

A collection of raised herb and flower gardens dominate the backyard landscaping, which was beautifully decorated with rustic charm by local décor experts Basia Halik and Carol Clark. **OPPOSITE LEFT:** A small breakfast or lunch nook with a classic tea-party style makes for a great entertaining spot in the garden. **OPPOSITE RIGHT:** Gary McLaughlin stands outside the entrance to the loft's adjoining art gallery, where he displays the work of local artists.



PHOTO BY PAT CROCKER



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# LOFTY INSPIRATION

BY JENNIFER SCHLEICH // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY

Hidden among the historic downtown storefronts in the village of Neustadt is an unexpected surprise waiting to be discovered: a spacious home with a quiet garden and a stunning view.

Located in a 130-year-old, 4,300 square-foot building, which once operated as the village's grocery store, is an artists' haven. Today it is the home and studio of commercial illustrator Gary McLaughlin and his wife, cookbook author Pat Crocker, as well as the location of the Riversong Art Gallery. Original artwork painted by Gary and other local artists adorns not only the downstairs gallery, but the walls of the upstairs apartment.

From Mill Street the home is impossible to distinguish from the surrounding shops, with its quiet and unassuming yellow brick exterior and narrow façade. Hidden in the backyard oasis that has been

transformed into an aromatic herb garden, is a breathtaking natural waterfall. The cascading torrent was formed by the neighbouring mill's damming of Meux Creek many decades previous and was a pleasant surprise to the couple when they first viewed the property 10 years ago.

The backyard possessed a world of potential, but like the rest of the property, offered its own set of challenges. "It had been built up and filled with stone so we couldn't get down to the dirt," reminisces Gary. The couple immediately set to work solving the problem; the solution was a series of raised gardens that descend from the back

*Continued on page 20*



**LEFT:** The back veranda and balcony are pleasantly shaded by the property's large trees and provide stunning views of their personal waterfall. **BELOW:** Paintings by local artists adorn the inside of the Riversong Art Gallery.

porch (**Frank Kuntz Carpentry**) to the drop-off above the creek. **Botanical Designs & Installations Inc.** provided the large stones, while **Ground Effects Landscapes** supplied the plants in the front and rear of the home. To complete the rural feel of the garden space **Basia Halik** and **Carol Clark** bestowed the backyard with a flourish of charming décor.

"Gardening is a shared chore for both of us," Gary adds. "Pat grows all her own herbs, vegetables, whatever she needs and we compost our own soil. It has this feel to it that it's green." The smell of herbs wafting through the air on a warm day is all the inspiration Pat needs while working diligently in her upstairs office and adjoining kitchen.

"It was Pat's idea to buy the property. My opinion then was that it was filled with butts."

The "butts" Gary refers to are the many obstacles that stood between the former grocery store and the beautiful loft, studio and gallery Pat had envisioned. From the floors, which were in incredibly poor condition, to the bat infestation, it took approximately a year to make the home livable. "Pat once called it a third world country," says Gary, describing the loft's two-apartment pre-renovation state.

"We started working on the upstairs in the summer of 2005 and finished by the next summer," he explains. "We had to rewire the building



**LEFT:** The loft's spacious kitchen with display-style cabinetry isn't an ordinary family's food prep area; it is Pat Crocker's test kitchen where she develops recipes for her series of cookbooks. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The backyard gardens overflow with bounty during the warm summer months. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The loft's main hallway has been converted into a library, housing a collection of 2,500 cookbooks.



PHOTO BY PAT CROCKER



and replace the old cast iron plumbing; the bones of it had to be done to code," (Plumbing by **T. Clarke Mechanical**). Though the interior had to be stripped back to the brick, they kept what they could, even restoring the authentic style of the windows. The original wood floors remain, as do the three original exposed-wood supporting beams in the loft, while a fourth is covered. Neustadt woodworker **Carl Kelsey** replaced the wood trim throughout the home.

A library comprised of Pat's collection of 2,500 cookbooks lines the hallway leading to the home's focal point: an open-concept kitchen. While the shower and sauna in the master en suite (granite provided by **The Old Barn**), complete with in-floor heating, may be Gary's favourite spot, the kitchen is the loft's most used and central feature.

Pat designs, cooks and photographs her recipes week after week in the state-of-the-art kitchen, which sits adjacent to her computer workstation

*Continued on page 22*



**LEFT:** Gary's original paintings in bright spring hues welcome visitors into the upstairs sitting room. **BELOW:** A decorative hall chest with an oversize mirror displays a selection of pottery in an open space dividing the living room from the kitchen. **BOTTOM:** One of the home's guest rooms houses an antique furniture collection, which bestows a sense of country living on the loft.



and the dining area. The kitchen is equipped with stone countertops from The Old Barn and cabinetry from **RONA Hanover Building Centre**. To the rear of the kitchen is a pantry complete with a full second fridge and prep station.

"I enjoy cooking too, mostly lunch and breakfast, to give Pat a break," says Gary. Off the dining area hangs a balcony with a sweeping view of the back garden. The balcony, built by Frank Kuntz Carpentry, houses a bistro table and Gary's charming antique charcoal barbecue from the 1940s. Ready to cook food in as few as 30 seconds it makes for great grilled lunch breaks.

"I actually found it at the dump," he laughs. Manufactured in 1948 in Atlanta, Georgia, it's a cast iron barbecue and smoker built to stand the test of time. "It actually didn't need much work when I rescued it," he adds.

Visible from the kitchen is a spacious sitting room and entertaining area, while a second comfortable den welcomes visitors from the garden on the main floor after the sun has set. Two spare bedrooms, one of which once belonged to the couple's daughter, front onto the street, one on the main floor beside the gallery, renovated by Frank Kuntz Carpentry, and the other directly above it in the loft. *Continued on page 24*

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**LEFT:** A serene and enchanting scene of water lilies hangs above the bed in the master bedroom. The building's preserved original window style can be observed on the left wall. **BELOW:** A peek into the master en suite showcases more original artwork and a portion of the walk-in, tiled shower room.



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A unique granite countertop with a rough-cut edge is complemented by his-and-hers vessel sinks against a brick-style backsplash.

Each home the duo has occupied has been a unique experience. “Our daughter now lives somewhere normal,” jokes Gary. A graphic designer in Toronto, she originally hated the Neustadt loft, but has grown to love it over the years.

“We came here from Toronto,” he reveals. “We first bought a weekend log cabin outside of Mount Forest, where we lived for 10 years. Then we lived in an 1857 Presbyterian church (Hampden Church), which we restored, before moving to Neustadt.”

“What we really wanted was stuff that’s different I guess,” he adds. “We wanted our home, including the décor, to be unique with a lot of character.”

They certainly succeeded. **OH**

**SOURCE GUIDE**

Basia Halik, Bill Douma, Botanical Designs & Installations Inc., Carl Kelsey, Carol Clark, Frank Kuntz Carpentry, Fulford RONA Building Centre, Gary McLaughlin, Ground Effects Landscapes, Hanover Home Hardware Building Centre, Lynn Miller, Owen Sound Home Depot, Rory Zettler Concrete, T. Clarke Mechanical, The Old Barn



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