

Gorgeous greenery frames this renovated church home's 150-year-old front door with low-maintenance perennials and garden globes that magically reflect the light. **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** What was once the church altar is now part of the Green's kitchen and dining area. The homeowners replaced the fragile antique window panes as birds flew into their splendid 12-foot tall gothic windows. **TOP RIGHT:** Luna, the dog, keeps a watchful eye on homeowners Rhonda and Doug Green as they relax in the shade under one of 80 varieties of trees they planted on their property. **BOTTOM:** Rhonda and Doug Green are the owners of Greentree Gardens and Emporium in Collingwood, where Rhonda manages the store and Doug runs the greenhouses.

BY LAUREL FORTIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY

# the greens OF ST. AUGUSTINE



If the mint condition 1985 motor home parked out back is any indication, Rhonda and Doug Green have a great sense of humour on top of their sense of preservation. The RV has obviously been as lovingly maintained as their 150-year-old Heathcote home.

Celebrating a century-and-a-half of history, the Greens live in the community's former St. Augustine Anglican church. The church appears much as it did in the 19th century, when Heathcote was on a bustling Grey County trade route and the village supported six churches.

Decommissioned in 1957 and converted to living quarters in the 1960s, Rhonda, Doug and their two daughters moved into the 1,400 sq. ft. church when it came up for sale in 1990. Doug had had his eye on the building since he was a boy. A true Heathcote native, Doug was born and raised in the scenic village in the Beaver River Valley. *Continued on page 98*





**LEFT:** A view through the living area to the back of the home. Rhonda's wonderful sense of style and flair for design is apparent throughout the entire living space. **BELOW:** A priceless portrait of Doug the gardener at four years of age hangs over one of Rhonda's many collections – stacked steamer trunks for additional storage space. **BOTTOM:** The church's original hemlock floors were restored throughout the Greens' abode. The stairs lead to an upstairs loft and office space.



He remembers visiting the church when the generous owner would open it to the locals as a kind of community centre. “All the village kids used to sleep in there in the summer,” recalls Doug. The owner had a small living space at the back of the church, and the whole front was open, minus the pews. “As many as 15 of us would be in here. The moon through the windows at night was phenomenal,” he says.

Doug's grandfather owned the property behind the church, where there was a small orchard. “I didn't know this would come back to haunt me, but we would play in the orchard and throw apples at the church windows,” says Doug. “The owner didn't fix the broken windowpanes; she just covered the holes with little strips of plywood. So when we bought the place, we ended up fixing each of those broken windowpanes.”

With 735 individual panes in the church, set in eight pairs of 12-foot tall, gothic-peaked windows, maintaining them is indeed a major undertaking. While the Greens have replaced the broken panes, all the gorgeous original pine casings have been left intact. “They were solidly made,” says Doug.

The 1863 building is heated with one wood stove in the centre and another one at the back; the Greens have made their peace with the building's winter drafts. Doug does forestry management work in the winter months and the couple love the home's cosy fires. Rhonda's father built the stone mantel in the living room with Wiarton ledge rock.

“There is a real tranquility in the church,” says Rhonda. “It's peaceful and beautiful and comfortable.” The couple renovated before moving in, adding three bedrooms and a loft at the front, a large bathroom in the mid-space, and a kitchen and dining area at the rear – in the church's original altar.

The plaster on the inside of the exterior walls is original, as are the ceiling and front vestibule door, complete with original skeleton key. The hemlock floors, likely logged and milled locally out of a nearby grove, were taken up to reinforce the floor joists, but the hardwood was all carefully re-laid and restored to a deep brown lustre. Outside, the roof was replaced with steel in the early 2000s by Hy-Grade Steel Roofing Sytems in Guelph. *Continued on page 100*

**RIGHT:** This intimate dining area features benches from the Meaford Factory Outlet. Check out the classic “fragile” lamp from *A Christmas Story* that Rhonda ordered online. **BELOW:** Come and sit awhile. Comfort beckons in the tranquil Zen-like atmosphere of this renovated church. Flower arrangements are compliments of Paperwhite Flowers. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Cheers! Rhonda and Doug just celebrated their 30-year wedding anniversary. On the woodstove is Rhonda's collection of blue Depression-era glass.







**FAR LEFT:** A view from the front foyer into the home. As Rhonda says, “the first time I walked into this church, the vibe was right.” It’s an incredibly serene and calm living space. **TOP LEFT:** The door to Rhonda’s office features the letter R. The enchanting view out the front window, through lush climbing hydrangeas, makes it a great space to sit and work on the computer or daydream. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Rhonda has an eye for the unusual, often they’re great flea-market finds. **BELOW:** The spa-like bathroom is laden with treasures and an array of unique accessories, some sourced through Rhonda’s store. **OPPOSITE:** Rhonda is a true collector. From flamingoes and vintage jewelry to glassware and belts... from red polka dot Fire King bowls and Fiesta Ware collections, to vintage Parisian opera glasses, and McCoy pottery pots from the 40s and 50s.



Most of the interior, open-concept space is painted a rich, dark green. Interior walls were all constructed to be independent of the structure, so they can be taken down without harming the church.

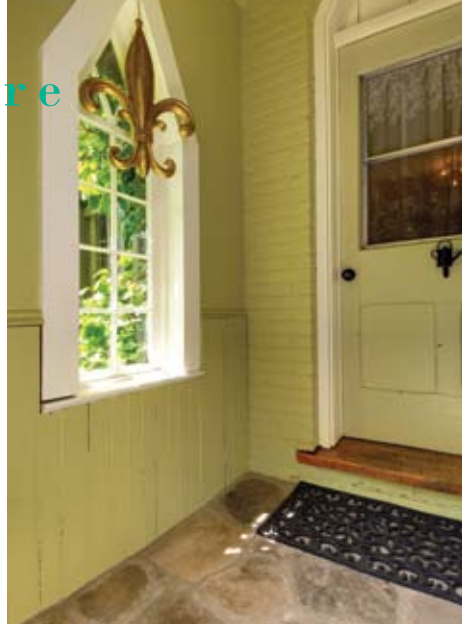
Today the Greens’ home is more than a just a piece of local history, it is a showcase for Rhonda’s artwork and collectors items, as well as for her favourite furnishings sourced through her décor shop. The Greens are the owner-operators of **Greentree Gardens and Emporium**, a nursery and décor store located west of Collingwood on Highway 26. Doug manages the nursery and Rhonda the emporium.

Rhonda’s eclectic aesthetic has introduced such delights to the home as a black sparkled cow trophy, a trio of stacked steamer trunks for extra storage space, many gorgeous mirrors to help bounce light and energy into the dark interior, a collection of jewelry from the 1920s, and lovely interior wood doors reclaimed from a local demolition company.

Portraits of the couple also adorn the home – Rhonda’s was painted at the beautiful age of 18 wearing a leather fringe 1970s necklace, and Doug’s adorable blown-up photo shows him at the age of four in overalls in the garden, complete with bucket and hoe.

*Continued on page 102*





Doug's love of nature and plants clearly goes back a long way, perhaps also inspired by the church's previous owner who planted extensive gardens with medicinal herbs and berries in the churchyard. "It was a spiritual place," recalls Doug. "She taught a lot of us how to garden. She knew about medicinal herbs, berries, composting, making manure tea and doing things to enrich the soil, and she taught us how to encourage bees by leaving out a kind of carrot juice. She was really ahead of her time."

Today, the property grounds extend over an acre, and with the couple's peak working season in the nursery being the spring and summer, they have chosen to put in stunning perennials and trees to keep their yard at home low maintenance. "We've put in over 80 varieties of trees here," says Rhonda. "We do some experimenting in our yard to see whether a certain species can survive in this climate zone." She points to one of their experiments: a trio of Redbud trees that are native to Georgia, which are absolutely thriving with gorgeous heart-shaped leaves that turn yellow in the fall. *Continued on page 106*



**TOP LEFT:** A fleur-de-lis hangs in the gothic window in the vestibule of the Green's home.  
**ABOVE:** Hostas and a variety of perennials line the walkway to the front door of the church.  
**LEFT:** Originally built to be a garden shed, this sacred small space has evolved into a great place to read a book on a summer afternoon.

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Mom  
100 times.



She only got  
flowers  
once.



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Doug and Rhonda plan to stay in their home for the long term because of the serenity of their church home and the lovely community that surrounds them. Doug jokes, “There was never a cemetery here, so I can’t be buried here, but I figure I can get my ashes spread at the church cemetery across the road. I don’t ever plan on leaving.”

Rhonda plans to update the 150-year-old church by expanding the master bedroom and enhancing the kitchen. “We’re considering opening up the ceiling even higher; there’s another eight feet of space

above the existing ceiling,” she notes. “Whatever we do, it will be functional, but won’t take away from the beauty and character of the church.”

Perhaps, too, in their later years, the couple will also have a chance to spend more summers camping in their retro RV. Rhonda shines as she shows off the RV’s glamorous interior, complete with lush cushions and beaded curtains. They’ve respected the character of the cockpit by keeping its original peach velour. **OH**



**ABOVE:** Picture perfect. Two bicycles sit parked outside the garden shed – yet another delightful small space. **LEFT:** Rhonda and Doug love hitting the open road in the vintage 1985 RV they purchased for a mere \$2,500.

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