

STORY **TAMARISK MCNALTY STEPHENS**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **SANDY MACKAY**



# the SCIENCE OF BUILDING

It's good to stand out in your field – or in your neighbourhood – and it's definitely the disruption to a rhythm that urges you to take a second glance when driving along a lovely tree-lined street in Port Elgin.

This 2,356 sq. ft. two-storey home is influenced by contemporary design elements but remains timeless with its simple and classic rectangular shape and Georgian proportions. The goal was to construct a house using modern-day building science that would meet the requirements of a growing family while minimizing the overall footprint.

**Dennison Homes** began when **Steve Dennison**, who has a background in engineering, and his wife Jennifer Haessler, a practicing naturopathic doctor, decided to make the move to Saugeen Shores in 2003. The company built their first home in 2005 and the business –

*Continued on page 43*



**TOP:** The kitchen, dining and family room with south-facing windows open onto the deck and backyard. **ABOVE:** The large scale custom barn door makes a statement in the front foyer. **OPPOSITE:** The family's 11-year-old Labradoodle Cooper relaxes by the fire on a brightly coloured, vintage inspired rug that defines the living area. Builder and owner Steve Dennison custom made the coffee table from an old piece of mahogany burl.

**RIGHT:** Kaitlyn Shular of K-Interiors was instrumental in the cabinetry design throughout the home. **BELOW:** Aside from some drywall and wall tile in the bathrooms, the walls throughout are clad in white and bright shiplap. **OPPOSITE, TOP:** Fun, geometric drop pendant lights punctuate the two-tone kitchen cabinetry. Appliances sourced at Square Deal Neil's. Counters and sinks from The Old Barn. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Owners Steve Dennison and Jennifer Haessler at the kitchen island.



*Sturdy see-through drawers make pantry items easy to find.*

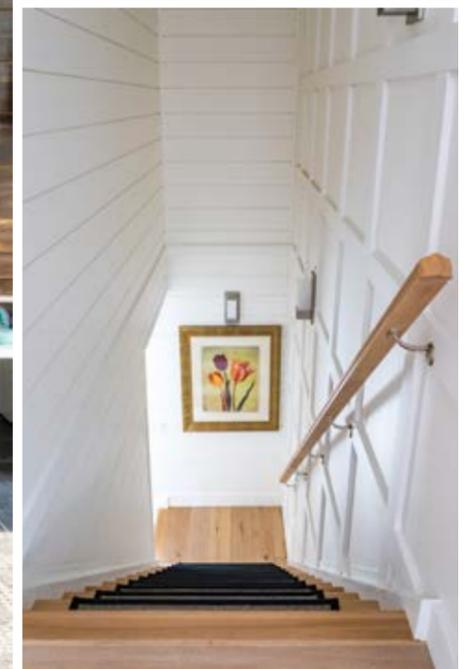
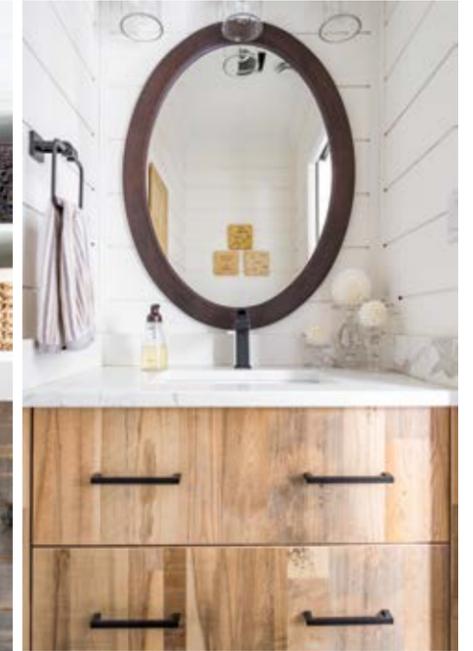
along with Dennison and Haessler's family – has grown steadily since then. When they learned they'd be welcoming their fourth child in 2017, they decided additional space would help make daily life function more smoothly as a family of six, so they purchased a vacant lot nearby and began planning their new build.

"This is the third iteration of a similar house we have built for ourselves," explains Dennison. Although the floor plan remains very similar to the previous layouts, the needs of a larger family meant the common family areas were expanded ever so slightly and an additional bedroom was added.

They were able to make the house as bright as possible with an expanse of south-facing windows and doors that open up to the backyard. The living areas were designed to fit their furniture and for efficient storage they incorporated a lot of built-in cabinetry – each unit with a specific use in mind. For example, the mudroom is the central organization point of the home and everyone has a dedicated drawer and hook space within reach so that their belongings can be easily accessed and

*Continued on page 44*





**TOP LEFT:** The second floor laundry room has fresh blue cabinets and ample space for folding clothes. **ABOVE:** The kids' bathroom has a nautical vibe with a round chrome mirror, blue vanity and water-resistant subway tile on the walls. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Off the living room on the main level is a play room office combination (the time of day dictates how much work gets accomplished!).

put away at the end of the day. In other areas there are drawers for arts and crafts, shelves and cubbies for books and toys, display for collectibles, and in the kitchen the kids can help set the table as their dishware is stowed in a lower drawer. The built-ins throughout showcase the fine quality and craftsmanship of **Bruce County Custom Cabinets**, a company

Steve owns with partners **Larry Lange** and **Kaitlyn Shular**. Together with **K-Interiors** (the interior design company Shular started after graduating college in 2011) and Dennison Homes, the three businesses share a showroom and form a complete design-build firm. This partnership means the team can design and build a house, select interior finishes, design the cabinets as well as provide decorating

services, all from one related company. "By managing the entire process, we can streamline communication and limit mistakes and omissions," Dennison says. "We can also adjust the design so that it better reflects the final product by having the designer work directly with the trades constructing the house and building the cabinets." Shular and her design team of **Amanda**

**Thede** and **Tanya Tsatsos**, worked directly with Haessler to help her make all of the decisions related to interior materials, finishes, cabinetry design and other unique details throughout the home. The primary design feature is the shiplap that clads nearly every wall in the house. Painted in **Benjamin Moore's** Simply White, the textural quality of the shiplap adds a fine

layer of detail within the all-white palette and was the inspiration for the design elements throughout the rest of the house. The live-edge walnut table from **Country Charm**, with the reclaimed walnut detail on the ceiling above, helps to anchor and define the dining area in the open-concept space. The built-in cabinetry in the living area flanks the electric fireplace, complete with walnut mantel and

*Continued on page 46*



**ABOVE:** The shiplap in the principal suite is accented with a colourful piece of art above the bed by local artist Susan Seitz. **TOP RIGHT:** The en suite is a little oasis complete with freestanding soaker tub and fully tiled walk-in shower. Plumbing by Carson Supply. **RIGHT:** Family portraits and art by Haessler's aunt and Opa adorn the walls in the hall. At the end of the hallway near the ceiling is the Mr. Slim that provides heat and air conditioning to the second floor.



antique brick surround (**West Shore Stone & Brick Inc.**). Another feature is the extra-large, distressed wood, barn-style door (**Disla Designs**) that conceals the cloak closet at the front foyer. Haessler loves the colour red, which is the primary accent throughout the home, beginning with a bright pop of red on the front door – a welcome contrast against the horizontal white wood siding.

Dennison admits that he didn't always put much focus on getting assistance from interior design professionals, as he believed it was the architecture or the trim that made the house. But tying together all of the elements throughout their new home has taught him otherwise, and he has a newfound respect and value for the detail-oriented job of a designer.

In addition to the savvy interior design, this house was constructed to meet the Passive House Standards. Dennison has a keen interest in focusing on high performance buildings and explains, "The basic premise of a Passive House is as follows: simplify the form so that the building is easy to construct and maintain; build an air-tight building shell to avoid drafts; use exterior insulation, triple pane windows, and a well-insulated basement to enclose the house in insulation and eliminate thermal bridging; provide efficient air exchange for fresh air and moisture removal (essential because the house

*Continued on page 48*

DESIGN BUILD LOVE



**Bruce County CUSTOM CABINETS**

519.483.1188  
brucecountycustomcabinets.ca

**K**

INTERIORS  
519.832.7040  
kaitlynshular.com

**DENNISON HOMES**

519.483.1199  
dennisonhomes.ca

Visit us at our showroom! | 1211 MacKenzie Rd. in Port Elgin | Open Mon. – Fri., 9am – 5pm





### LOCAL SOURCE GUIDE

- Aiken Bros. Home Hardware • Blinds to You • Brubacher Siding and Construction • Bruce County Custom Cabinets • Carson Supply • Country Charm • Dennison Homes • Disla Designs • Edward Fuels • Greg Williamson Design • K-Interiors • Square Deal Neil's • The Old Barn Polished Stone Creations • West Shore Stone & Brick Inc. • Wiarton Home Hardware

is built so air tight); and harness the free energy from the sun with proper facing windows (southern exposure), overhangs and hopefully some solar panels."

The goal is to have a house that is energy neutral, which means that once their solar power system is installed they will produce as much energy as they consume when averaged over the year. The house is completely electric, and although they could have connected to natural gas, they decided against the option to limit their dependency on fossil fuel. The house is heated by a ductless, air source heat pump – a two-head Mitsubishi Mr. Slim mini-split system (**Edward Fuels**). Their domestic hot water also utilizes heat pump technology for maximum efficiency while the ERV (energy recovery ventilator) provides continuous fresh air to the

house through a controlled entry point (**Aiken Bros. Home Hardware**). The metal roof was sourced at **Wiarthon Home Hardware**.

This house was built to stand the test of time, from the sound construction principles and the environmentally-forward thinking, to the timeless and classic design aesthetic. It will carry Dennison, Haessler and their four children through the next phase of life as a family of six. **OH**

**TOP LEFT:** The simplicity of the white palette allows the accents to pop while colours and themes can be easily updated and changed as the children grow. **TOP RIGHT:** In the kids' rooms, built-in cabinetry was installed in lieu of traditional closets to optimize functionality. Dennison made the lego table for their oldest son from leftover ash flooring. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Shiplap accented with blue stripes and decor throughout creates a marine nursery theme.



## WEST SHORE STONE & BRICK

Stone & Brick for New Homes & Renovations  
Thin Stone Veneers • Mulch (bulk & bagged)  
Topsoil/Aggregates • Steps/Flagstone/Rockery  
Fire Pit Kits • Paving & Patio Stones  
Landscape & Masonry Products

Showroom/Yard is South of Kincardine  
1.5km East of Hwy 21 on Conc. 12  
519.395.2747 • [www.WestShoreStoneandBrick.com](http://www.WestShoreStoneandBrick.com)

**CARSON  
SUPPLY**

HVAC . HYDRONICS . PLUMBING . WATERWORKS  
CARSON CUSTOM MOLDING

1071 Goderich St., Port Elgin ON  
1.800.265.3716 | [carsonsupply.com](http://carsonsupply.com)

Concept to Design.  
Construction to completion.

**Build with Wiarthon Beaver Home & Cottage Program today!**  
Call design consultant  
*Jason Stevens*  
Cell: 519.378.3883  
Email: [jason.stevens@wiarthonhbc.com](mailto:jason.stevens@wiarthonhbc.com)

**Wiarthon Home Design Centre**  
a division of the Wiarthon Home Building Centre  
160 Berford Street, Wiarthon ON | 519.534.5599  
[wiarthonhbc.com](http://wiarthonhbc.com)