



# On a Firm **FOUNDATION**

By David McConkey

**W**hen I last met with Stewart and Jaime-Lynn Dyck, they were all ready to start building their new home. Everything was set. They had their house up for sale, they had purchased a property, and they had finalized their new house design. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out as planned . . .



A temporary dip in the Brandon real estate market stalled their sale, so they put their plans on hold. Oh, well; they are philosophical. "We are doing everything we wanted to do," Stewart says, "but a year later."

And they ended up putting that year's delay to good use. While initially disappointing, that time for reflection turned out to have real value. "It was nice to have that year," Jaime-Lynn says, "to build stronger relationships with builders, tweak the design, and ponder the whole house."

During that year they walked over their property – a two-acre lot just outside of the city. They also staked where the house could be located, looked again at the drawings, made measurements again of their existing house, and imagined how everything would fit together.

Stewart and Jaime-Lynn are still delighted with the home design. Stewart describes their blueprints as "very meticulous." Good plans are especially useful as Stewart and Jaime-Lynn are carrying out their original intention of being their own general contractor. "Having detailed plans with great images gives you a real perspective of your home before you even break ground." Stewart adds.



For selling their existing home, they decided to re-list with Brian Baker at Royal LePage Martin-Liberty Realty in Brandon. Stewart reports that Brian used his experience and contacts to find great perspective buyers; he "brought the right people to our house." After successfully finding a buyer, Brian continued to assist them with the move. Brian offered one of his complementary Cargo Trailers to move their belongings. This made the transition from one home to the next, go smoothly.

For the excavation and preparation of the property for construction, Stewart and Jaime-Lynn turned to Chris Griffin at Alternative Landscaping. Chris was able to size up the property and assess the best place to site the house. "There was concern with underground streams around the property and with Chris's help and knowledge of



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landscaping we were able to find a location on the property that was high and dry," Stewart explains. This saved them time and money.

Stewart and Jaime-Lynn enlisted Powell Concrete Construction to form, pump and finish their concrete basement. Powell is best known in town for years of commercial work, but has been branching out to do more in the residential field. "Powel brings years of experience and was able to offer their insights and contacts to help," Jaime-Lynn explains. "Powell took the lead and was



able to communicate to the other trades when to start their projects."

Stewart and Jaime-Lynn decided to use Insulated Concrete Foundation (ICF) for their foundation walls. ICF is a system of formwork for reinforced concrete usually made with a rigid thermal insulation that stays in place as a permanent interior and exterior substrate for walls. The forms are interlocking modular units that are dry-stacked (without mortar) and filled with concrete. The units lock together somewhat like children's blocks and create a form for the structural walls or floors of a building. ICF gives you savings on heating and cooling costs

To heat their future house, Stewart and Jaime-Lynn chose radiant heat (an in-floor water system). They asked Bryan

at North Hill Plumbing & Heating to install it. The basement will have radiant tubing that snakes through the concrete slab. The entire basement floor becomes a giant radiant panel that heats everyone and everything in the space. Walking in bare feet or lying on the floor is pure warmth.

"There are many pros when it comes to radiant heating," Jaime-Lynn says. "It's nearly silent, it's clean, it's comfortable, there are no ducts to clean, it's efficient and requires minimal maintenance." This system sends heated water from a central boiler to piping underneath the floor. It's warmth from the feet up. Another benefit is the ability to zone your house. With a small amount of effort and some additional expense, you can have groups of rooms on their own zone. This allows you to have different zones

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at different temperatures at different times. If you only use a few rooms in your home, you just can heat those rooms in that zone.

For the framing of the house, Stewart and Jaime-Lynn contracted with Geoff Gregoire at Con-Cor Homes, which is a division of Contractor's Corner. Known originally as "Westman's Countertop Shop," Contractor's Corner has greatly expanded over the years. The Con-Cor Homes division constructs new houses, ready-to-move homes, and condo developments.

Con-Cor Homes will be in the next stage of the build . . .

Stewart and Jaime-Lynn are happy to report that – so far – there have been no mistakes or surprises. They suggest three keys to success: take your time, do your research, and talk to as many people as possible. Even if they are not eventually selected for the job, Stewart points out, people "like to share, they want to make sure you are doing it right."

The best overall guideline: ask around to find firms that have a good reputation. Also look for those who can communicate well both with you and with the other contractors in your team. In short, Stewart says, "hire experience."

Stewart and Jaime-Lynn point out that there can be particular issues when building a new home. For one thing, they recommend dealing with a mortgage specialist. Financing the building of a new home can be trickier than financing the buying of an already-constructed home.

They had decided beforehand they would only start building their new house after they had sold their existing house. (Remember: they delayed their plans until their house sale was completed.) That meant making arrangements for where to live during the construction and also where to store the extra stuff. But that kind of orderly pre-planning is worth it, Jaime-Lynn advises. Importantly, she says, it can "avoid marital stress."

Speaking of marital stress, I recall our conversation from a year ago. I asked back then: What is most important when you design and build your own home? Jaime-Lynn laughed and replied, "Go in with a good relationship with your spouse!"

So, I can't help but ask: Are things going OK now? Stewart and Jaime-Lynn both chuckle at the same time and nod affirmatively.

Great! Good to know that everything is being built on a firm foundation.

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