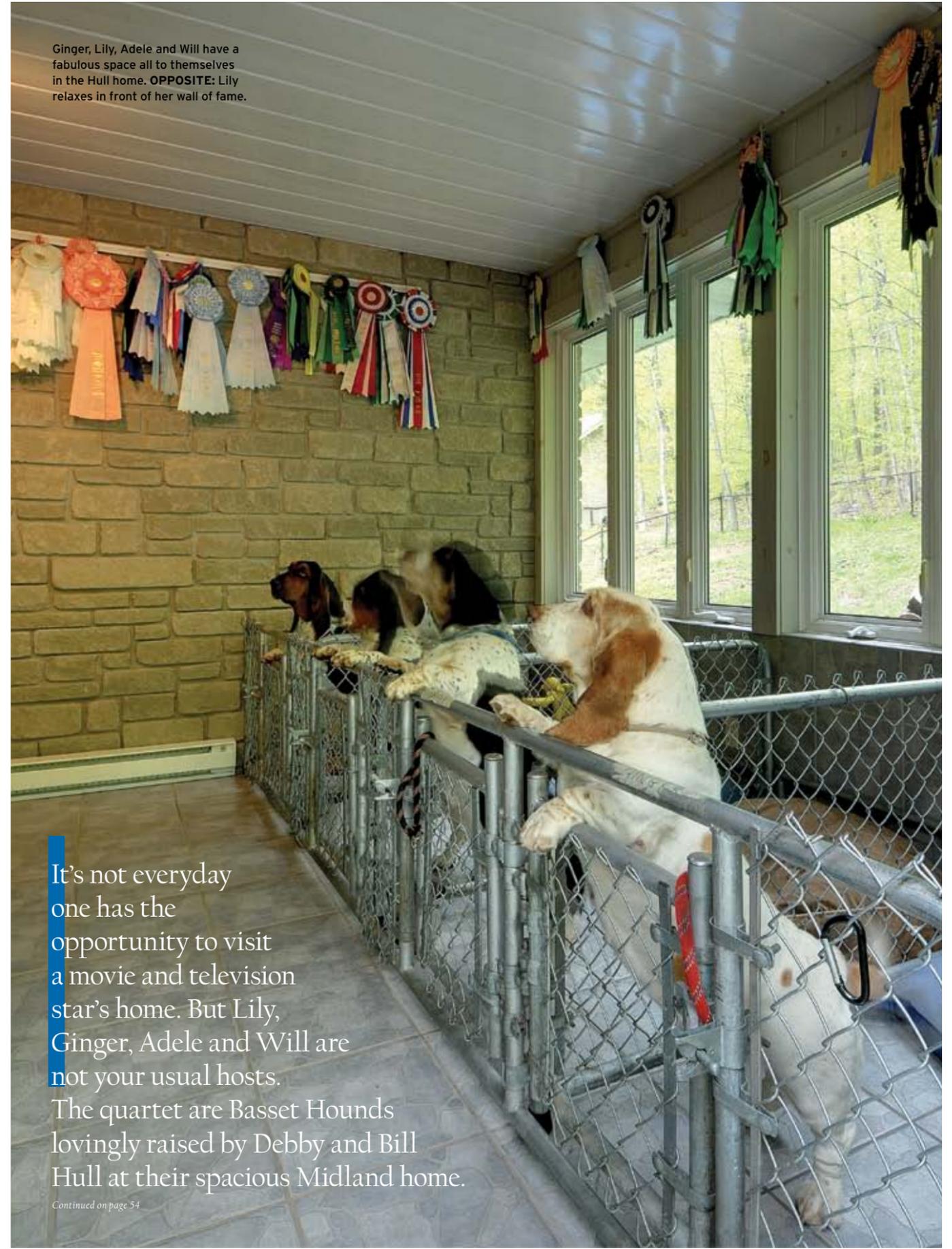


feature



# LUCKY DOGS

BY ANDREW PHILIPS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY



Ginger, Lily, Adele and Will have a fabulous space all to themselves in the Hull home. OPPOSITE: Lily relaxes in front of her wall of fame.

It's not everyday one has the opportunity to visit a movie and television star's home. But Lily, Ginger, Adele and Will are not your usual hosts. The quartet are Basset Hounds lovingly raised by Debby and Bill Hull at their spacious Midland home.

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# feature

The Hulls' dogs are integral players in their lives, something that is easily evident during a visit to their bright, airy abode that features an abundance of living space spread over 5,500 sq. ft. on three floors, all located on a private, two-acre, wooded lot.

"We are breeders of top-quality Basset Hounds on a limited basis," Debby says. "We're interested in quality, not quantity. That's my love."

Over the years, the Hulls' brood has appeared in commercials, TV shows and Melodious Meg (aka Meggie), who passed away last year at age 13-and-a-half, had a featured role in the film *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl* opposite Academy Award nominee Abigail Breslin. "We've done a lot of interesting things and met lots of interesting people from breeding the dogs," Debby says, noting Chicago Blackhawks player Patrick Sharp now has one of their puppies. "We're really selective about who gets our dogs. If you're not careful, you get them back."

A baby gate divides the home into two unique sections, with the dogs staying in the more rustic portion, which includes the kitchen, a warm and cosy family room, a large laundry/sewing room with LG Tromm appliances and a dog room complete with grooming and wash stations.

Highlighting this area of the home is a striking fieldstone fireplace built by Penetanguishene stonemason **Nelson Robillard** that features two hearths, one in the fully functional kitchen and another in the adjacent family room, along with stunning copper and stainless-steel doors created by Quebec artisan Richard Bossé.

And while the couple custom built their home 20 years ago with **Art**

**Beutler Building and Design**, this marks the first time they'll actually summer here. "This is very much a winter-focused house," Debby explains. "We don't even have an outdoor living area."

The Hulls first met at a downtown Midland store where Debby worked. Bill, who grew up in Hamilton, was staying at a cottage in Honey Harbour and came into town "to buy essentials," Debby jokes.

Since 1972, they owned and operated Picnic Island Resort Ltd., well known throughout the Georgian Bay boating community. But that huge chunk of their lives ended this spring.

"As of April 15th, we are retired after 37 years in the tourism business," Bill says as he works on a centre island in the kitchen that has plenty of room to accommodate several would-be chefs along with top-of-the-line Gaggenau and AEG appliances and washed-oak cupboards from nearby **Marcelville Inc.**

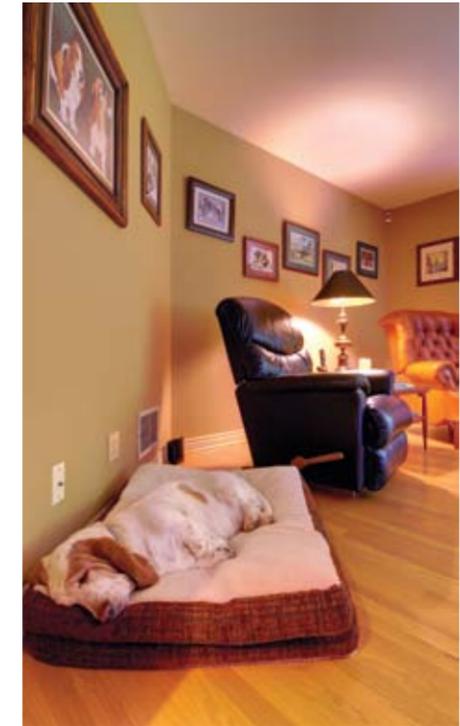
The couple, who have been together for 40 years, feel a little lost without the business, but are taking the advice of family and friends not to do anything rash.

"We got engaged there, our kids grew up there... the adjustment is tremendous," Debby explains with an obvious heavy heart. "It was our entire life. We're busy filling up our summer with social events."

Bill jokes: "We have our own boat, but we wouldn't use it more than three times a summer. Maybe this year will be different."

But the break gives the Hulls the chance to better experience a home they so obviously love. "It's not a showpiece, it's our home," Debby says. "We built it for a growing family so we would all have room to do our own thing."

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**OPPOSITE:** Debra and Bill enjoy a coffee in their spacious kitchen with Lily. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** A beautiful double-sided wood fireplace is the focal point in the kitchen. **TOP LEFT:** Basset Hound Maggie, who passed away last year, starred in the film *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl*. The movie poster graces the laundry room. **TOP RIGHT:** Ginger naps in the den.





"We wanted a large treed lot that was our own. In Honey Harbour, we had a total lack of any sort of privacy. You'd step out the door and see someone."

And while the home was built nearly two decades ago, there are plenty of ultra-modern amenities that are still considered cutting edge, including a "flawless, very energy-efficient" geothermal heating system installed by Doug Hook, now retired from Midland's **Fred Hook Ltd.**

Bill says the construction quality was extremely high.

"Art (Beutler) was known for overbuilding, not overcharging," Bill says. "We're still friends with him. That says something."

"Twenty years out, we've never encountered a deficiency of any sort, never had a squeak in the floor."

**Shaw's Interiors** of Elmvale has played a key role in the home's ongoing development from initially supplying the flooring and furniture to more recently helping redesign the living and dining rooms and suggesting warm, neutral colours from Midland's **Tripp's Paints.**

There are lots of windows throughout the home to allow a constant flow of natural light. The original windows are being replaced by Midland's **Templeton Windows.**

Besides their canine companions, the Hulls have two adult children, Andrew, 28, who now operates Georgian Bay Solutions (a property management and tree service firm) and 30-year-old Jennifer, a teacher and gifted multi-instrumentalist living in British Columbia. "She started playing piano when she was little, then she played guitar, then got into horses, but returned to music and took up the trumpet," Debby says. "She had some amazing teachers. She was very lucky. Sometimes it's not always about talent, it's all about mentoring."

Debby seems like a natural entrepreneur. While walking through the laundry/sewing room she recounts a steady business she once had making polar fleece hats and jackets, a venture stemming from Andrew, who "has always been on the cutting edge of design and trends."

Antiques are spread throughout the home, including the living room, which features a grandfather clock in one corner and a lovingly restored brass fender surrounding the fireplace with French doors separating the living and music rooms.

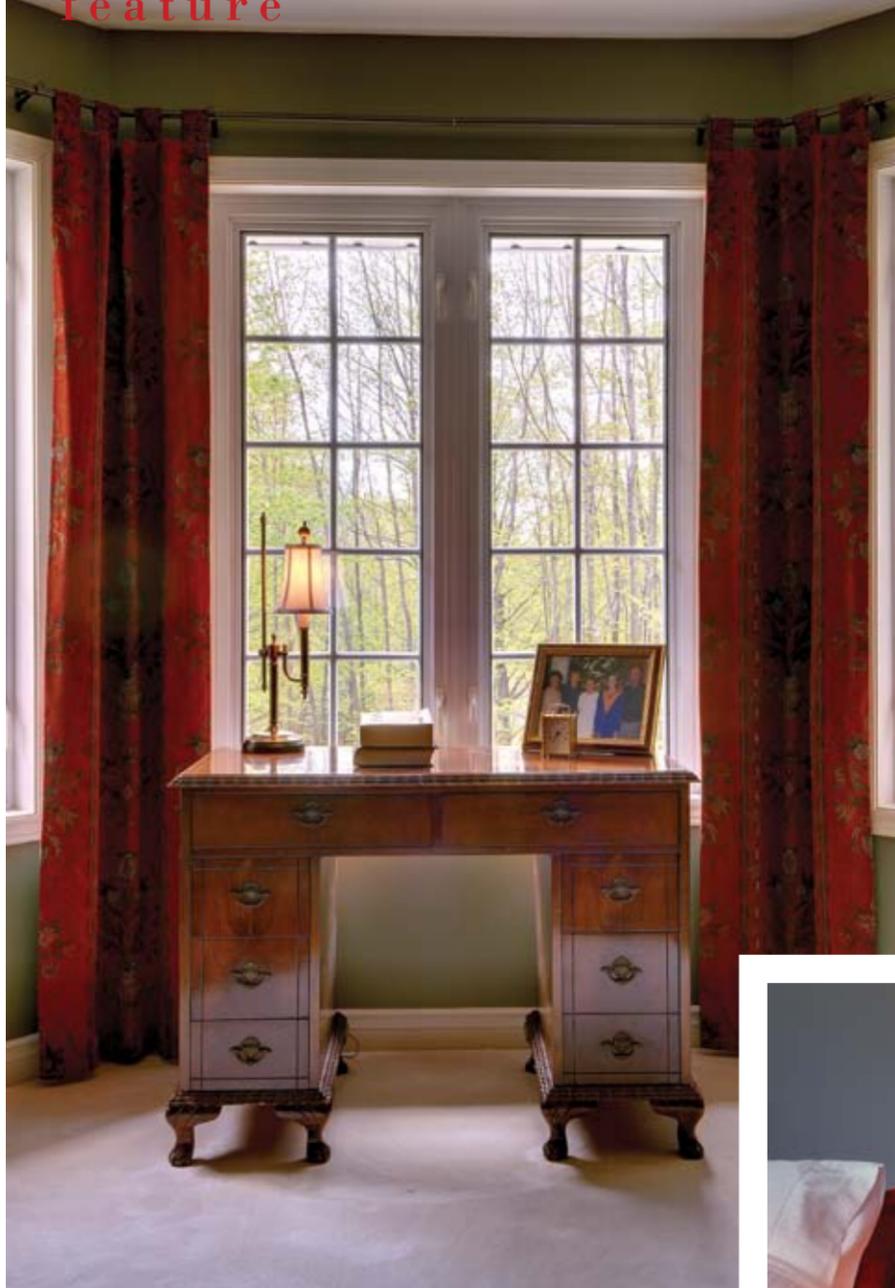
"We have a lot of things from our parents," Debby says. "We like a lot of older things."

The dining room, which is separated from the front foyer by striking leaded glass windows created by local artisan **Anne Ledlie**, features an eight and a-half-foot long harvest table built by Marcelville and antique chairs that were refinished by **Wilkinson's Upholstery** of Midland using fabric supplied by Shaw's. *Continued on page 58*



Stained glass windows shine light into this beautiful traditional dining room. **ABOVE:** The living room was recently re-decorated with new custom furniture from Shaw's Interiors in Elmvale. **OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT:** The staircase with open risers leads up to the bedrooms and down to the finished basement. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT:** A large window on the landing offers a wonderful view of the large property and Georgian Bay across the road. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT:** This lovely sideboard with beautiful fresh flowers is located in the foyer opposite the double front entry.





The large master suite upstairs is located in the front of the home. The en suite with separate tub and shower is open to the bedroom. Debra and Bill have furnished their Midland home with comfortable, traditional pieces.



On the second floor, there are four bedrooms, including a large master featuring an en suite complete with a shower and whirlpool bath.

The large basement features a games room, propane fireplace and TV room as well as a powder room, lots of storage and an office with a dog couch.

Debby gushes when she describes her dogs. Several walls are adorned with pictures of dogs competing at events across Canada and the United States, including Lily's Best-in-Show placing at a Kingston event.

"Lily is a very special dog," she says proudly as the six-and-a-half-year-old dog slumbers on a nearby cushion. "She's won about everything you can win. We'll probably never have another Lily."

While their **Hullabaloo Bassets** business is relatively small, it enjoys a stellar reputation in the breeding community. "As far as the dog business goes we were smitten with our pet puppy 20 years ago and the rest is history," Debby says. "I seem to have a knack for taking everything to the limit... and the dogs are no different. Jennifer jokes that we have more pictures of the dogs up than of our kids." **OH**

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