


house & home
of the month



REBUILDING the PAST


A ramshackle Georgian tavern is fashioned into the ultimate country house from the ground up.

TEXT BY BARBARA SGROI PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK BURSTYN



A cathedral ceiling ribbed with reclaimed barn beams gives the great room in Kathy and David Richardson's Eastern Ontario country house dramatic presence. Kathy's collection of hand-hooked rugs dots the house; there's one here above the stone fireplace.

The sofas and chairs are arranged symmetrically; "I like balance. It's calming," Kathy says. Rug, Carol Telfer Antiques; hall table, hutch, Peter Baker Antiques; fire screen, Anvil Artistry; wood bowls (on mantel, hall table), Morgain Cuddy; coffee table, High House Antiques.



ABOVE: Kathy grows strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, gooseberries and currants and is able to pick berries in her garden most every day from mid-June through October.

BELOW: An antique tavern sign hangs in the great room by an interior window to the upstairs hallway.

OPPOSITE: To soften the log building's austere, quintessentially Georgian symmetry, landscaper David Warburton designed perennial borders planted to look balanced but not too formal. Obelisks punctuate the beds and add height. Windows, door, TWP Incorporated; paint on door, English Pinewood (905), ICI; obelisks, Greg Aboud's Details; railing, Anvil Artistry.





Matching cedar-shake roofing, grey board-and-batten siding and white trim help the new 2,000-sq-ft. addition, designed by Young + Wright Architects, coordinate with the old log building. The addition acts as the owners' principal living area. Trellises, Greg Aboud's Details.

BOTTOM LEFT: The old tavern's hand-hewn, white-pine logs serve as a rustic backdrop in the inviting great room. Rug (over cabinet), Carol Teller Antiques; table, chairs, Peter Baker Antiques; stools, Upper Canada Housefitters; cabinet (far left), High House Antiques.




Like falling in love, you just never know when house-lust is going to hit you like a ton of logs. Although Kathy and David Richardson had purchased a 120-acre property in Ontario's Northumberland Hills, 1-1/2 hours east of Toronto, with the hope of someday building a country house they could retire to, a dilapidated log house was the last thing they were looking for when they spotted a soon-to-be-torn-down Georgian log building for sale in their morning *Globe & Mail*. The former tavern was located 200 kilometres west in Roseville, Ont., and a world away from the couple's cosmopolitan life in Toronto. But, propelled by the irresistible lure of risk, real estate and romance, these city people proved themselves pioneers at heart.

"It was a bit of a wreck," Kathy admits, recalling the day in December 1998 they went to see the long-abandoned building. Sadly, the once-proud, two-storey structure, built in 1837 of hand-hewn white-pine logs, had been covered over with siding. The roof and windows were gone, and the shell was full of garbage. Adding insult to injury, fire had ravaged the interior faces of some of the logs. It was hardly their dream house — but it was love at first sight nonetheless. The building's elegant, quintessentially Georgian symmetry truly appealed to them, and they could see beyond what it had become to admire what it could be.

Within six weeks of viewing the tavern, they had bought it, had each log, door, staircase and piece of trim painstakingly numbered

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Avoiding bold patterns and using "simple, honest, hardworking textiles" to cover upholstered pieces like the great room's wing chairs and plump sofas keeps the country decor from looking fussy, says the couple's niece Sarah Richardson, who assisted with the interior design. Artwork hung high on the walls emphasizes the soaring ceiling. Antique diamond-point armoire panels hide the TV. Hooked rug (over TV), Jackie Radwin Antiques; wing chairs, Absolutely Inc.; sofas, throw pillows, drapery, Sarah Richardson Design; staghorn chandelier, Turn of the Century Lighting; door and window hardware, Upper Canada Specialty Hardware; architectural salvage, Tony's Place, and Balleycanoe & Co.



"It's the kind of place where you come in from a long walk and flop down on the sofa – nothing precious, no pretensions"



ABOVE: To give the kitchen an unfitted look, Shaker-style cabinets were painted subtly different shades of smoky blue then dragged, rubbed or finished with a faux wood grain. Cabinets, Odalisque Design; cabinet painting, David Savoy; counters, Vermont Soapstone.

LEFT: Its original finish was too time-ravaged to restore, so Kathy

had this large 1820 cupboard in the kitchen painted off-white then rubbed with an ivory shade to mimic an aged look. She keeps her collection of spongeware and Portneuf pottery inside, an easy reach from the soapstone-topped eating counter on the island. A pantry off the kitchen houses the fridge, microwave and two ovens. Cabinet, High House Antiques.

as the building was dismantled, piled it all onto a flatbed truck and driven across southern Ontario. After storing the building for 18 months while hunting for a contractor, they had it re-erected on their property in a meadow at the top of a drumlin, a site that offers lovely views of the rolling countryside dotted with second-growth forests (all part of the Oak Ridges Moraine). The old building got a new roof, and "new" salvaged elements like red-pine flooring, windows and doors. The façade of the building, which had had two front doors and a balcony running the width of the second floor, was reworked to remove the balcony and one door, which was turned into a window.

The couple had hoped the 2,000-square-foot building would provide enough room to act as their whole house, but once they sat down to work out a floor plan it was apparent they needed more space. The solution — a 2,000-square-foot wing added to the back of the log building — owes more to practicality than any



PALETTE OF HISTORICAL COLOURS

Kitchen

FROM TOP: Ivory Sampler (640) and Old Navajo (723), ICI (both on cream cabinet); Blue Slate (2235), Pratt & Lambert (on cabinetry).

Great room

FROM TOP: Sagebrush (40YY 50/177), ICI (on great room and kitchen area walls); English Pinewood (905), ICI (on front door).

Dining room

FROM TOP: Dusty Miller (1046), ICI (on walls above chair rail); Grey Birch (833), ICI (on walls below chair rail).

Porch

FROM TOP: Parchment (724), ICI (on porch floor); Lanyard (746), ICI (on porch walls).

LEFT: In the dining area, a worn Persian rug pulls together a subtle historical palette. The partly stripped mantel is a work in progress. Chandelier, Constantine; chairs, Peter Baker Antiques.

BELOW LEFT: Kathy restored the staircase, one of the few original features in the log building. The

landing is simply adorned with a hooked runner, lantern and 1868 lithographs of wildflowers.

Lithographs by Agnes Fitzgibbon.

BELOW: The sparsely furnished guest room features tiger-maple beds, old quilts and simple drapery. Pictures (on wall), Matthew Richardson; beds, High House.





In an effort to meld exterior features with the surrounding countryside, stone from a nearby quarry was used to create the wall and deck (a cool spot for Golden retrievers Skye and Tasman to lie) surrounding the new swimming pool. A cutting garden behind it adds colour in summer and texture year-round.

OPPOSITE, TOP: The pool

house/potting shed at the far end of the pool is clad in the same siding as the house's addition. The wall was made with old stones from the property.

BOTTOM: On summer evenings, Kathy and David like to relax on the porch and enjoy views of the rolling countryside, part of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Pillows, Restoration Hardware.



quaint *Little House on the Prairie* aesthetic. "We wanted a really comfortable country house with the main living areas all on one floor so we can still use them when we're elderly," Kathy explains. The one-storey, board-and-batten-clad addition houses the kitchen, great room, master bedroom, bath and study, while the old tavern holds the formal dining room, billiard room, three guest bedrooms and two baths. While Kathy and David had strong ideas about the project, architect James M. Wright of Young + Wright, principal contractor Thomas Wieland, restoration contractor Wade Davey, stonemason Aubrey Blaker, and restoration painter David Sheffield were integral to its realization. In the last four years, the pair has also developed the exterior areas, adding a pool, covered porch, pergola, and perennial, cutting and kitchen gardens with the help of landscaper David Warburton.

Despite all the work they've put into the property, nothing makes the pair happier than being told it all looks like it's been here forever. No matter how small the detail, they've made every effort to use recycled materials that give their home a timeless look. Stones used in the foundation and chimney, and dry-stone walls around the property came from old barn foundations; granite boulders found on the site were recycled to make the fieldstone fireplace in the great room; and huge old barn beams were carefully fitted together to form its soaring cathedral ceiling. Although little was left of the log building's original interior, Kathy was able to carefully restore its two staircases. She also peeled layers of paint from the antique door latches and hardware used throughout the house. "It was a labour of love," she says. *CONTINUED ON PAGE 147*



rebuilding the past

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Once the bones of the house were in place, Kathy turned to her niece Sarah Richardson, principal in Sarah Richardson Design and host of HGTV's *Design Inc.*, for help in choosing interior colours, fabrics and finishes. "They wanted a calm, relaxing country haven," explains Sarah, who incorporated a soft, historical palette inspired by the natural surroundings. "It's the kind of family gathering place where you come in from a long walk with the dogs and flop down on the sofa — nothing precious, no pretensions."

They seem an unlikely team. Kathy is a life-long antiques buff who could fill two houses with her collection of Canadiana, while Sarah is known for the clean, uncluttered rooms she creates. In fact, the careful punctuation of the airy, modern rooms with both whimsical and clean-lined antiques creates a fresh, contemporary look. "There's a streamlined approach to how the collections are displayed," Sarah says. "They've collected utilitarian items that are used every day. Nothing just sits on a shelf collecting dust."

The same may be said of Kathy and David. This may be their retirement home, but there are no rocking chairs here. "We don't sit around a lot," laughs Kathy, a retired lawyer now more often found happily yanking weeds in her garden. "Since retiring, we've canoed in the Arctic, hiked in Tasmania and travelled to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands." That said, they're content for now to be here, enjoying the summer in their exquisitely crafted and perfectly suited home. **HEM**

making history

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clapboard siding outside and wood floors and period mouldings inside are unifying forces.

The home's style falls somewhere between "classic American preppy" and "English country house." Rooms are decorated in combinations of white, pale yellow, grass green, ocean blue and ruby red — with a dash of hearty plaid thrown in here and there for a swarthy, men's-club edge.

Hugh is a whiz with palettes and fabrics. Rob drew up the floorplans and handled furniture placement. "Rob likes to say, 'He bakes the cake, and I ice the cake,'" says Hugh. "We've been renovating houses together for 31 years. We've redone 12 homes we've lived in. We've learned from past mistakes and

discovered what we like and don't like."

Here, they took their time furnishing each room. If they didn't already have just the right classic piece for each wall, alcove, nook and cranny in their arsenal, they attended local auctions to find it. Each sun-kissed room is different, filled with rag rugs or cheerful Nourmak rugs, antique wicker and overstuffed sofas, mixes plaids, stripes, checks and florals. End tables and sideboards hold an eclectic variety of lamps. Walls are adorned with oil paintings of horses, foxhunts and ships. "We don't like stark rooms. We like comfortable rooms that invite you in," Hugh says.

What they've created here is a rural haven where they go to escape the rigours of the city, to entertain guests when the urge strikes them, or to simply settle down in the sun-room — just the two of them — with a couple good books. Says Hugh, "It's a home that makes you want to put your feet up, put your head back and stay a while." **HEM**

into the woods

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built in an apple tree or head out with him to fish in the property's trout pond, Monic putters in the garden, which includes lush plantings that ring the cottage and a slightly more formal parterre behind. "I like a house to be surrounded with lots of flowers," she says, admitting that she spends at least two hours gardening every day during the summer. Except for a stone retaining wall installed in the 1970s (which both levels the land and conceals the unattractive base of the cottage) the "garden" was nothing but grass when they bought the property. Now every spot of soil, patch of stone (all "harvested" on-site) and flower that blooms is a result of Monic's green thumb. "Different flowers bloom throughout the summer for a new mood for every week."

An expanse of pink-flowering thyme carpets the entrance to the loosely formed parterre that Monic is "letting go" in favour of a blowsy country look. "I always say, 'Next year will be low-maintenance,' but it never happens."

With their pampering manner and light touch, the couple has joined a lineage of owners who, over almost two centuries, have respected the cottage's style. In fact, in another 180 years, the cottage will likely be much the same: the wood a bit more weathered, but its spirit intact. **HEM**