

# Finding the perfect place, the perfect life

All  
July 29  
Ok Sunday

"We are the hollow men. We are the stuffed men."  
— T.S. Elliot

**Y**ou know who you are. Real estate is your chief form of entertainment. Take open houses. You analyse master bedroom views, test the entrance feng shui and deconstruct kitchen design, all for the sheer pleasure of it.

You are a pro; you even watch TV and movies with an eye to analysing architecture and interior design. They invented product placement for you.

"Hey, dude," you say nonchalantly to the realtor standing patiently in his silk socks and tell him, "Yeah, baby, we're locals. We're always in the market. By the way, stucco ceilings are so very uncool. Tell your builder to get with this decade."

The realtor nods because he/she's got an nice Audi parked out front, kids in university, and plenty of trips to exotic locales, all because of you who are obligated to check MLS listings on a weekly, daily, hourly basis.

It's more than a hobby: it's therapy.

You attend open houses hoping for the impossible. Grins come when you shake your head and say "nice place, but it's just not as complete a package as what we're living in right now."

"Lacks value," your partner whispers smugly. You both feel good. You swell with equity. But you feel empty inside. Like minor misfortune, being without an ideal home brings you closer. Hold me now.

You know you are in big trouble when on that extremely rare occasion, you see something nice. No traffic. No corner lot. No lack of privacy. Twinkling view, no slam cabinets, extra height triple garage.

"Oh, sweet cakes, the new composite decking matches the hardwood flooring. Talk about indoor/outdoor continuity!"

Your partner is pumped, but it's not exactly perfect: ages ago you stopped reading Architectural Digest. You subscribe to Dwell and Azure now. You don't want a typical wannabe home, the predictable product that sells so easily to flat landers.

Still, you see yourself padding out bare-foot onto the expansive deck, and you dream about waking up in the morning and facing the eternally blue Okanagan sky.

You see yourself plopping down on the dual-flush toilet, contemplating the pivot point of your life-work balance. It's a good thing.

You imagine getting dressed under the "his/her skylights" in a master closet the size of Sicamous. Your partner asks you, "who in their right mind can live without dressing in natural light?"

When these thoughts happen, you're inspired to put away the catalogues on the dining room table, pay a few bills on time, and, like a kid cramming for a final exam, prep up for your next visit to the mortgage broker. (You need a big-time credit score).

This kind of thinking happens all the time. But you can resist. It's the next thing you can't handle.

What really irks you, what drives a stake into your heart, is when you visit one of your friends and they, through their own sweat, hard work, or inheritance, have managed to



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put together an unbelievably righteous pad, with stylishness up the ying yang. The pad has everything you ever wanted, right down to heated floors and nine-inch baseboards, all put together into a killer package.

It hurts so good.

That's when you go home, look at your reflection in the LCD monitor, and start wondering what you could get for your place.

Sure, it's worth a pretty buck, but you know darn well it's a big mistake to go looking before you sell your house, unless, of course, you like the rope burn of dangling two mortgages around your neck, or you like playing chicken with living in a rundown apartment without A/C if you get outbid (which, in this market, is highly likely).

You can certainly put in your offer, says your hipster realtor, swing bridge financing, list your pad, and bear down as you get ready for one showing after another.

Been there. Done that. You know it, fool!

You must do this because you must do the same thing to one of your friends: bring them over and let ENVY do the talking. It will be so delicious. It will be systematic. You can taste it now.

You can't help it. After all, a great house provides a triple whammy.

First, you get to enjoy it. You need the space. Seriously. This ain't Europe. Second, you know your equity will skyrocket. Yahoo! And third, you get to stick it to everybody who comes over.

All this stuff is totally wrong, you realize, but it makes so much sense that you can't help it. You know tons of people who work for tips and live in million-dollar places — at least you've convinced yourself of this reality. You also wonder what the heck all these people do, the ones with the multi-level garages, Italian car collections and ripped bodies.

You passed calculus. How did they beat you to the good life?

Whatever they're doing, you'd like to do the same thing; of course, without the stress, the

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hard work and the decade sentence in a Prairie town where it can snow in July.

Of course, you could always say no. You could be happy with what you have. You could avoid mls.ca and decide to opt-out of the game.

But you know that you just won't be happy. You admit it. You're honest. Plus, the green movement has filled you with a new excitement. The green movement means you can find another way to compete with your friends. Bigger is not better! Say it with smugness. Say it wearing second-hand hemp clothing.

You can go for a smaller footprint. Small is beautiful. Less is more. You can live closer to downtown, walk to cold noodles at Goochies, deposit friends at the Rotary Centre of Arts for the two-buck gelato. You can sell a few toys. Craigslist the truck and boat combo. Start wearing Costco clothing. Fire the herbicide-eschewing gardener.

On the outside, you're ready to forget the '90s craftsman revival. You'd rather go hard for art deco. You want something architectural with some real character.

You will source unconventional finishing and reject Gyproc, Home Depot, Corian and tired stainless steel; you'll tailor your next house with the self-righteous sensibility that is putting others in Prius, Pilates, and Lululemon.

The developers out there haven't been able to create a product that meets your standards. You want every product sourced to be congruent with your values as a global citizen. Forget cork, bamboo, and exotic woods. You want LOCAL everything. You want to pluck baby spinach from your own organic window boxes made of denim (beetle-kill) wood.

You want photovoltaic shingles, geothermal, roof gardens, rain barrels and sweet grasses planted by smoky aboriginal fingers.

Heck, is vegetarianism next? Nah, you can't give up prime rib, no matter how much water, land, fertilizer and energy it takes to raise a lip-smacking cow. But you are going to buy that Canadian-made Cervelo road bike, you promise yourself, once you lose 20 pounds of meat apron.

Would a tattoo be pushing it?

Come to think of it, this ain't about envy. This ain't about social pressure. This ain't about materialism gone wild. This is about you. You, you, YOU.

You say real estate is a totally worthy passion. Boot the kids off the Internet. One more glance at mls.ca and then a quick call to your realtor. He loves you. You're putting his kids through college. (One kid is studying poetry. Yes, there is a god.)

There are a couple of open houses this weekend. Circle the calendar. Charge up the digital Elph. E-mail the broker. Yup. You know who you are. You think.

Shopping makes you feel alive, and real estate is your best hope. Call your partner, feed deep deep upon his/her needs. Hold me now.

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