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# NATURAL PROGRESSION

Perched atop one of West Grey's highest hills is an old barn. From the hill's summit, the water towers of Durham, Hanover and Chesley can be spotted, and on a crisp, clear summer's evening the distant red twinkling lights of Saugeen Shores' wind turbines can be seen glittering below the stars along the Lake Huron shoreline.



**OPPOSITE:** The rural property's original barn has been updated and refreshed to house the Hunter family's granite workshop and retail centre. **LEFT:** The spacious garden shed from Ace 'n JJ's sits alongside the sandbox designated for the family's various grandchildren. **BELOW:** Ted and Reay Hunter (back row) and their respective wives Brenda and Courtney are the past, present and future of The Old Barn.

**T**he old post-and-beam barn, which has withstood decades of farming, is the reason the Hunter family continues to pass on the family homestead from generation to generation. It's the centre of a bustling local business, **The Old Barn – Polished Stone Creations**, that is about to switch hands from father to son, along with the fully renovated farmhouse situated below it.

"When I was a kid this seemed like the biggest forest in the world to me," says Reay Hunter as he gestures toward the old maple forest to the north of the family home. "Now I realize it's only 10-feet wide. Everything's completely different; my grandparents' house was old, dark and full of 70s-style wood panelling. It was like a cosy place to visit where you'd curl up and fall asleep."

He's not joking. The home has been completely transformed, along with the old barn, by Reay's parents Ted and Brenda after they purchased the property from Ted's mother and stepfather in 2003. The barn was the first project the couple tackled, reconstructing the outer façade to make it business-worthy while they turned the interior into a granite workshop. The home renovation came later, after Ted and Brenda took over the working farm from Ted's parents in 2008 and said goodbye to the livestock.

"We were both farm kids, my home farm is just down the road too," says Brenda, "but we didn't really want animals. I had three kids – I had enough to do without chickens."

Prior to Ted and Brenda's move to purchase the family farm, the duo had no previous experience in the granite industry. Ted's parents had been farmers, and the old barn had been just that, a barn. *Continued on page 42*





“That’s when I got into the business,” says Ted. “I’d seen it and thought, hey I could do that [polish and cut granite] so I took a four-day course in Minneapolis on polishing and cutting. I’ve always been in the trade industry though.”

Ted had recently retired from his plumbing and heating business and wanted to refresh by tackling a new challenge. Luckily for him, his son Reay and Reay’s wife Courtney were looking for a change too, and in December of 2006 the young couple moved home to Durham from North Bay to join the business and take a stab at the granite industry. Now Reay and Courtney are less than a year away from taking over the Hunter homestead and the business; they’ll be the third generation of Hunters to live alongside the old barn.

Of course the home they’ll live in and the barn itself are barely recognizable from old photographs. Originally a double-wide mobile home, the Hunters knocked down a major wall, relocated the basement staircase, finished the basement and reorganized the internal flow of the house. Obviously sparkling granite surfaces predominate throughout the home.

**ABOVE:** An antique deacon’s bench – repainted a multitude of colours over the years – welcomes guests into the home. **TOP LEFT:** The new sitting-room addition at the front of the home opened up the living space and provided expansive windows to enjoy the country view. **LEFT:** The front door of the Hunter homestead is a bright bold red, a precise match to the door and trimming of the barn at the top of the hill.

The modernized farmhouse kitchen is adorned with light wainscoted cabinetry and complemented with black granite countertops. **ABOVE:** A reading nook in the family’s living room plays off the “barn red” colour present throughout the home and property. **BELOW RIGHT:** The vintage solid wood kitchen table is set and ready for the Hunters to gather for a family meal.



Ted and Brenda added an addition onto the front of the home to create a spacious foyer and living space, and closed in a former breezeway at the back of the home to make an all-season access to the garage. They also removed a wall between the kitchen and original living room to enlarge the dining area and create a more open-concept feeling (renovation work by **Progress Builders**). To accommodate the new layout of the home, they updated their furnace system and ductwork with help from **Pratt Plumbing and Heating**.

“By eliminating the hallway and moving the stairway we opened up a nice sized room,” explains Brenda.

The couple replaced the original kitchen with contemporary cabinetry and accented it with two slabs of bold Absolute Black granite (The Old Barn). They replaced the flooring with tile from **JD’s Flooring Centre** (now owned by **House Rules Design Shop**) and modernized the windows and doors (Progress Builders). Regional ironworker and welding instructor at Georgian College, Dan Duquette, crafted custom railings for the home. He also constructed a beautiful iron table in Ted and Brenda’s living room that was originally an antique floor register salvaged from an old church and topped with a round granite surface from the shop. *Continued on page 46*



feature



**ABOVE:** The custom granite fireplace in the home's lower level was designed and installed by The Old Barn founder Ted Hunter. **RIGHT:** Blue-toned granite surfaces sparkle in the master en suite. **BELOW:** The master bedroom is furnished in vintage solid wood pieces from local furniture company Durham Furniture.



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At the end of a long day working in the barn, the family likes to reconnect around the large solid wood kitchen table by local furniture maker **Durham Furniture** (products carried at **Smitty's Fine Furniture**). The home's spacious kitchen and open-concept living area come in handy for the growing family, which has already welcomed seven happy grandchildren into its midst.

After all the work they've done, it seems a shame to pack up and move, but Ted and Brenda are more than ready to leave the farm for the convenience of in-town living. Heading in to Durham, they are practically trading places with Reay and Courtney's small family, who are also ready to leave Durham's quaint semi-urban life behind for some fresh rural air.

"We're excited to move out here to the country with the kids," says Courtney. And who wouldn't be? **OH**



The property's barn is equipped with impressive granite working machinery that enables the Hunter business, The Old Barn – Polished Stone Creations, to create beautiful counter tops and other stone features for regional homes, and beyond.

## LOCAL SOURCE GUIDE

- Ace 'n JJ's • Barry Yack Construction And Insulation Ltd.
- Dan Duquette • Durham Furniture • Eckhardt's Floral Treasures
- Filomena's Photography • GBL Construction
- JD's Flooring Centre • Jan Croghan • House Rules Design Shop
- Home Hardware • Postman's Antiques
- Pratt Plumbing and Heating • Progress Builders
- Smitty's Fine Furniture • The Old Barn

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