



# Rising

## from the ashes

*Family's stately home recreated after devastating fire*

IMAGINE it's a warm summer night. You and your spouse are just getting ready to go to bed when all of a sudden there's a large explosion outside. You look out the front window to find out what has happened when your daughter screams from upstairs that it's you — your house is on fire.

By the time you've run downstairs to head out the front door, the fire has already engulfed the back of the house. And all you can do is go outside and watch the house that you've lived in for more than 18 years go up in flames.



**Around the Market**

Tracey Bryksa

That's exactly what happened to one Winnipeg family last July when arson claimed their River Heights house and their neighbour's homes on either side. All three stately old homes were destroyed beyond repair.

Despite losing everything they owned, there is a good news side to the story. In just 10 months, the family of three was able to move back into their house. Well, not exactly their house, but a very close version of it.

When the insurance company told them their choice was to sell the land and move or tear down and rebuild, the homeowner, who did not wish to be identified, said there was no choice at all. She said they knew they could never leave their home and had to rebuild. But the worry was finding a builder who could recreate the house they'd lost.

"We had the house we wanted," she said. "Finding the right builder to translate it was a challenge."

But Diego Vassallo of KDR Design Builders Inc. met that challenge head on. With very few photos of the house, as most were destroyed in the fire, Vassallo recreated the house largely from the homeowners' description.

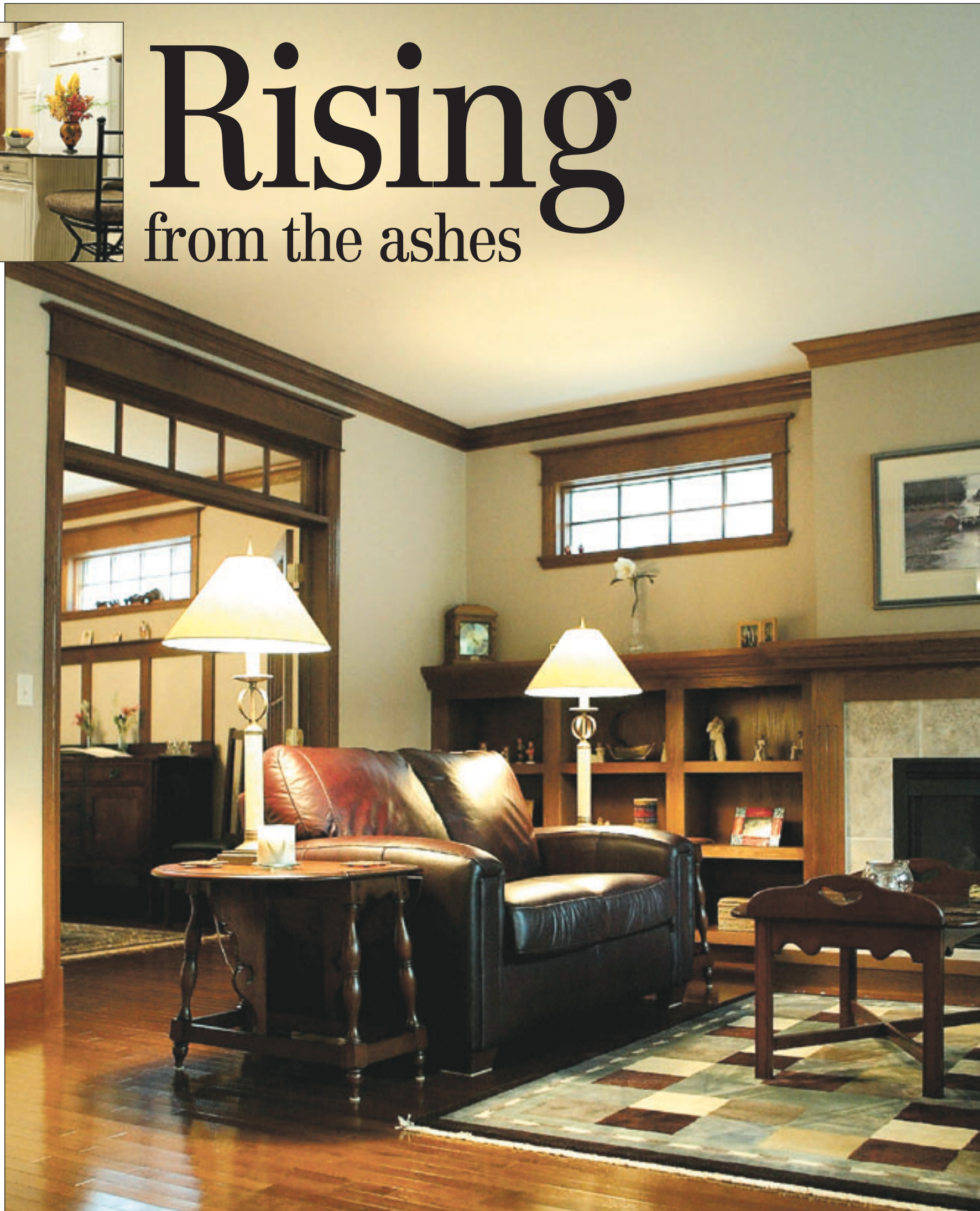
"To be able to build a character home is absolutely unique," said the homeowner. "Diego is extremely skilled and just had a vision."

Vassallo told the homeowner to sketch the layout of the house, then close her eyes and change everything that she wanted to. Then KDR turned that dream into reality, rebuilding the house from the ground up — literally. A whole new foundation was poured, the house was piled and rebuilt with nine-foot walls.

Using one of the few photos that wasn't destroyed, Vassallo rebuilt the grand staircase. He also recreated the original wainscoting that had once graced the walls in the formal dining room. The end result is a house that feels like it should be 100 years old, but isn't.

"It's a brand new, old home," Vassallo said. "We took a tragedy and turned it into something positive."

And after coming from something really horrible, the homeowner said the building experience was great. Today, the house is almost exactly as it



The homeowners weren't content to merely rebuild, they wanted to recapture the character of the historic home.



was, except it now has drywall instead of plaster and is less than a year old. It's brand new with the charm and character of the original house.

"It is everything that we loved and

used to be.

KDR added a four-season sunroom at the back of the house to give the family some extra living space to compensate for giving up a third floor. There is also a roomy screened porch on the second floor for added privacy, which was moved off the main floor in the original house.

Where there used to be one large window on the landing at the top of the stairs, there are now three large windows going up the staircase to let in more natural light. The closets are also much larger — a change most owners of older homes would welcome.



PHOTOS BY RUTH BONNEVILLE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Perhaps one of the most positive additions in the new house is the renovated basement, which was developed into a private space for the couples' 20-something daughter, who used to occupy the third floor.

"She lost everything she had ever owned in the fire," the homeowner said of her daughter. "We tried to give her her own special space."

Despite the fact they were getting a brand new, custom-built house, the homeowner said the one thing they did-

n't do was add all the bells and whistles of a new house, such as steam showers and Jacuzzis.

"We tried to concentrate on the house, not the gadgets," she explains.

And it shows. Resoundingly, people say the house feels just like it used to. The homeowner said that when friends come over for the first time, they often say it feels like they've been there before.

"We're very pleased," she said. "Coming home was just that."

*'It's a brand-new, old home. We took a tragedy and turned it into something positive'*

our wish list," she said.

The new floor plan is the same as the original house with a few modifications. It's now a two-storey house instead of a three-storey, but with about 100 more square feet. The house is also longer and narrower than it