



Getting a lift

CAMBRIDGE HOME ELEVATORS ARE TAKING OFF

A SMALL CAMBRIDGE firm that makes customized residential elevators has two growing markets: high-end builders who offer the elevator as a housing amenity and, to a lesser extent, individuals with disabilities.

At least 75 per cent of Cambridge Elevating's sales are to dealers in the U.S., particularly along the east and west coasts. One Myrtle Beach dealer buys 100 elevators a year to supply the busy tear-down and rebuild market in his haven for vacationing families and golfers.

Coastal builders putting up three- and four-storey townhouses within 30 kilometres of the water install elevators so inhabitants have easy access to their rooftop gardens with ocean views, says marketing co-ordinator Steve Zadel. Or perhaps the cook wants a nice view from the kitchen; with an elevator, the kitchen can be on the top floor, not always the main floor.

Although Canada lags in housing trends, the firm is already supplying elevators to townhouse builders in Oakville, Stoney Creek and the GTA, marketing executive Jamie Hamilton says. He's also talking with at least one builder locally.



With a well-designed home elevator, only the button on the wall gives a clue to the hidden space (above). The interior walls can be a plain colour, a wood veneer or even a trendy oil-rubbed bronze.



Cambridge Elevating got its start in 1989, primarily as a builder of wheelchair lifts and stair glides. In 2004, Derek Hamilton bought the firm and rewrote its business plan, investing in research, design and marketing to focus on residential elevators. The company has 25 employees and, except for a couple of working parts, builds each entire elevator in its plant on Industrial Drive.

A residential elevator, installed, costs about \$25,000 — not much more than some people spend on granite countertops, Zadel points out. If the house is not new, renovations to accommodate the elevator passageway, known as a hoistway, are an additional charge. The extra cost points to the wisdom of stacking large closets at the construction stage in case an owner wants to install an elevator at a later date.

Hamilton estimates renovations to create a hoistway at \$5,000 or more, whereas at the design stage large closets can be stacked on each level for much less.

Residential elevators can be larger or smaller, but typically a 59-square-inch hoistway is needed. The pump that powers the lift is the size of a small filing cabinet, usually installed under a nearby staircase or in the basement. The elevator travels at a speed of 30 to 40 feet a minute, the noise level comparable to a refrigerator motor.

The cab's interior walls can be plain white, a rich stained wood veneer or even a trendy oil-rubbed bronze. Elevator doors can be sleek, sliding steel, much like a commercial elevator, or concealed behind a wood closet door so the only clue is the button on the wall. An elevator can even have access doors on more than one side if individual floor layouts demand it.

Some customers simply hang a picture on the wall of the elevator, others take full advantage of the opportunity to customize. One man had his corporate logo etched into a mirror on one wall, another had a bar installed to supply his rooftop terrace.

"Make it happen" is our motto, Zadel says, pointing to a 500-per-cent jump in business over the last three years. 