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House Design and Home Improvement

Renovation of Developer Built Homes Using an Architect

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■ **May 15, 2009**

Architect John Brown established his firm housebrand to cater to budget conscious homeowners who aspire to good design.



The typical suburban home of the 1950's and 1960's is getting a make-over thanks to [housebrand](#). Founded by architect and design professor John Brown in Calgary, housebrand is transforming existing housing stock into contemporary, attractive residences.

Brown created housebrand more than a decade ago as an alternative for home buyers. The company has evolved into a successful business practice that delivers services in real estate, construction and interior design. Its focuses on transforming homes for owners who plan to live in their residences for the long term.

housebrand is based on the [slow home philosophy](#), which Brown created from the ideas of Carl Honoré to make good design more accessible. Brown's client base includes people living in modest circumstances in condominium developments and bungalows.

Cookie Cutter Development versus Good Design

Purchasing a home is one of the most important decisions a person can make. Brown contends the development industry treats home buyers as consumers of a product, rather than as future residents of a home they will occupy for some time.

Hence the proliferation of cookie cutter designs for quick sale: conventional housing layouts that sever the connection between house interior and exterior and are predicated on an antiquated model of how people actually live.

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Bungalow design of the postwar era assumed a woman in the kitchen and a man in the garage, with three children at home. Closet space was minimal, the kitchen was pokey and lacking in natural light, and entry vestibules were almost non-existent. New owners of these homes find the layouts do not work for 21st century lifestyles.

Renovating Existing Housing Stock

Brown is an advocate of renovating older bungalows rather than demolishing them to build new. [Embodied energy](#), found in building materials, accounts for eight percent of the energy used in architecture. When an edifice is remodelled, this energy is retained for future use. It makes good sense from an environmental perspective, never mind a financial one, to renovate existing housing.

Prospective housebrand clients complete a questionnaire about their lifestyle preferences. Brown's team then goes to work to prepare sample floor layouts for consideration by the client. Brown shows people how to make the best use of slender budgets.

It's a complete package: from identifying the best real estate deal, through redesign, construction, interior finishing and purchase of furnishings from the housebrand store.

Many of Brown's clients choose to live in more [compact, urban settings](#). They select smaller homes with fewer demands on upkeep, and elect to lead a simpler lifestyle. Brown shows them how to achieve their goals without

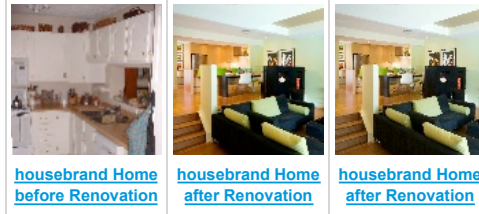
sacrificing quality of life or running over budget.

Home improvements typically include kitchen renovations and redesign of the main floor layout to enhance functionality. Brown has a genuine affection for early modern bungalows of the 50's and 60's, seeing in them the influence of Charles and Ray Eames. The [Eames house](#) is a good example of a modestly-sized residence that is simple in its design, light and open: all features that Brown's clients aspire to in their houses.

Brown's slow home philosophy equates the renovation of existing homes with shopping at the local farmer's market for food. Yes, you could buy a big Mac instead, but it wouldn't taste as good nor would it support local food culture. A slow home by housebrand is an investment in great design and a simpler way of life.

If design is about making a decision that affects the future, then a residence with slow home qualities is a wise choice for the planet.

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