

# DECK THE HALLS

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Foraged wild mushrooms shared under a wood-beam ceiling may conjure up images of off-the-gridders in a country cabin, but the appeal of forest harvesting and natural building materials has also found its way to the well-appointed suburban kitchens of health-conscious families.



Santa welcomes guests to Sel and Tanya Vespera's Barrie home, built three years ago. **BELOW:** Sel's pride and joy, a '69 Chevrolet Chevelle Malibu convertible. **OPPOSITE:** A rustic cabinet in a hallway is tufted with greens and Christmas cheer for the May Court Club of Barrie's Homes For The Holidays Tour.



Early-retirees Sel and Tanya Vespera built their 3,800 sq. ft. home by **Normerica Timber Homes & Cottages** (with **Greg Ballantyne** of **GB Enterprize Ltd.**) on Barrie's eastern perimeter three years ago. Tanya sought an upscale country look, mixing rustic materials with fine finishes. Sel, a former landscaper, wanted garage space to protect his truck, snowmobile trailer, boat, riding mower, and '69 Chevrolet Chevelle Malibu convertible (complete with fuzzy dice and a crucifix hanging from the rear-view mirror). "A joke from my son," he smiles.

A shared philosophy of hard work and smart investing allowed these first-generation Canadians to get both – although Lucy, their seven-year-old "very spoiled" English Bulldog, acts like the house was custom-built for her. *Continued on page 57*



**RIGHT:** Glass railings surround the staircase leading to the lower level. A glass table and bench fit nicely in the space. **FAR RIGHT:** Barrie's Garden Centre provided all the flowers and greens for the home. **BELOW:** The great room is where the family gathers to enjoy the fire and the big screen television.



**LEFT:** This powder room is unique with its stone vessel sink and L-shaped custom vanity with open storage. **BELOW:** The sleek Jøtul fireplace warms the reading nook off the kitchen. **BOTTOM:** Greens, giant pine cones and elevated candles grace a windowsill.



“I love my fridge, it’s huge!” laughs Tanya as she describes the imported-from-Germany Leicht kitchen with Miele appliances. With no upper cabinetry to block the view to the adjacent great room’s 20-foot peak, the spacious, square room is a favourite. “You can have hors d’oeuvres on one side, and someone can still cook.”

Just off the dining room, and leading out to the Trex-clad deck and six bays of garage space is a cosy reading room with leather chairs, a sofa and a slim, sleek Jøtul fireplace with a three-sided view of the flames.

“We have breakfast there nearly every day,” says Sel, who enjoys this intimate nook that also leads up to a home gym and guest suite loft.

But when there’s a larger crowd, the great

room is the go-to destination, with a massive floor-to-ceiling tiled fireplace providing an elegant focal point. A high-tech glass guillotine screen descends to contain the wood-burning firebox and demonstrate the beauty and practicality of rustic and refined elements. The juxtaposition is echoed with modern furniture made of iron and stone, antler art and brass accents to warm things up.

Amid the décor sourced from Pottery Barn and Restoration Hardware are one-off treasures given new life by Tanya.

“There’s a lot of work before you get to the fun stuff – the decorating,” she acknowledges of the building process. “I find some interesting things in thrift stores and vintage shops. I’m in deep mourning over the passing of Goodwill.” *Continued on page 59*





Lucy the English Bulldog believes the home was built just for her, says Tanya.

The modern Leicht kitchen is surrounded by timbers. There are no upper cabinets to block the view to the adjacent great room. All appliances are from Miele, including Tanya's huge refrigerator, concealed by cabinetry. **OPPOSITE, TOP:** The dining room has a spectacular view of the outdoors. The chandelier is a showstopper. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The quartz kitchen counters have room for a festive display for the holidays. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Even the laundry room behind the kitchen receives a festive touch.



An imported ocean stone that looks like petrified wood also caught her attention. It's now an eye-catching vessel sink in the powder room off her laundry, which she designed with the help of Pinterest and the custom millwork of Muskoka Custom Cabinets.

Stevenson Plumbing & Electric and heating contractor **Charlie McCallion** of **A Few Degrees More Inc.** were also instrumental in the construction.

Last year, when the Vespera home was featured on the **May Court Club** of Barrie's annual Homes for the Holidays fall tour, guests entered through its 10-foot front door and under the transom by **DeCola Windows & Doors**. They stepped across a foyer floor by **Desert Tile** onto hand-scraped Austrian oak boards from Northern Wide Plank that continue through most of the three-bedroom bungalow.

"In-floor radiant heating runs through the entire floor – as well as the basement (which contains a 1,200 sq. ft. self-contained apartment), garage and loft," explains Sel. "We put in a forced air furnace as backup, but we've never needed it."

This year, as heating systems warm up, the May Court tour will feature five very different houses – from an artistic haven to a Bass Lake B & B. All homes will showcase the talents of local decorators and florists who donate their work and supplies to support the tour's fundraising efforts. *Continued on page 60*





feature

**RIGHT:** This bedroom is warm and cosy. Faux fur bedding tops a majestic bed. **BELOW:** A very wide hallway leading to the sleeping quarters is graced with art with impact. **BOTTOM:** This grey and white en suite has pops of pink. All the floors are heated.



“Every penny we make goes right back into the community,” says Sharon Fitzsimmons, Homes for the Holidays 2016 convenor. “I think that’s a selling point for this tour. We’re helping those in our community who need our help. That’s why I became a member. I really believe in the philosophy.”

In 2015, more than 1,400 people came through the tour’s tea room. This year, major sponsor **Salnek’s Custom Window Treatments** will be in attendance all weekend.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the

Homes for the Holidays event, a few silver anniversary bonuses have been added. For example, in addition to the five scheduled homes, the Waterford Retirement Residence on Edgehill Drive is opening its Christmas-themed lobby to the tour for the first time.

In the tea room, a surprise sweet will be added to the menu, while fashion shows by Janet Kemp and Garden Gallery entertain and inspire. The popular unique boutique and gourmet section will return with hand-made delights from May Court members and friends. *Continued on page 62*

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A heavy throw is like icing on this bed with its tufted upholstered headboard. **RIGHT:** The en suite's walk-in shower has a pebble stone floor. **FAR RIGHT:** A vessel tub is surrounded by floor-to-ceiling tile.



“I recommend anyone attending to go there first because things go fast,” warns Fitzsimmons.

Homes for the Holidays 2016 runs November 19 and 20, with tickets available at the **May Court Shop** on Maple Avenue and, for the first time, online at [barriemaycourtclub.ca](http://barriemaycourtclub.ca).

With tour duties finished and work days behind them, the Vesperas are free to do as they please. Especially now that daughter Katie’s recent move has left them empty nesters. They’ve considered travelling to California, New York City, Italy and heading out in an RV. But then MacKenzie, their environmentalist son, drops by to share his freshly harvested chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms from a nearby forest and they’re in no hurry to leave. **OH**

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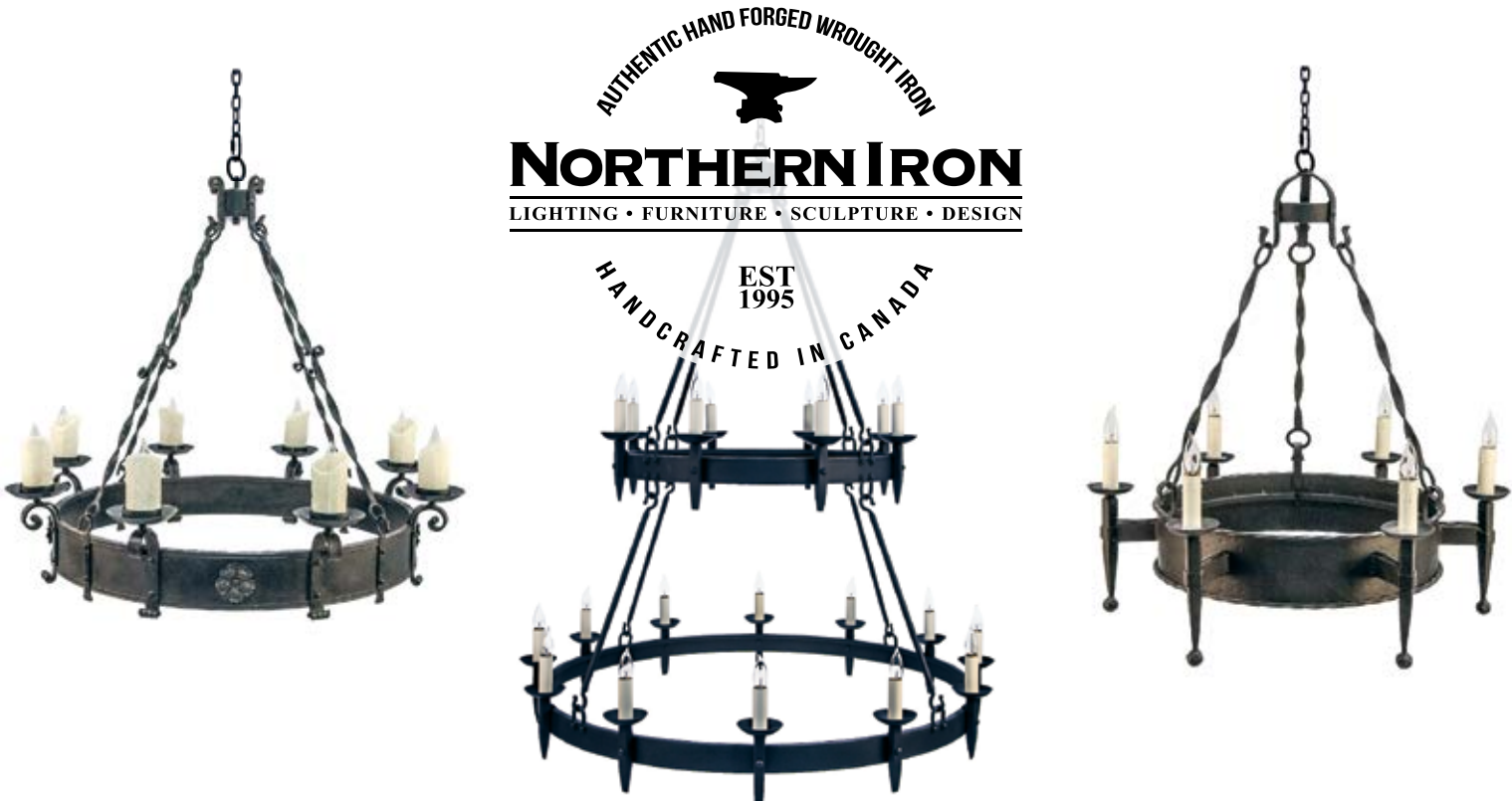


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