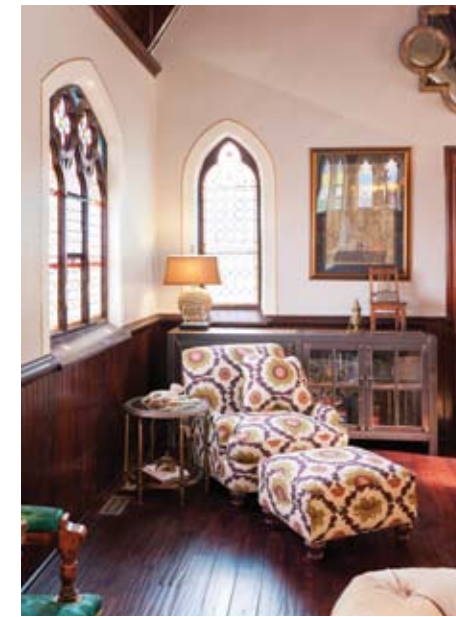


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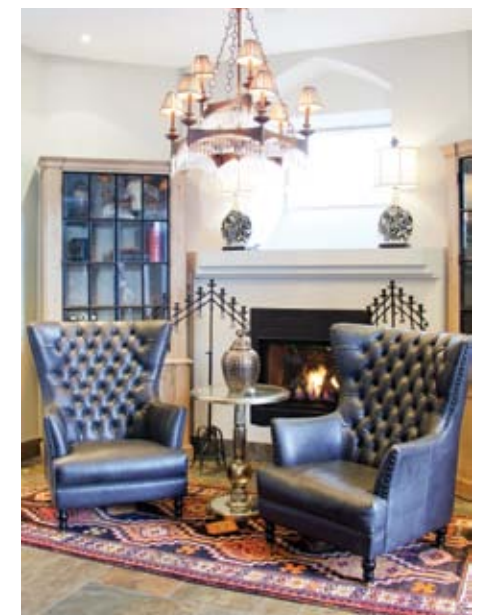
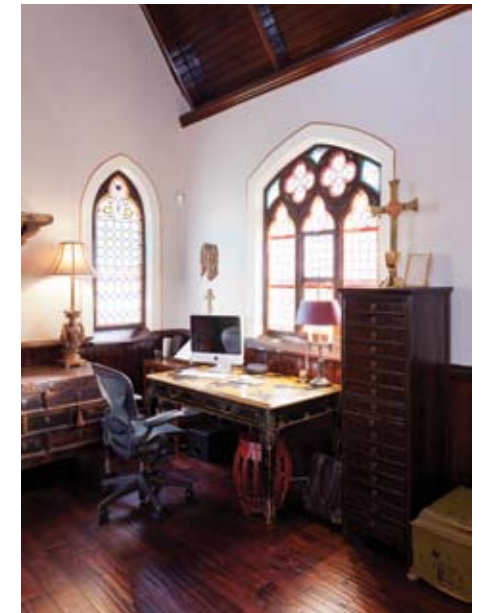
Divine INSPIRATION

Sometimes, all you need is a little faith. “Our goal was simple: we wanted to create a fabulous family home out of something others considered not worth the effort,” says Danielle Benning, who turned a former church into a cosy sanctuary for her family. *Continued on page 37*

BY LISA MACCOLL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON HARTOG



OPPOSITE: The church's peaked roof and panelled ceiling creates a striking silhouette for the family's living space. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: (1)** The front doors are as welcoming as always. **(2)** Danielle and Martin own Cornerstone Home Interiors, so they were able to find the perfect furniture for every space in their home. **(3)** Danielle snuffs out a candle with the church snuffer. **(4)** All of the church's stained glass windows remain in place. **(5)** Large leather chairs frame the ground level fireplace perfectly. **(6)** The main floor bathroom features a rustic wood vanity that warms the space. **(7)** Only a large, solid table would suit the dining space in this home. **(8)** Danielle incorporated many items left behind in the church into her décor. “Anything that belonged there stayed,” she says.





LEFT AND BELOW: Modern fixtures, custom cabinets and top-notch appliances turn what was once the church's sanctuary into a functional, stylish kitchen. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Twelve-year-old twins Simon and Garreth shared this bedroom. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** A bright accent wall livens up this ground-level living space. **OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT:** Danielle found area rugs to suit every room in the house – even the master bath. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** The master bedroom features comfortable furniture and a cozy fireplace.



St. Matthew and St. James Anglican Church was founded in 1893 in Cambridge (then Hespeler). Over 110 years later, in 2009, when the congregation dwindled to a handful of parishioners, the Anglican diocese sold the property and all its contents to Danielle and her husband Martin Rawlinson.

"The building has a heritage designation so we renovated the interior and left the exterior intact, although we did landscape the 30-car parking lot. We have to tell delivery people or guests they are looking for a church or they drive right by," says Danielle.

She and Martin teamed with Danielle's father, Richard Benning, to create a liveable design for the interior. Richard focused on designing the kitchen and the master bathroom while Martin designed the remaining bathrooms and the second-floor configuration. The couple did much of the work themselves. "Martin had a vision, and he never dreams small," says Danielle. "We created a space that is both grand and welcoming."

The structure has 32-foot vaulted ceilings and interior plaster walls that were 24 inches thick. The stained-glass windows were restored in 2000 and the new owners decided to keep the accompanying brass plaques commemorating the parishioners who paid for the facelift. "We wanted to create a family home, while respecting the history and integrity of the space," says Danielle. "People baptized their babies here, people were married – we wanted to honour the history."

The biggest transformations took place in the kitchen and the ground level. The sanctuary is now the kitchen and features modern appliances and a marble island with seating for six. It's based on a design by Richard Benning, in collaboration with **Joe Furtado** and **Carlos Loureiro** of **Loureiro's Custom Cabinets**.

"We were fortunate to find local craftsmen who understood our needs, were able to work within the limitations of the space, and were proud to be associated with the project," says Danielle. All the tile-work and granite flooring was completed by **Master Ceramic Flooring Ltd.** and the hand-scraped teak floors on the main level come from **Source Flooring Distributors**.

"We had to replace all the plumbing, electrical, heating and air. It was the most expensive and least glamorous part. We took it from a Model T to a Lamborghini," says Danielle. "We had to put plumbing in where no plumbing existed." The water table runs under the property, so adequate drainage and French drains had to be added. "We poured six inches of concrete in the ground level and added in-floor radiant heating."

The lower level of the church originally housed a kitchen and community rooms, as well as two furnaces, and featured 13-foot ceilings. Martin, Richard and Danielle collaborated on the floor plan, which resulted in the creation of the master bedroom, two children's bedrooms, a media room and two bathrooms featuring walk-in rain forest-style showers. *Continued on page 38*



feature



Danielle and Martin created a beautiful, colourful room for their three-year-old daughter Eden. Her en suite is equally classy. An adult would be just as happy in the space as a young girl!



Decorating a space once occupied only by pews proved to be a challenge. The scale and age of the room required careful consideration. The contents of the church were included in the sale, so Danielle re-covered the altar chairs with old vestments and positioned them in the living room. The hymn board found a new home in the guest bathroom and unique liturgical items such as large brass candlesticks are spread throughout the home.

In spite of the array of stained glass windows, very little natural light filters in. Danielle and Martin added several large chandeliers to brighten things up while maintaining the majestic feel of the main room. Luckily, as the owners of **Cornerstone Home Interiors**, they were able to test furniture and lighting in the space to find the best pieces. “When the chandelier arrived in the showroom, we sent it straight to the house,” laughs Danielle. “We cycled at least six sets of chairs until we found the perfect set for the dining table.”

Sound echoes in the room, so Danielle and Martin carefully selected area rugs in complementary colours to add warmth and visual interest and to act as sound baffles. “We couldn’t decorate the walls because of all the stained glass windows, so we decorated the floor instead,” says Danielle.

Many of the pieces – such as the bases for the sinks in the master bath and the bed in their daughter Eden’s bedroom – are Chinese antiques, which

Martin acquired on buying trips for Cornerstone. “They were the right style and age,” says Danielle. “We took our time to find just the right light fixture, just the right switch cover or vent cover, just the right chest – we wanted everything to be a synergy between our home and our business.”

To add extra comfort to the bedrooms, Danielle and Martin chose commercial grade wall-to-wall wool carpet from **Sarmazian Bros. Ltd.** Located at ground level, the master bedroom features a walk-out to the terrace. The side entrance is guarded by a life-size statue of St. Gerard Majella. “He’s solid wood and very life-like, especially at night,” says Danielle. “The cross looks like an axe. He’s our security!”

The family lived in the home through more than two years of renovations, at one point sleeping at one end of the great room and covering the living area every morning with a 47-foot Canadian flag to protect it from the dust. The lower kitchen remained in use until the feature kitchen was complete, and then the lower half was sealed off.

The family had planned to stay in their unique home forever, but a new opportunity presented itself and they are preparing to move. “It’s bittersweet,” says Danielle. “We poured our heart and soul into this place, and now we’re leaving. We’re really pleased with the final results. It’s grand and peaceful.” **OH**

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