

Meet Friedemann Weinhardt: Award-winning designer is not swayed by trends



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Friedemann Weinhardt, president of Design First Interiors, who was named designer of the year at the GOHBA Housing Design Awards gala in the fall JEAN LEVAC / POSTMEDIA

When interior designer Friedemann Weinhardt won the coveted Designer of the Year award at this year's Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association gala, he said winning never gets old.

That's because the man, known for his sleek, contemporary kitchens and bathrooms, has collected more than 100 awards from various organizations over his 30-year career.

This is the first year he entered his work in this category.

"It really is an honour to receive feedback from our industry. It was nice to win (the award) first time out of the gate."

Weinhardt's creative spark germinated in the early days as a draftsman and furniture designer. After a short stint selling cabinetry at a kitchen design company, he launched his own firm Design First Interiors in 1986.

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Based in Westboro, Weinhardt specializes in kitchen and bathrooms, as well as complete homes and additions.

He says the biggest evolution in the industry is the variety of finishes and appliances available to clients.

“In the early days, if you had a built-in fridge and a Jenn-Air stove, that was a big deal for kitchen design. And now the appliances have far surpassed the budget for cabinetry and countertops in the kitchen. You name it and you can have just about anything you want. You have WiFi connected to everything, fridges, ovens, so this changes everything.”



Friedemann Weinhardt is moving away from two-toned islands and is going with one colour tone in kitchens. DESIGN FIRST INTERIORS / POSTMEDIA

When it comes to working with clients he encourages them to choose materials that suit their personal style and to not be swayed by trends.

To bring a space to life, Weinhardt sits down at his drafting table with a blank piece of paper and the creative process — which he calls a “thrill” — begins.

“It’s really quite an amazing feeling because anything can happen. And you don’t really know where it’s going to go right away. So the cool thing about design is that it does have an evolutionary process.”

That passion earned Weinhardt this year’s Designer of the Year as well as for best custom bathroom design at 100 sq. ft. or less (with RND

Construction).

The blind judging involved a group of about a dozen industry experts from across the country who pored over hundreds of submissions. The judges considered the entry packages — which included written bios and client referrals — as well as the overall scores of the projects entered.

Weinhardt was also a finalist in four other categories this year.

His winning bathroom design, titled New Traditions, is a bright, elegant master ensuite with a full height glass shower with custom soap and shampoo niches with a mix of micro mosaic tiles that complement the classic black and white marble floor tiles. A soaking tub is set against a partially frosted window. An oversized mirror appears to float over the double basin vanity that features a tissue dispenser niche, saving space around the toilet area.





'New Traditions' Custom Bathroom won best bathroom of the year (100 sq. ft. or less) with RND Construction at the GOHBA JUSTIN VAN LEEUWEN / POSTMEDIA

“It’s a small bathroom done in a classic style. We try to push the envelope. If you notice, the side panels of the cabinetry are marble. Initially, the marble supplier said no we can’t do that ... but I said why don’t you just try it.”

Weinhardt’s success has now moved beyond the capital.

This year was the second time he judged the SubZero Wolf Global Design Contest where he had a chance to critique some of the worlds best designs and hand out awards at the glitzy gala in San Diego, California.

He has also expanded his business into the Caribbean where he is now working with condominium developer in the Cayman Islands.

Locally, he is designing his own addition with a slick expansion to his Westboro showroom which will include a new “live” kitchen for clients and special events. It is expected to open this spring.

“We are an agent for Miele, so every six months we’ll have Miele training for clients who have Miele appliances. We’ll bring them in, make them dinner... and (clients will) learn a little bit more about how to use their appliances. And for other events, we’ll invite the media, designers, architects and show what we have, because who doesn’t like a kitchen party?”

Once thing Weinhardt is not a proponent of trends. Here are a few of his go-to design features and a few he believes are on the way out.

In:

Neutral matte cabinets: “I like the neutral colours, white is my standard cabinet colour, it’s not too often we do a different colour in the bathroom cabinetry ... a matte finish is my preference.”



Design First Interiors’ winning kitchen design with white matte finish on the cabinets and hidden appliances. DESIGN FIRST INTERIORS / POSTMEDIA

Hidden appliances: “For a really clean, contemporary design, hidden appliance are good. Hoods can be all built into the cabinetry...but none of (the manufacturers) have come up with a fully integrated oven ... so

I've been doing pocket doors and hiding my ovens that way. So I just open up a door, put it back into the slot and I can see my whole oven tower all at one time. So that would be a coffee machine, microwave and oven all in one tower and when I'm done with it I can close it off and it's a really nice sculptural wall."

Corian: Weinhardt says he prefers to use Corian because it "is not machine fabricated."

"It's done by hand, and it's not cold like quartz or marble. Corian is warm and has a much more sensual quality to it. It feels really nice. It's self-servicing. If you get minor scratches on it, just from wiping (the scratch) it will disappear. The seams are imperceptible, you can barely see them."

Out:

Two-toned Kitchens: While he has designed his fair share of two-toned kitchens, he is ready to move on.

"Two-toned kitchens are kind of on the way out, I'm at the point where I don't want to do two-toned kitchens anymore because they've been overdone now for 10 years ... and I think you can do more interesting work in keeping things simple with one colour for the cabinetry (island)."

Barn Board: While barn board is a must-have material when designing a rustic chic finish, Weinhardt never used the reclaimed wood for his projects.

"Barn board was really trendy for a while, I never used it. I knew it's going to be a fad and I think it's already over as far as a look goes. I don't like trends, I like to stay in classical design, to do things that will hold their value."





Friedemann Weinhardt, president of Design First Interiors, who was named designer of the year at the GOHBA Housing Design Awards gala in October . He is seen in a kitchen he designed on Colonel By Drive. JEAN LEVAC / POSTMEDIA

Weinhardt's recent awards:

2017

Custom Kitchen (181 to 240 sq. ft.) – Contemporary: Finalist

Custom Kitchen (241 sq. ft. or more) – Contemporary \$75,001 and over: Finalist

Custom Bathroom (100 sq. ft. or less) – Traditional (with RND Construction): Winner

Custom Bathroom (100 sq. ft. or less) – Contemporary (with RND Construction): Finalist

Custom Bathroom (101 sq. ft. or more) – Contemporary: Finalist

Special Achievement Awards: Friedemann Weinhardt, Designer of the Year.

2016

Ontario Homebuilder 2016 Awards of Distinction

Most Outstanding Kitchen Renovation

Most Outstanding Bathroom Renovation

2015/2016

Weinhardt judges SubZero Wolf Global Design Contest for the second year.

2014

National Kitchen and Bath Association awards

Creative Concept, First Place

Classic/Traditional Kitchens (over \$30,000), Second Place

Classic/Traditional Baths (over \$15,000), Second Place

Contemporary/Modern Baths (under \$15,000), Second Place

Contemporary/Modern Baths (over \$15,000), Second Place

2013/2014

Weinhardt was invited to join the SubZero Wolf Global Design Contest, judging panel for the Prestigious Global Kitchen design Contest, 'Best of the Best'.

2013

National Kitchen and Bath Association awards:

Small Kitchen Category, First Place

Medium Kitchen Category, Second Place

Large Kitchen Category, Second Place

Powder Room Category, First Place

Large Bathroom Category, First Place

Large Bathroom Category, Second Place

Showstopper, First Place

Best of Show – Kitchen

Best of Show – Bath

People’s Choice Award Winner

Global Winner, Second Place

SubZero Wolf Best of the Best Kitchen Design Contest, Global Winner,
Second Place for custom home design

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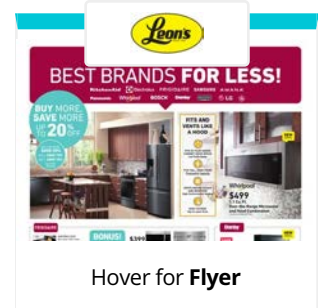
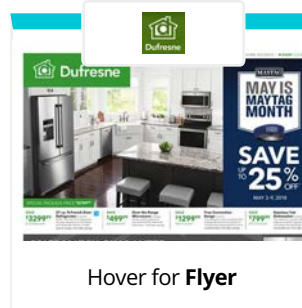
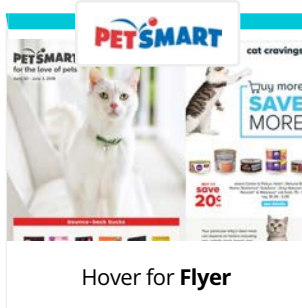
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Mike Belk · Owner-operator at BELK Tile

Congratulations Friedemann! I love your designs!

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