

Let the sun shine in

A sunroom adds space and value to your home.

by David Schmeichel



Given the notoriously fleeting nature of what we've come to call summer in Winnipeg—a blink-and-you've-missed-it phenomenon on par with the passing of Halley's Comet—it's only natural local residents would do everything in their power to make the good times last.

That's why more and more homeowners are opting to make it a truly endless summer, by installing screened enclosures and three-

season sunrooms that allow them to make the most of whatever Mother Nature's got in store.

"(Homeowners) want an area where they can feel like they're outside, but still have all the control of being inside," says Steve Sarens, one of the co-owners of SunShade Products Ltd.—designers, manufacturers and installers of locally-renowned Glastar Sunrooms Systems. "Nothing provides that feeling more than a three-season sunroom."

Sarens' family-owned business has been helping to bring the outdoors indoors (and vice-versa) since the 1970s, when Sunshade got its start manufacturing aluminum awnings for household decks. Of course, this being Manitoba—when summer months are synonymous with insect infestations—they were soon fielding requests for enclosures that provided more of a barrier against unwelcome guests.

"Originally why people started looking at these types of sunrooms was more because of



the mosquitoes than anything," says Sarens. "That's what really started the market and drove it for a while, but as we grew, it became apparent that (sunrooms) were doing a lot more than just that. They were also extending the summer season by many months."

As people's reasons for wanting a sunroom changed, so did their idea of a preferred location. Whereas decks and verandas were once located at the front of most properties, by the 1970s, homeowners were doing the bulk of their entertaining in the back yard.

"It would take a number of years before the housing market would bear that out, but then eventually people started putting in decks

be taken "outdoors," even when the weather might not be fully conducive.

"People really enjoy having their meals out there, so quite often they'll set up two distinct zones," he explains. "One is an area where they'll have a table for dining, and then on the other side, they'll have furniture for just sitting around and lounging."

And while it's still against local zoning laws to use a barbecue in an enclosed space, it's entirely possible to incorporate another summer staple: a splash-friendly zone in which to install a hot tub.

Once people get a taste of the outdoor living

"The floatation is in the design of the system," says Sarens. "It allows us to compensate for the ground movement, so the sunroom won't be pulling away from the house, and you won't have windows breaking because of shiftage."

The process of installing a sunroom is less complicated than one might expect—even the seemingly all-important decision of where to locate the room.

"Virtually every side (of the house) will have its pros and cons, but historically what we've found is whatever side people put it on, they tend to say, 'If I was ever doing it again, I'd still put it on the same side,'" says Sarens. "To them, it's nothing but gain."

"In most cases, when people sell, they'd be getting virtually all of their money back...and often, it's the feature that makes yours the first house on the block to sell."

again, and moved them around to the back for privacy" he says.

"Back in the 1970s, it was rare that new homes even had a provision for a deck, but now, virtually every new home that goes in has patio doors or garden doors in the back."

These days, many new home designs feature some sort of sunroom-type enclosure, though Sarens says homeowners are often left unsatisfied, since they feel too much like an extension of the indoors. As a result, they choose to seek outside experts to help them design unique, unconventional spaces that are both functional and luxurious.

While the most common reason for installing a sunroom would appear obvious—it's right there in the name, after all—they serve much more of a function than just providing a spot in which to soak up UV rays.

Sarens says one of the more common trends these days is a sunroom with some sort of dining capacity—one that allows for meals to

opportunities afforded by a screened enclosure or sunroom, they often begin looking for ways to maximize the experience even further. In fact, while screened enclosures are by far the more affordable option, they're usually just the first step on the way to a glass-and-screen model, which offers more protection from the elements, for a longer portion of the year.

"We'll do maybe half a dozen jobs each year that are strictly screen-only," says Sarens. "But of those half a dozen, probably 80% will upgrade to glass and screen within a year."

Of course, the process of building a sunroom in Manitoba presents its own unique challenges, especially since most additions—by nature, an afterthought—aren't built on piles, leaving them susceptible to the constantly shifting soil levels, or what Sarens calls "Manitoba gumbo."

Luckily, SunShade's line of Glastar Sunrooms feature a unique floatation system involving padded teleposts, which allow for sunrooms to be constructed on a non-piled basis.

After that, it's a simple matter of meeting with an installer to discuss design and ventilation options—and possibly to tour other sunrooms in your neighbourhood—then awaiting the average installation time of two to four days, says Sarens.

Though times and costs vary from project to project, an average sunroom tends to cost between \$12,000 and \$20,000, though homeowners can expect to recoup their costs in the added retail value of the their homes, he adds.

"Historically, they've been one of the top three investments, as far as return on the dollar: kitchens, bathrooms and sunrooms," says Sarens. "In most cases, when people sell, they'd be getting virtually all of their money back... and often, it's the feature that makes yours the first house on the block to sell."

For more information about Sunshade Products or its line of Glastar Sunroom Systems, see www.sunshadeld.com or call 204-940-3030. ☎