He also praised the consistent excellence across all marketing materials from brochures to builders' Internet presence. Such consistency is classic textbook marketing, according to Wheeler.

The importance builders attach to sales and marketing, and to public recognition of their efforts, is evidenced in the steady growth of SAM entries, which this year hit 97 in 29 categories. GOHBA executive director John Herbert says that growth comes in part from builders' increasing use of social media and video tours of their model homes. Those technologies have given them more ammunition with which to compete and made entering the awards easier because it's so simple to submit entries digitally. Award events are also a great way to heighten a company's public profile.

Sophie Rust, the Ottawa Sun's Homes editor and another new judge, says she was singularly impressed by the townhome models.

"Sometimes when people think of townhomes they think of them as a compromise compared to single-family homes. But some of the townhomes I saw were more impressive than single-family homes I've seen." Add the finished basement, which is pretty much standard in towns, and you can wind up with more usable space than you do in a more expensive single, she says.

HN Homes' The Parkway, which won best town model over 1,500 square feet, got her memorable home vote. High ceilings and a sculptural staircase give it a real "wow factor" she says.

HN also won for The Kenson in the single-family, 2,500 to 2,999-square-foot category. Furnished in

modern fashion, including boldly painted decorative architectural panels and cool, clean furniture, it's located in Bridlewood.

"We're proud to have been recognized at the SAM awards," said HN marketing coordinator Vasi Georganas. "With our focus on design, it's also great to be recognized for the appeal of our homes to the public."

Rust noticed builders taking design "risks" like the bright orangey-red wallpaper in the dining room of Glenview's Woodland, a single-family home finalist. It may not be to everyone's taste, but the wallpaper's an attention-grabber in an intensely competitive housing market.

Other builders are pushing the envelope. Urbandale's Beaumont was a finalist for best bungalow single over 1,500 square feet. Its kitchen pairs conservative wenge lower cabinets with deep red, high-gloss uppers. The design references the boldly coloured paintings of Spanish artist Joan Miró and the Netherlands' Piet Mondrian, according to the model's Montreal-based designer, Katherine Muller. eQ Homes' more sedate Alexander, aimed squarely at the 55-plus crowd, won the bungalow single award.

Citizen Homes editor Anita Murray notes that, for the most part, model home design no longer means throwing furniture into a space and having done with it. "A lot more thought is going into the design and decor," she says. Model homes now market a lifestyle so "when someone walks through the door they can see themselves living in this place ... It's in the colours, it's in the furniture, it's the layout of the home."

She was also taken with how some builders doll up a couple of models with upgrades but leave one with standard finishes to give buyers a sense of a base home. Tartan did this with its Parkhill model, which won for best single-family home 2,000 to 2,499 square feet. Pointing to features like the double-sided fireplace between the living and family rooms, Murray says, "I was really impressed with what they could put together with standard finishes."

THE WINNERS

Builder sales assistant

Cristina Carruthers, Glenview Homes

Builder sales representative

Dale Laurie, Cardel Homes

Industry partner sales representative

Linda Oliveri, Enercare Home Services

Builder sales team

Tartan Homes

Design centre consultant

Leah Wellstein, Glenview Homes

Best print ad, builder

Tie: Tartan Homes; Lépine with Finesse Perspectives

Best print ad, industry partner

TRUEdotDESIGN with Smith & Barber Sculpture Atelier

Best project logo/identity

Claridge Homes

Best builder sales centre

TRUEdotDESIGN with Uniform Urban Developments

Best industry partner showroom

Amsted Design-Build

Best builder brochure

Domicile Developments

Best marketing innovation

Glenview Homes

Best marketing campaign

Minto Communities

Best builder website

Lépine with Finesse Perspectives

Best industry partner website

TRUEdotDESIGN with Amsted Design-Build

Best townhome model over 1,500 sq. ft.

HN Homes, The Parkway

Best semi-detached model over 1,500 sq. ft.

Tartan Homes, Red Oak

Best single-family model 2,000 to 2,499 sq. ft.

Tartan Homes, Parkhill

Best single-family model 2,500 to 2,999 sq. ft.

HN Homes, The Kenson

Best single-family model 3,000 sq. ft. and over

Urbandale, Menlo Park

Best bungalow model, attached

Tartan Homes, Marigold

Best bungalow model, single over 1,500 sq. ft.

eQ Homes, The Alexander

Best condo model low-rise

eQ Homes, The Rosewood

Best condo model highrise

Claridge Homes, The Lilac

Best condo model stacked

Urbandale, The Harmony

Best community

Lépine with Finesse Perspectives

Best highrise project

Lépine with Finesse Perspectives

Most environmentally friendly builder

Tartan Homes

Industry partner of the year

Linda Oliveri, Enercare Home Services

Grand Sammy

Tartan Homes