



THE
simple
LIFE

STORY TIFFANY MAYER
PHOTOGRAPHY KELLY HORKOFF

The homeowner's personality and her keen eye for antiques show in every corner.



There's no mistaking Margaret Currie's Scottish brogue. Yet when it comes to life at home in her Port Dalhousie bungalow, Currie takes her cues from the French.

Joie de vivre is present in everything, from her choice of wallpaper in the bedrooms to the antiques filling her cosy nest. The pleasure Currie derives from life in this lakeside hub of St. Catharines is evident the moment you step into her charming home, which also subscribes to the Scottish adage that "guid gear comes in sma' bulk" (good things come in small packages).

And after years of running two bustling bed and breakfasts in Niagara-on-the-Lake, small – and simple – were all that Currie desired when she traded looking after guests for looking after herself.

"It's light and airy," Currie says. "It's how I feel. As you get older, that's how you live. It's a tiny wee house but I love it to death. It's mine. I don't think I'd change a thing about it at all."

That wasn't the case when she bought it in 2002, however. Currie saw scads of potential in the plain, white-sided bungalow off Main Street and didn't shy away from taking on the work to make it her dream retirement home.

"Although I was in Niagara-on-the-Lake (before this) and many people stay there, I wanted to do my business and then leave," she explains. "I like something with a wee bit of oomph to it that I can do something to."

She made big changes to the 1,000 sq. ft. house, including heightening the pitch of the roof, and smaller ones by comparison, like adding a chandelier, bought for two dollars at a hotel furniture sale, to gussy her back deck. "Curb appeal is really important to me," says Currie.

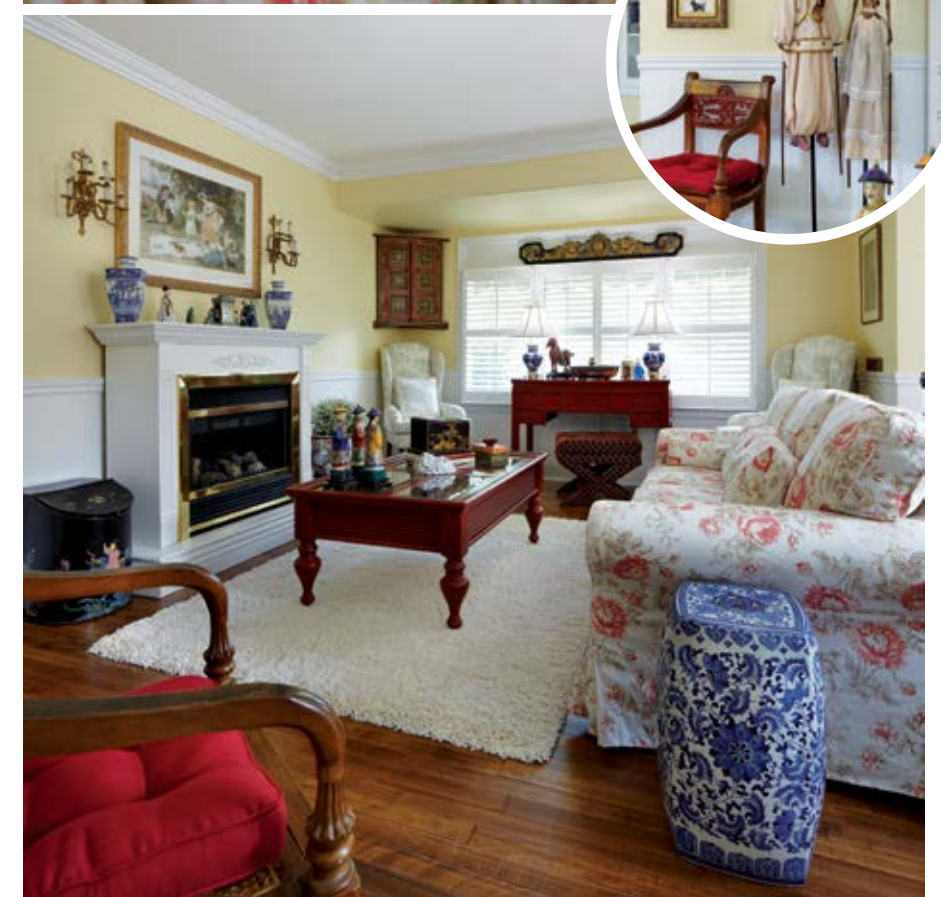
The roof pitch, however, was perhaps the most dramatic change. The previous 4:12 was elevated to 12:12. Faux dormers were added, giving the illusion of another storey and a Cape Cod feel. Though the change was her idea, the growth spurt was a shock when it happened.

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LEFT: A galley kitchen equipped with plenty of white cupboards adds brightness and functionality. **BOTTOM:** Antiques and refinished bargain finds lend warmth, elegance and cosiness to the living room. **OPPOSITE, TOP:** A lean-to nook is made inviting with the addition of antiques refinished to have a French country look.

Antique royal wedding couple puppets from Jakarta are striking conversation pieces.





LEFT: Wood panelling on walls in the guest bedroom was filled in and papered over with soft birds and flowers. **RIGHT:** The French country look and feel is carried throughout the house, even into the main bath. **BELOW:** Toile paper, a Capodimonte chandelier and furniture refinished in a matching palette make for an elegant master bedroom.



There are plenty of nods to her past, though. She added a dollhouse-like shed to the backyard. It currently stores her furniture projects in-waiting but once she clears them out, she plans to host tea parties and make it a playroom for her grandchildren, similar to what she saw as a girl growing up in Glasgow. "It just reminds me of that, and that was a very happy time in my life."

Her mature backyard is a natural refuge come summer with a large tree canopy casting shade on the hottest days, clematis vines bursting with blooms and lush ferns requiring little maintenance. Though she didn't have to do much to it when she moved in, she hired **Rozema Rock & Stone** to build a new rock garden in the front yard.

Best of all, her home is just a few hundred metres from Lake Ontario, a bonus she didn't discover until after she took ownership. Having lived near water in Scotland, it's another nod to her past. But Currie, who clocks up to eight kilometres on daily waterfront walks with her golden retriever, Skye, is living in the present while keeping her eye on the future.

"I love coming into my house," she says. "That's the most important thing is loving coming home. It's what I love – the feeling of airiness and French country. I'm Scottish but the French have an easy way of living. They're more laid back. I'm a huge believer that what you put into a home shows a home. It's not the bricks and mortar." **OH**

LOCAL SOURCE GUIDE

- ACF Surfaces Inc. • Amber Stairs and Railings Inc. • BM Awnings • C. Lynds & Sons Paving Ltd. • Elmwood Fine Custom Cabinetry • Hayes Construction • My Paris Apartment Antiques • Rozema Rock & Stone • Sierra Stone • Tool Time Home Improvements Inc.



"I remember the day they started working on the roof, I came around the corner and said, 'Oh my, that's high.'"

She hired **Hayes Construction** to lower the main floor windows 18 inches from her new roofline because she knew "it looks better." Hayes also handled the less showy but critical electrical updates and renovations to make the basement livable again after two floods left it in ruins.

Changes to the plain exterior were tied together with new eavestroughs and cream-coloured siding by **Tool Time Home Improvements Inc.** The Thorold business also helped bolster the home's energy efficiency by redoing the insulation throughout.

Inside, Currie's bright and efficient galley kitchen wasn't always a home cook's dream. It had only a small single sink and it lacked storage space – there was only one stand of cupboards – when she bought it.

Hayes expanded the space by moving access to the basement stairs from the kitchen

to the adjoining lean-to nook that would go viral on Pinterest with its antique mantel and gleaming chandelier that scatters the light. That reconfiguration also enabled **Elmwood Kitchens** to up Currie's storage by adding more cupboards with a white finish that's both timeless and trendy. AcryFleck Industries, now **ACF Surfaces Inc.**, installed the countertops, giving Currie a large surface on which to work.

Though it isn't flashy like a high roofline, changing the basement access was one of Currie's favourite renovations. It enabled her to do away with the flimsy and steep open stairs that were painted with a zebra stripe motif. **Amber Stairs and Railings Inc.** installed a set of solid straight stairs on a more gradual incline that Currie is confident she could run down. The wood staircase flows with much of the flooring in the rest of the home, which she had refinished.

There's little in her humble home to remind her of her previous life as a B & B owner, save for the welcoming feeling she's created. Currie

sold everything when she officially retired. She gladly bid adieu to 200-year-old Scottish and European antiques, including a regal 250-year-old German poster bed.

She replaced those items with bargain finds, and on a tour of her house, she rhymes off with pride where she scored her striking pieces, including a \$90-mahogany hutch she refinished herself and painted white: Kijiji, a garage sale, antique hunting, the curb.

The work she's put into restoring each piece, giving many a French-country look, belies where they came from. Currie works her magic with them in a garage-turned-workshop that's equipped with a cushy, warm floor made of recycled tires and installed by **Sierra Stone** in Welland.

"I've never bought a new sofa in my life," she boasts. "I love antiques because I grew up with them, but when I left (my B & B), I wanted light. I was brought up in big homes all my life. I think it's the idea of living easy or living easier. It's not about worrying about posh pieces anymore."

TOP: Lush gardens in the backyard provide a low maintenance and shady refuge for homeowner Margaret Currie, her granddaughter Audrey, 6, and golden retriever Skye. **ABOVE:** This once plain white bungalow was given a dramatic facelift with a new roof pitch, faux dormers and cream-coloured siding. **LEFT:** A dollhouse-like shed has great potential as storage or an extension of the home to host backyard tea parties. **RIGHT:** Some of Margaret Currie's finds from local antique shops.

