



FIRE WATER ART + personality

STORY **ANNE TAIT**
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Two years after building her family home on Old Mail Road, high on the Escarpment in Grey County, **Helen Thomson** was ready to landscape.

Designer and owner of **HT Designs**, Thomson's spectacular 35-acre property is tucked away from busy roads at the end of a long driveway amidst rolling hills and cycling trails. Noticing signs around the area, she contacted landscape designer **Tyler Speirs**, principal of **TS Design Build**. They met to chat and the creative energy grew.

The landscape would be designed around her home, a 5,000 sq. ft. modernist twist on a country barn. With stunning architectural work by **Rockside Campbell Design**, the house was built by **Creek Valley Homes** in 2010. "It was a great build," says Thomson.

There was much to consider before drawing up a landscape plan. Speirs is an award-winning landscape designer with a hands-on approach to his work. "Tyler is wonderful to work with," offers Thomson. "He gives off good energy, really listens to his clients, follows through and puts his heart and soul into the project."

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This modernist twist on a country barn gets a refreshing blue pool, smooth concrete deck and custom pergola designed and installed by TS Design Build. **OPPOSITE:** A circular drive ringing a mature maple welcomes the family and visitors. A trio of poplar trees show their white bark against the dark, horizontal fence slats.



When Speirs first approached the property, he was drawn to its unique qualities. “I saw fields of corn flanking a contemporary home on the Escarpment,” he recalls. “There were great vistas with a forest-like setting behind, and it was quite secluded.” Thomson and Speirs had the same vision: To create an outdoor living space that would blend and flow well with Thomson’s design taste and style, and create a balance between the modern elements of the house and the natural outdoor setting.

But Thomson had a longer wish list, which evolved over the three-month project: A pool with a patio area, a spa/hot tub with decking extending over the pool, a pergola to shelter the dining area, a barbecue and bar area, a fire pit with a seating area and plants. With the plan in place, Speirs and his team of four got to work. Says Speirs, “No landscape is complete without fire, water, art and personality,” and this project has it all.

Thomson envisioned the hardscaping as solid, clean lines and the softscaping as low maintenance with large swaths of soothing colour in mass-planted garden beds. A broad assortment of perennials, including salvia, Russian sage, lavender, creeping thyme, maiden grass, iris, euonymus and fountain grass offer a cool palette of blues and purples in late summer. A single white paper birch tree further defines the space. Irrigation managed by **The Sprinkler Guys**.

There were privacy considerations. Fencing was needed for the pool, but also to deter visiting wildlife, including deer, foxes, coyotes and wild turkeys. With the forest offering some privacy, the homeowners wanted an enclosure that felt open and did not obstruct views. Speirs designed a unique fence using galvanized steel mesh, framed by cedar posts stained black. A horizontal wood fence blocks the nearby circular driveway from the patio area.

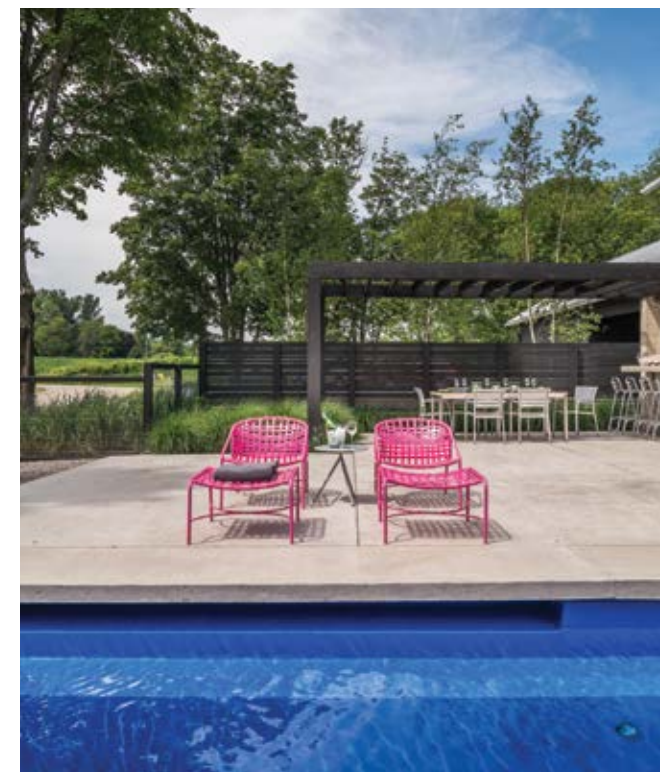


Custom fencing with galvanized steel mesh and cedar posts stained black lets the view in but keeps the wildlife out.

TOP: Tyler Speirs of TS Design Build pauses among his salvia plantings off the pool deck. **RIGHT:** The hot tub deck is stained to match the home’s siding, and the tub is tiled with steps to allow easy entry from ground level. Pool maintained by Reid Aquatics. A cement fire pit off the end of the patio brings the fire to eye level. Fields and forest beyond provide great vistas year-round.



ABOVE LEFT: Board-formed concrete creates a bar with floating countertop, reminiscent of the home’s interior design. The opposite side of the bar holds a large barbecue and food preparation area. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The custom fir pergola uses canvas overhead for added shade. Aluminum bar stools and dining chairs are practical and add to the industrial vibe. **RIGHT:** Hot pink chairs with footstools bring the interior colour scheme outdoors.



Speirs created custom concrete pool decking, poured and made smooth but with texture to prevent slipping. The hot tub surround is heat-treated ash, a popular maintenance-free option, and LED lighting glows from beneath the spa steps. A waterfall feature flowing gently into the pool was later added to the hot tub wall. The custom pergola is constructed of fir posts and beams, with a canvas shade overhead. A floating concrete countertop designed by Speirs completes the barbecue and bar area. Board-formed concrete, consistent with design details in the home’s interior, was used for the barbecue area, pool retaining wall and fire pit. Muskoka chairs and a custom bench by Speirs cluster around the fire pit, on a bed of pea-stone gravel.

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Entering the house, visitors are struck by the bold and innovative design details, enhanced by the interaction of light, glass, concrete and wood. The south-facing main floor is bathed in natural light through floor-to-ceiling windows and doors (**Cedarport Window and Door Centre Inc.**), and a partial glass floor acts as a skylight to the lower level.


Board-formed concrete, antique pine and reclaimed-wood accent walls seamlessly blend with outside landscaping. There are some surprises, such as the use of hot pink as an accent colour. “My daughter and I love pink,” says Thomson. “And as a designer, I know interior colour choices are often influenced by what colours actually look good on my clients.” *Continued on page 62*

TOP LEFT: Inspiring the landscape design, the interior features board-formed concrete, dark wood, metals and hits of pink. The main-floor powder room is housed in its own structure within the high-ceilinged space, leaving an open feeling to the main level. **TOP MIDDLE:** A stunning floating staircase in pine with glass and metal railings links the main level with the upper and lower levels. **TOP RIGHT:** The kitchen island (countertop by City Stone) overlooks the dining area and out to the pool and outdoor space beyond. Black-framed windows throughout from Cedarport Window & Door Centre receive blinds sourced at Ashton’s Blinds Draperies Shutters. **RIGHT:** A wall of dark cabinets by Riverside Custom Cabinets Ltd. separates the kitchen from the living room space. Five metal low-back stools with white seats coordinate with the island cabinetry and dining table seating. The master suite is visible beyond the living room at the end of the home.




“My daughter and I love pink and as a designer, I know interior colour choices are often influenced by what colours actually look good on my clients.”

Despite concrete and an open-concept space, this living room is cosy and inviting with its friendly accent above the fireplace and cowhide rug softening the hardwood underfoot. The wall is open to the upper level, where a balcony half-wall brings in light from below.



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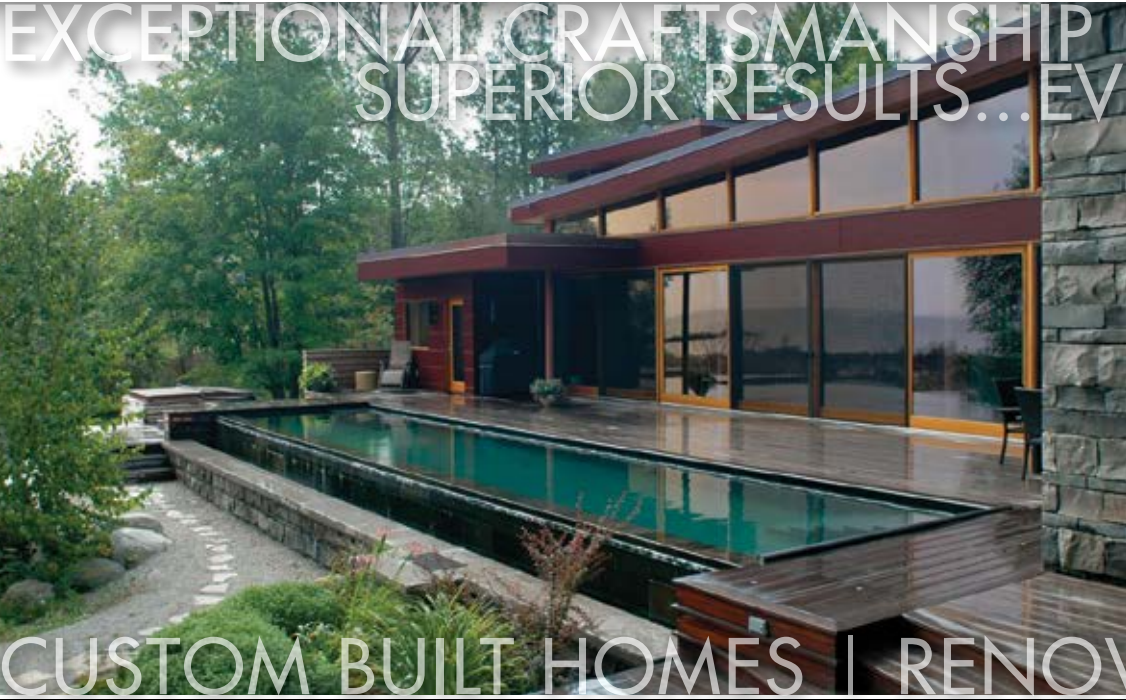
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A porcelain stone floor in the front entrance butts up with grey, elm flooring in the open-concept main level, adding to the illusion of more space. A dramatic fireplace by **Chantico Fireplace Gallery** creates a focal point for the family living area. All interior painting was done by **Student Works Painting**, a company owned by Thomson.

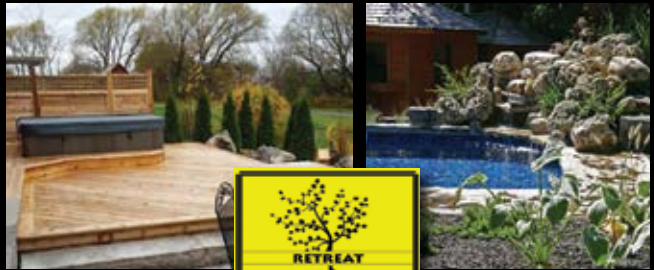
“You can’t always buy what you need,” adds Thomson, pointing to the dining room table and side table she herself designed. Two dramatic chandeliers, some of the few man-made light sources in the home and sourced by HT Designs, define the dining area. The sleek custom kitchen cabinets and built-ins were provided by **Riverside Custom Cabinets Ltd.**

ABOVE: A guest room on the lower level has heated, polished concrete floors and a dark feature wall. A long rattan bench stretches under the window. **BELOW LEFT:** Pink appears again in the homeowner’s daughter’s room. Floor-to-ceiling draperies are courtesy of Bouj Custom Design Studio. **BELOW RIGHT:** The upper level has loft work spaces that are open to the lower level.

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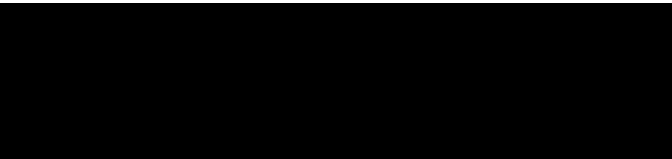
home & landscape



LEFT: With thoughts of planning for the future, doorways are wide and the shower door has a minimal transition lip. Arrangement by Paperwhite Flowers. **BELOW:** A glass panel provides transition from the concrete to wood-clad walls in the master suite, and allows light into the bath. **BOTTOM:** A headboard built into the reclaimed board wall supports three mirrors to reflect light. The master suite has a balcony overlooking the forest, pool and yard.



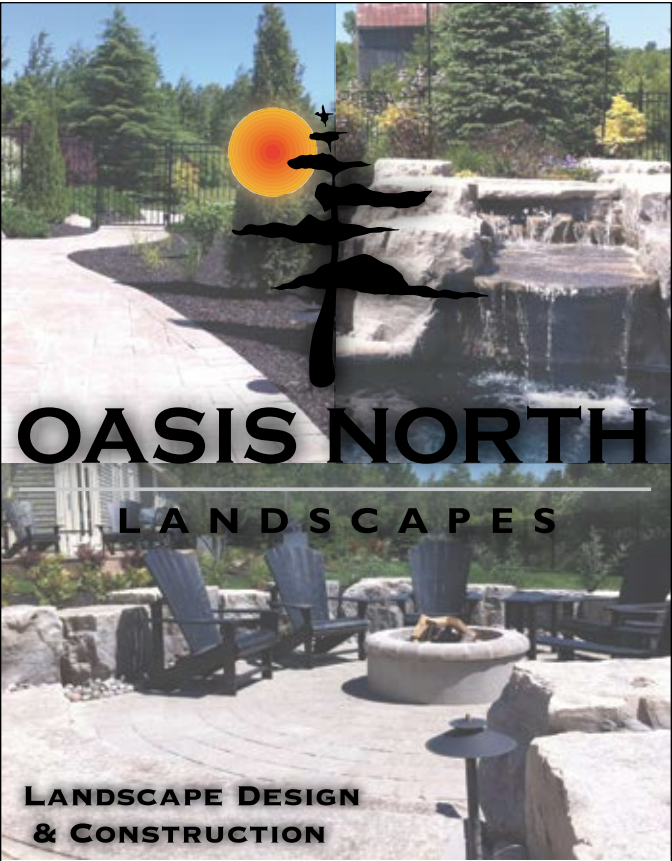
Floating stairs of pine and glass, with custom metal railings (**Thornbury Steel Fabricators**) link the three floors. “From the upper level in winter, you can see the bay and Georgian Peaks,” says Thomson. The couple’s grown children enjoy their private spaces, each with a view, when they are home. “Working with Thomson and her husband was a great experience and we soon became friends,” adds Speirs. “I enjoyed the opportunity to work on such a unique property, and will continue to watch it grow with maintenance and a few small projects to come.” **OH**



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