



PLAY TIME

STORY KATHLEEN DUNCAN
PHOTOGRAPHY SANDY MACKAY



The pool, designed and installed by Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping, has made the Ushers' backyard the place to be every summer. There is plenty of space beyond the pool area for play on the one-acre property.

ABOVE: The view from the front of the Midhurst home.



The rustle of the leaves being tickled by a breeze that also carries the cheerful chirp of nearby songbirds never fails to soothe Monique Usher – even if she's in the process of chasing her three young sons across the grass or through the forest path at the rear of the family's one-acre property.

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feature

“I love my backyard,” she smiles, looking at the roof-covered porch that steps down between pillars to an interlocking brick patio, in-ground hot tub and fibreglass salt-water pool. A stone retaining wall (materials from **GP Masonry and Landscaping Supplies**) adds another tier to separate the outdoor living area from the treed environment. “The portico was one of the reasons we bought the house.”

The feel is pure country splendour, although the location is actually a Midhurst cul-de-sac in a family-friendly neighbourhood with lots of playmates.

“When we moved in, the backyard was sloped away from the house and we never used it,” Monique recalls. “And Darren grew up with a pool, so he wanted one.”

They also wanted to make better use of the portico that first drew them to their new 2,700 sq. ft. bungalow, while maintaining a natural

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Inside, the kitchen is always hopping with three boys and their friends. The harvest table is situated at the back of the kitchen with a view of the backyard.



The family room is just off the kitchen of the Usher's bungalow. The two-sided fireplace separates the room from the front foyer.



Each of the three boys has his own room. Darren's father Mark built most of the furniture, including the incredible, animated clock in their youngest boy's room.

atmosphere. Coming together to transform this vision into reality were the teams from **Blue Diamond Pools & Landscaping** and **Sunsational Landscapes Inc.**

A second patio set was added to accommodate the increased usage. The two companies worked well together as the oasis came together, she reports. Included in the result are stone window wells, replacing the more common galvanized steel, brick walkways around the house, upgraded flowerbed edging and design, and ornamental tree and rock placements that add to the curb appeal and define property lines. **Greg Gore** of **Quality Handyman Services** was brought in to oversee the necessary tree and stump removal.

"I wish I had a 'before' picture of the yard – it's like night and day," adds Monique, who also points out the pool house built by her husband Darren and his father Mark. "His dad built most of the furniture in the house."

His talent is fully on display at the bottom of the basement stairs, where a large salt-water aquarium sits perched on Mark-built cabinetry. This vignette serves as a colourful welcome to the newly renovated leisure and guest space that has been crafted on the lower level of this 10-year-old home.

"We want to make this ours," she says of the changes that have been steadily underway since they moved in five years ago. Their attention to such details has been understandably divided during this time. They relocated to Springwater Township from a town house in Hamilton just before son number two was born, and immediately prior to Darren taking up his new post as an emergency physician at Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre.

A native of the small and flat French farming community of St. Joachim, near Windsor, Monique was attracted to the hilly terrain of the Barrie area. Darren, an avid windsurfer who found a like-minded



community at Kempenfelt Bay, spent summers camping at Algonquin and Killbear Provincial Parks and dreamt of returning to the region full time.

"It just seemed like an active community and a better place to raise a family," Monique considers. "And Darren's grandparents are originally from Elmvale, where a street and school are named after the family, so I guess we're really bringing it back."

The main floor has benefitted from some new colour (by **Essa Painting** in one of the three bedrooms on the main floor), new window covers (from **Complete Blinds**), a new front door with transom, lights and window panels by **Kempenfelt Windows & Doors Ltd.**, a set of bunk beds – one of the few wooden pieces Mark didn't have a hand in, and a faux barn-beam mantel that he did. Otherwise, Monique and Darren have focused on overhauling the recreational areas of the home.

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ABOVE: The master en suite is Monique's retreat.

feature

The fully-finished basement doubled the size of the home and has space for everyone. Darren has his bar, pool table and home theatre and the kids have a huge playroom. The whole family enjoys the aquarium, which is the star of the room.



Besides, a bright guest suite with a large, comfortable bed was one of the conditions Monique says she put on moving so far away from her family. “I wanted them to want to come visit,” she laughs, with a nod to the success of the strategy.

“The basement was unfinished when we moved in and we wanted a toy room for the kids, a home theatre, a guest room and a mud room that could accommodate two adults, three kids and all their ski gear,” she describes. “I also wanted to retain space for storage, since it was nothing but storage in the beginning.”

Prycon Custom Building & Renovations Inc. was entrusted to put it all together. Local trades invited by Prycon to help included **Gilbertson Electrical Contracting**, **Wright’s Plumbing**, and **Campbell Custom Carpentry**, who handled the framing and trim work for the new space.

“I call this the man cave,” Monique says with amusement, with eyes sweeping across the handcrafted bar (by **Simcoe Custom Furniture & Cabinetry**, which also crafted the guest en suite vanity), pool table (sourced from **Sanders Pro Home & Billiards**) and rec room with

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“Darren likes to watch movies and host UFC parties here.”

Monique, a dental hygienist-turned-full time mom, can more often be found in the spacious playroom lined with cork flooring, soft green walls (adorned with a painting by a young artist), and a wall unit of cupboards and shelves to house the appropriate creative outlets for youngsters between the ages of two and seven.

The soothing sound of boys laughing is also music to her ears. **OH**



The covered portico next to the pool brings relief from the sun and provides a great place to entertain with easy access to the kitchen. The backyard is surrounded by lush landscaping, providing privacy and enjoyment.



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