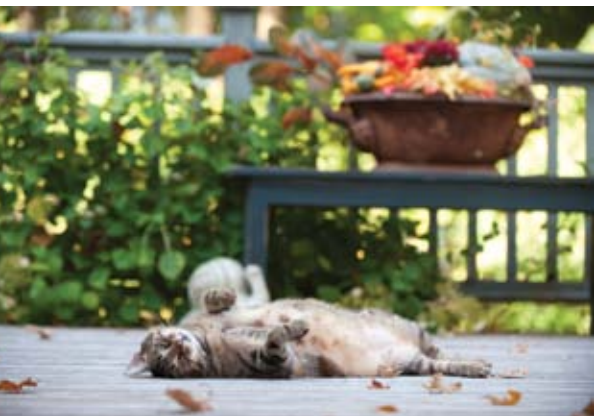


CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: (1) When updating their early 20th century home, Donna and Robert Roberts made every effort to maintain its original character. (2) A winding laneway extends a heartfelt welcome. John Szczepaniak was the Landscape Architect. (3) The Roberts love the backyard for entertaining. After many years of living in the U.S. they enjoy the Ottawa weather immensely and often sit outside until November. (4) A collection of walking canes hints at some of the other interesting touches within. (5) The home's main floor is grand yet warm. (6) A beautiful vista at the front of the home. Gardener Murray Gauthier takes care of the home's exterior. (7) One of the Roberts' two cats enjoying the crisp autumn air.

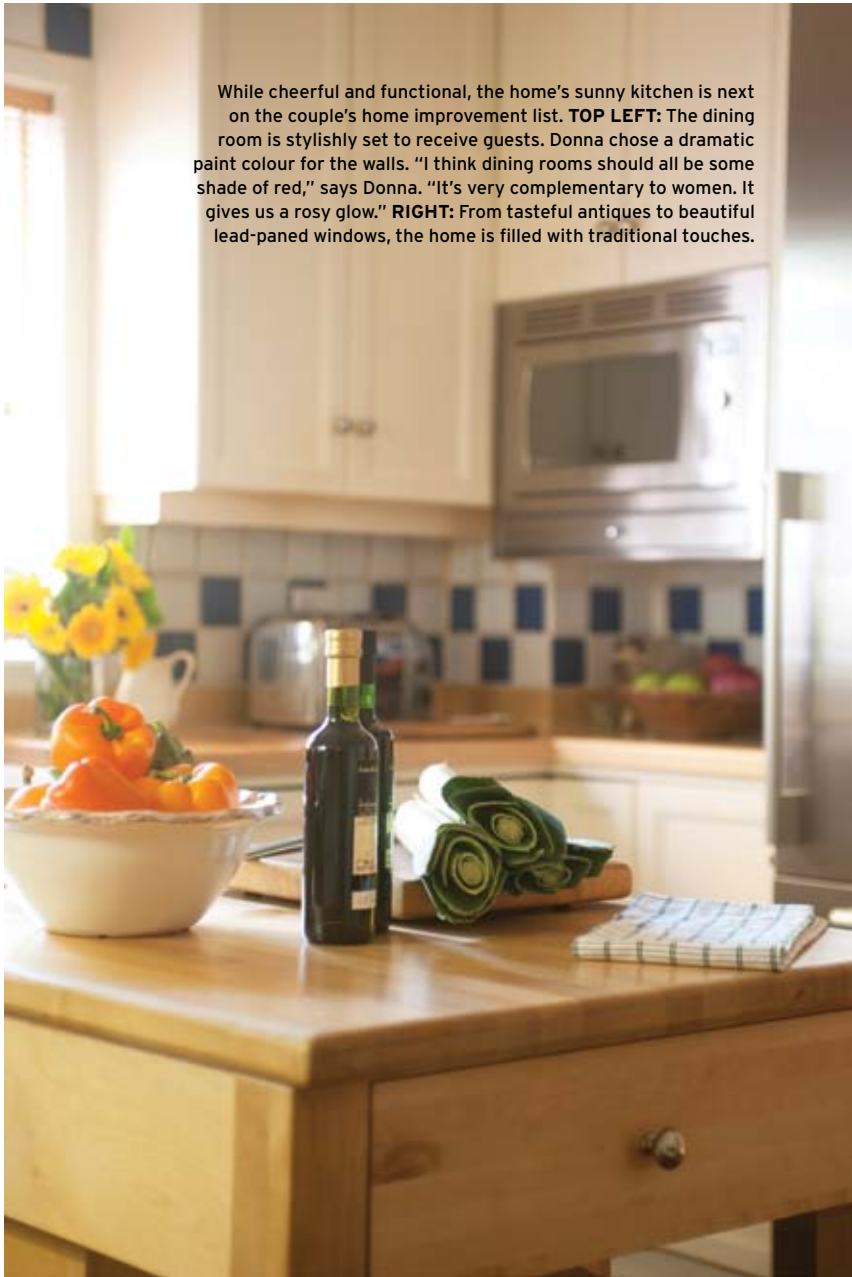


Traditional warmth

BY ANDREA TOMKINS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUZANNE BIRD

The winsome Rockcliffe home of Donna and Dr. Robert Roberts may be antique, but it's certainly not stuffy. It's airy and soft, bright and polished. It is warm and welcoming. It is abundantly clear that living here is a comfort and a joy. *Continued on page 24*





While cheerful and functional, the home's sunny kitchen is next on the couple's home improvement list. **TOP LEFT:** The dining room is stylishly set to receive guests. Donna chose a dramatic paint colour for the walls. "I think dining rooms should all be some shade of red," says Donna. "It's very complementary to women. It gives us a rosy glow." **RIGHT:** From tasteful antiques to beautiful lead-paned windows, the home is filled with traditional touches.



Donna defines her style as "traditional English," but a lot of homes of this vintage can be quite dark, which can sometimes feel oppressive. "I do like antiques, but I don't want to be Victorian and heavy," she says. There are darker pieces here and there but they are offset by areas of light and bright, whether it's a cream-coloured fireplace mantel or a cheery bouquet.

It's the Roberts' eighth year living in this quiet corner of Rockcliffe. The house required a lot of work when they first moved in. Keeping the character of the home has always been Donna's goal. "It was built in the early 1900s and I wanted to keep the feel of the house but bring it up to modern day," she says.

Plaster mouldings had to be redone and the ceiling itself was in bad shape. Walls were opened up and substantial changes were made to

improve the function of the space. The front foyer, for example, had doors that took up too much floor space. The whole area felt off balance. "The door to my husband's study opened on one wall and it wasn't very usable," says Donna. "I had someone make a split door using the door that was there." It looks like it's always been there, which was her goal all along – to make changes seem like they never happened.

Another invisible update: wainscoting up the staircase. Donna says the original bare wall seemed so massive from the foyer. It needed something to break it up. Now it's a seamless addition that looks original. What's more, the top of the panels flare out and become a bit of a railing on which you can lightly rest your hand as you walk up or down the stairs. It's a small detail, which makes the space that much more comfortable and welcoming. *Continued on page 28*





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:
(1) One of the Roberts' favourite spaces. The living room's fireplace mantel was a great local find (Yardley's Antiques) and was brought back to life by stripping away several layers of old paint and giving it a fresh coat of creamy vanilla. (2) "Creative people can come in and see this room in many different ways," says Donna in reference to the living room. "I can't – I can only see it in one way, and this is it." (3) The door to the study was cut in half to create balance and flow to the space. (4) The study houses many books as well as a large piano. (5) One of many beautiful details in the home.



feature



LEFT: One of the cosy bedrooms tucked away on the home's third level.
BELOW: A welcome addition to the top floor was this stylish bathroom.



The mantel on the living room fireplace was a great find, a result of some astute buyer's intuition. The original mantel looked out of proportion to Donna's eyes. "It was very low and didn't feel right for the house. I found this one in two pieces at **Yardley's Antiques**," she says. "It was so dirty and shoddy," she recalls. "They took a whole bucket of paint off of it. You couldn't see the detail." It was stripped down to the wood and repainted in a warm French vanilla shade, Donna's favourite neutral.

Another big change involved the flooring. It was the wrong colour – a light blonde parquet that didn't suit the age and character of the house – so the Roberts had the floors stained a light chestnut; a brunette with sunny highlights.

One of the Roberts' favourite places is the living room. "It's one of the rooms you can really use," says Donna. "You just come in and fall right into it."

The other is the family room. It's estimated that this addition off the back of the house was built in the 1980s. Today, it's full of antiques and books. "I have always collected," says Donna. "And we came with a lot of this furniture. I had to make it work."

The third floor is another part of the home that has been transformed.

Growing up in Nova Scotia, Donna remembers how important it was to receive the minister, or the town doctor and teacher in a formal front parlour. But the third floor is different. It's an opportunity to be less formal than the rest of the house yet still remain true to the home's character.

Original pine floors welcome guests as they walk up the stairs, interrupted only by handsome landings. Sloped ceilings in the bedrooms, covered with traditionally patterned wallpaper that extends to the ceiling, add to the comfort factor and conjure up fond memories of grandma's house. A generous bathroom with cabinetry by **KSL Construction Services Ltd.** makes the third floor into a sweet retreat that's in perfect harmony with everything else. "I love smaller rooms, I don't like walking across a lot of empty space. It feels cold to me, and I just don't need it," says Donna.

Although the décor of the Roberts' residence crosses different periods, there is harmony to be found here. Perhaps it's because their collection is unified by good taste, clean lines and a handsome beauty that isn't frilly or fussy. It's also personal. Donna likes to be surrounded by things she has collected over the years. "I like things that show craftsmanship. I can see what went into each piece and in my mind, I honour the past." **OH**

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