



# 100 Years, 100 Breezes

BY LAUREL FORTIN // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY

When George Vickers bought a 100-acre parcel of land atop the escarpment in Grey County west of Thornbury in 1853, it set his family back £200. By 1875, the family had built a sturdy yellow brick house along the dusty path known today as Old Mail Road, carved by pioneers destined for the new townships of Collingwood and Osprey.

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Finding high winds sweeping their farm year round, carrying snow squalls from Georgian Bay in the winter, the family set about planting an enclave of red pine trees to protect the house from the worst of the drafts. Tucked inside the pines, Mrs. Vickers planted an English garden, complete with hedges and roses to remind the family of their homeland.

Ninety years later, in 1965, with the pines nearing 100 feet tall, the fine, yellow brick house and 100 acres passed out of the Vickers family. New owners continued to farm the land for several years, and installed a geothermal heating system (**Clarksburg Contractors**) on the property. Pipes buried a few metres below the surface are filled with an antifreeze solution that is circulated and delivered to a central heat pump, where heat transfers into the home by way of a forced air ventilation system. In summer, the process is reversed and heat is drawn out of the home back into the ground.

When its current owners spotted the acreage for sale in 1995, they fell in love. Two city dwellers from Oakville with a hankering for fresh country air, the professional couple knew little about managing a farm but were drawn to the property's charm. Quickly befriending neighbouring farmers, the couple rented out the fields for crop production and began to learn how to steward their diverse property.

Today, the home and gardens are radiant. Tended with the help of Teresa Matamoros and staff at **Garden Holistics**, perennial flowerbeds skirt the house and edge of the property, the formal English garden within the front enclave of towering pines has been lovingly maintained, and a new, rear vegetable garden stocks the pantry of the homeowners with potatoes, onions, tomatoes, peppers, beans, eggplant and more at each harvest. *Continued on page 45*



Like a secret garden, this shaded sitting area is surrounded by lush green lawns and has gracious curves and colourful blooms. **BELOW LEFT:** Views abound at every angle. The side entrance has a covered porch and a lovely view of the vegetable gardens. **BELOW RIGHT:** The entrance to the pool area, which is surrounded by flowering bushes and perennials. A simple wooden bench sits near the entrance to the majestic barn. **OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:** Teresa Matamoros and son Gabriel, of Garden Holistics, have been taking care of the estate's gardens for years. **OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT:** A stone staircase leads from the exterior garden and orchard to the home.





This is a true country kitchen with modern amenities. The cabinetry and all built-ins are white and bright. OPPOSITE: An antique harvest table fits nicely between the kitchen and the quaint, comfortable main living area. Books fill the shelves.



The approach at Garden Holistics is all organic. “We try to do what’s best for the plants. It often means working at the soil level to amend with composting and top dressing with natural materials, nothing chemical,” says Matamoros. “We also recommend hardy plants to our clients that have a good chance of success on their own; nothing that needs constant attention or watering.”

In the spring, Garden Holistics meets with the owners to plan for the season’s work. “This year we’re putting our attention into the orchard. There was rodent damage to some of the apple trees, so we’re replacing them with a Cortland apple, a plum and an oriental pear tree, to create more of a fruit orchard,” says Matamoros. Nut trees will go in as well, including a hickory and a hazelnut. Berry bushes were planted behind the barn to offer an even greater diversity of fruit: blueberries, raspberries and goji berries. “We’re trying honeyberries as well – they’re

in the honeysuckle family and produce an elongated blueberry-like fruit that is supposed to ripen in the spring before strawberries,” explains Matamoros.

The property is among her favourites to work with. “When you’re gardening for a client, the garden becomes like your own,” she says. “This home could be self-sufficient with a permaculture theory. It’s an example of where, yes, you can have a beautiful garden, but you can have vegetables as well. You can have nice trees, but have them for food production as well. It brings in an ecological diversity of bugs and insects so that you don’t have an infestation or imbalance of any one thing.”

Garden Holistics’ work is in sync with the vision of the owners. “You create a different sense of living when you can go outside,” says the owner. “Each garden is like another part of the house that is equally as important as the interior.” *Continued on page 47*

Fine china, antiques and collectibles fill the colourful dining room. **MIDDLE:** A trough sink is a modern addition to the butler's pantry. **RIGHT:** The living room offers plenty of comfortable seating and opens to a breezeway and library.



Inside, a major renovation five years ago saw the brick house double in square footage. "We hired Gren Weis Architect & Associates in Oakville; he is known for keeping a historic aspect when renovating a home. We wanted to maintain the home's history," says the owner. They expanded the kitchen, adding a family room to the rear of the house, with a new master bedroom above. An octagonal sunroom and conservatory went in at the opposite end of the home.

Because they loved the yellow brick exterior, they salvaged and reused as many bricks as they could, taking each wall down with care and locating some of a similar age and colour in a Mississauga brickyard. "We found bricks that the Vickers family had carved names or dates into over the years; any bricks that had carvings were replaced back into the house somewhere," says the owner.

While the escarpment-top winds haven't eased over the years, the couple was able to solve one of the home's draft problems during the rebuild. "Once, when guests were up, we heard an incredible noise – the wind had caught the door and blown it off its hinges," describes the owner. The couple took the opportunity during the rebuild to move the front door to the lea of the building, overlooking the formal English garden, safe from the powerful winds.

In their spare time, the couple travels the world. Memories of their excursions are peppered throughout the home. A Buddha statue from Asia adorns the butler's pantry. An Aboriginal woman's button blanket tapestry from B.C. hangs on the dining room wall. Large soapstone carvings of birds stand around the windowed perimeter of the conservatory where the couple relaxes to read books from their extensive library. *Continued on page 50*



A breezeway leads to the conservatory where books are shelved low as not to obstruct the magnificent view.



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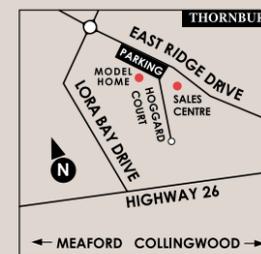
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The master bedroom with this striking spa-like en suite is located upstairs in a private area of the home. **MIDDLE LEFT:** A blue and white guest room. **BOTTOM LEFT:** A room for the visiting children features the works of local artist Shelagh Fox. **BELOW:** Folk art lines the hallway upstairs.



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They are purveyors of local crafts and wares as well. "Many pieces we've picked up at **Mary Sarah Antiques** in Flesherton," says the owner. A guest bedroom features bear and paddle art by Thornbury artist **Shelagh Fox**. A set of tumblers by Eugenia blown glass artist **Kate Civiero** of **Infinite Glassworks** awaits company.

The home's basement balances the old and new. Floor joists and the old stone foundation are featured and preserved, while the modern wine cellar was designed by J. David Ellis of JDE Residential Design to make use of the home's old cistern. Collingwood's **SaunaRay** built and installed a roomy sauna that the couple enjoys in the winter months.

Back outside in summer, the owners dip into the pool deftly designed by Collingwood landscape architect **Richard Moore** and installed by

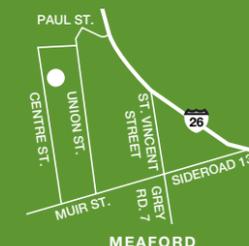
**Clearchoice Pools and Spas**. A knee-wall of dry-stacked stone rings the pool and tries to hold back the lush greenery and white, fleecy flowers of the *Persicaria Polymorphy*; the small, yellow, daisy-like flowers of the *Anthemis*; the fluffy, purple flowers on the long stems of Joe-Pye weed; delicate evening primrose; *Echinacea*; daylilies and multiple varieties of tall grasses.

Around the acreage, the owners can always find a sunny or shady spot to relax. The escarpment winds are tamed and become a light breeze through the 100-year-old trees. "There is a lovely movement of light around the property. My favourite time is in the evening with the incredible sense of green that comes," marvels the owner. "The shadows that happen through the trees around 7 p.m. with the sun are so tranquil and peaceful." **OH**

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