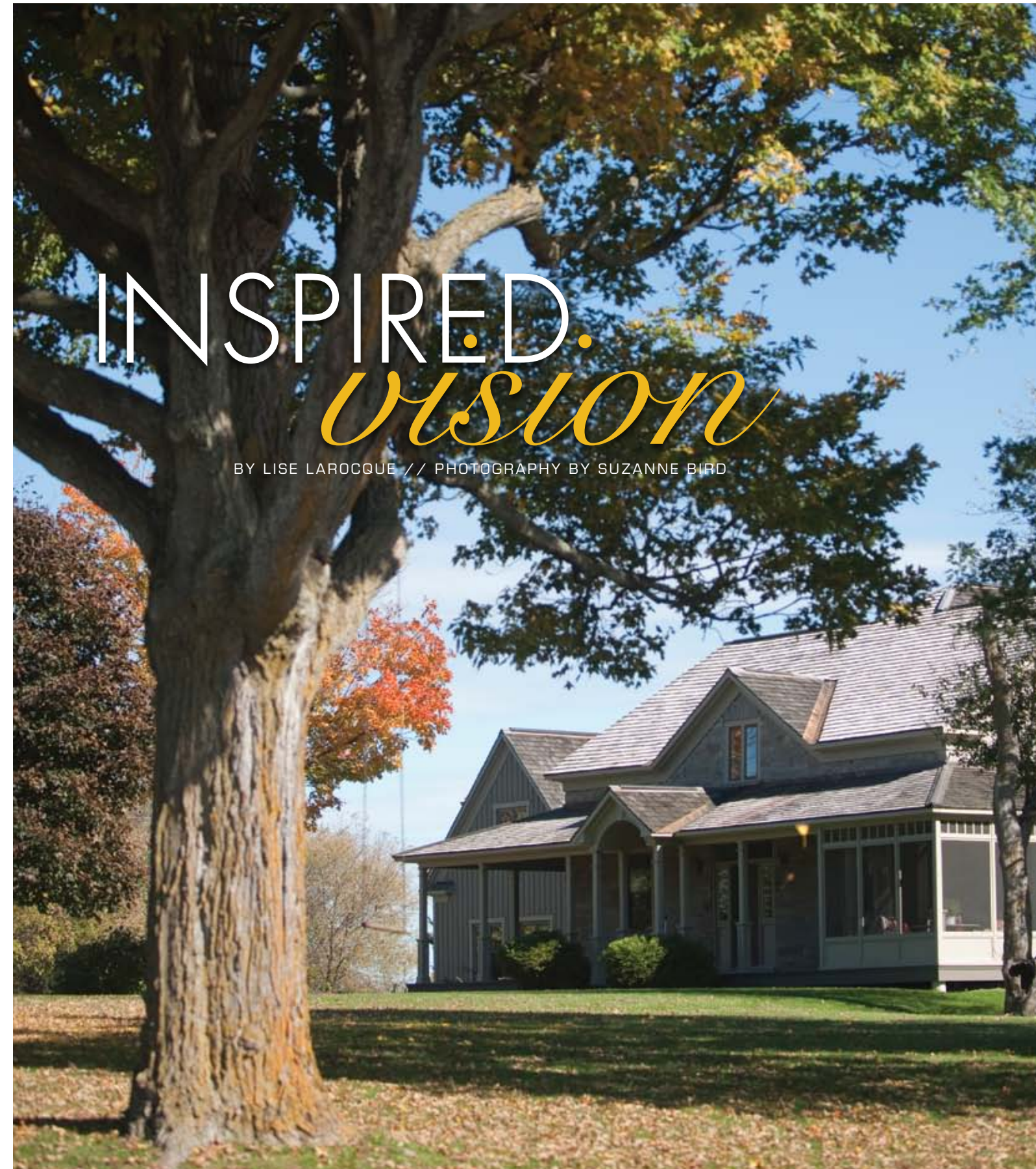




A seat on the large wrap-around porch is a prime spot from which to observe the changing seasons. **TOP:** The large porch easily accommodates a table and chairs. **MIDDLE:** An extensive wall of windows is impressive both from the exterior and interior of the home. **BOTTOM:** Beauty in simplicity; an antique bench sits outside the home's original stone exterior. **RIGHT:** The beautiful mid 19th century home has undergone a transformation that has kept its original character intact.



INSPIRED. *vision*

BY LISE LAROCQUE // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUZANNE BIRD

Down a picturesque tree-lined lane on the outskirts of Richmond is a home that has stood the test of time. Built by early Scottish settlers, this mid 19th century home is a beautiful part of the rural Ontario countryside, but it hasn't always been that way.

Back in 1993, current owners Denise Wilkes and Wes van der Ploeg were looking for a home in the peaceful countryside, one in which they could raise their young family and to which they could add their own personal touch. In their search they learned of a promising property that was on the market through power of sale. But Denise's first impression of the home was far from favourable. "It was overgrown and full of flies," she says. "It was just the original little house, no closets, one bathroom, no shower... and I thought, I couldn't possibly live here." But Wes saw something different; potential. Having worked as a general contractor for many years he recognized the fine craftsmanship of the original stone building and saw past the weeds and limitations of the home's current state. "My husband has amazing vision," says Denise. And so the couple sold their home in the Glebe and got to work on their renovation story.

During a 10-year period living in the original stone home, they drafted many design plans to add on to the existing structure. Maintaining the integrity and feel of the country home was essential to them and when looking for a designer, they wanted to find someone who understood. When it came time to bring their vision to fruition, they hired Gord Weima of **Gord Weima Design Builder**. The final design process took about a year of back and forth, tweaking plans that took into account the daily routines and lifestyles of the couple and their three children. "Gord understood the whole country thing," says Denise. "He came up with some fantastic ideas we absolutely loved."

The addition provided many spaces for the family of five to sprawl out, including a basement with games area and sunken theatre room, and a beautiful screened-in wrap-around porch for taking in the sweet sites and sounds of nature. The main floor gained a welcoming foyer, a powder room, a large country kitchen with dining area and a stunning great room. Many of the rooms from the original part of the home have been re-purposed and still see plenty of use. The former kitchen is now Denise's main floor office. The formal living room doubles as a great homework area and music room.

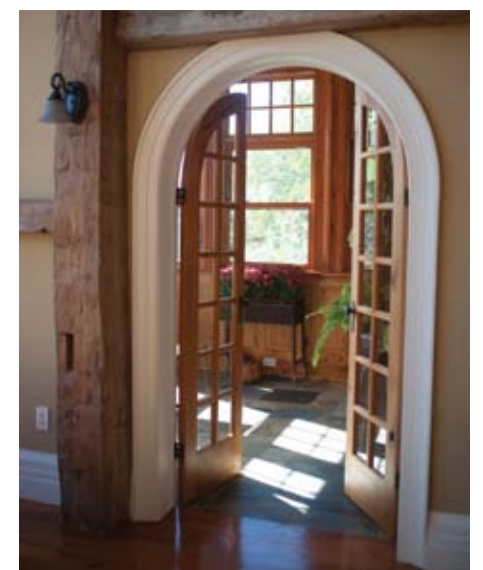
Continued on page 26



The front porch is a new addition but blends seamlessly with the original structure. **RIGHT:** Cozy chairs (Luxe Home Interiors) provide a perfect vantage point from which to enjoy the incredible details of the massive great room. **BOTTOM L-R:** (1) Beams of sunlight cascade through the large wall of windows into the great room. (2) Antique finds from local shops and auctions. (3) Homeowners Wes and Denise with their horses. (4) Doors were made on site by Wes using old pine barn boards.



PHOTO BY LYNEA GRAVELINE





One design element that was key for Denise and Wes was to ensure the new structure blended seamlessly with the original house. In other words, they didn't want their addition to look like an addition. In order to accomplish this, they sourced recycled materials from near and far. Old barns and abandoned ruins in farmers' fields became sources for seasoned construction materials. Rocks were harvested and old hand-hewn beams were salvaged and collected. One particular find came from a farm close to their home. "This just happened to be out in a field," says Wes, pointing to part of a massive fireplace in the home's great room. "There was just a fireplace standing on its own and we talked to the farmer to sell the stone to us, and he did," he says. "We took it apart, brought it back and built it exactly the same here."

Wes completed much of the home's detailed renovation work on his own, including the construction of the large stone fireplace which contains more than 200 thousand pounds of reclaimed stone.

Across from the fireplace is an extensive wall of windows through which glorious cascades of light flow into the room. Each window is framed with salvaged barn beams. "I wanted something original with

open space, lots of sunshine and just a great space to walk into in the morning," says Denise.

The barn beams are also repeated in the ceiling and trim, adding an element of warmth and character to the main floor. "We wanted to make it look as though the addition appeared to be constructed at the same time as when the house was built," says Wes. "I think we achieved that."

During the five-year renovation project, the couple hired local carpenter **Andy McGregor** on a full-time basis to help with the vast amounts of wood detailing throughout the home. Reclaimed wood was planned on site and used strategically in the build.

In the new country kitchen, an old china cabinet stands proudly. Purchased at an estate auction, it now houses an Old English dish collection and served as a starting point for the kitchen's design. Wes and Andy used reclaimed pine to construct the kitchen doors and cabinetry and copied the fluting, door detail and glass panelled fronts of the antique cabinet. Modern day stainless steel appliances from **Corbeil Appliances** were incorporated into the space and beautiful soft grey tiles from **Emerald Tile & Marble** were chosen for the backsplash. *Continued on page 28*



The table is set for a casual gathering with Denise's Old English dish set. (Flower arrangements by Trillium Floral Designs) **TOP LEFT:** The kitchen is filled with stylish touches from a large apron sink with bronze fixtures to delicate antique pendant lights. **BOTTOM LEFT:** An old glass compote dish with miniature pumpkins adds a touch of whimsy to the décor. **CENTRE:** Reclaimed pine was used to construct the kitchen doors and cabinetry.



The home's original living room still sees plenty of use. **BELOW:** The dining room features rustic built-ins and a beautiful antique table from Gendron Antiques. **TOP RIGHT:** The secret room is a favourite place for guests. **RIGHT:** A large custom-made bookcase conceals a hidden secret; a staircase to a third-level room.



When it came time to select decorative elements for their home, Denise and Wes had plenty of choice. They share a passion for antiques and had spent many a weekend perusing local shops and attending auctions. Throughout the years they have amassed a large collection of antiques and hand-crafted treasures; forgotten pieces that have been given a new role in a new story. One particular auction find is a metal spiral staircase salvaged from the old E.B. Eddy Company plant. It was strategically placed in the hall just off the great room where it now has a starring role.

One intriguing addition to the home lies a few steps beyond the second level landing. Here, a large custom-made rustic bookcase conceals a hidden secret; a third level room originally designed by Wes and his daughter Annika to serve as a play room. "Everybody loves that room," says Denise. "When we have guests, that's where they want to stay," she says with a chuckle.

Wes and Denise's renovation is a continuing story. Upcoming chapters include plans for additional rock pathways and flower beds. Denise seems happy she didn't rely on first impressions. "I love everything about the house and it's still ongoing," she says. "There's always something you can add and I'm enjoying it... I love it, it's peaceful." **OH**



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