



# BUILDING *character*

BY LAUREL FORTIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY  
STYLED BY LEJLA EDEN

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Lorraine and Bill Strain have given the village of Creemore a wonderful compliment. The couple's new 2,500 sq. ft. home went up on the village's main street last summer, yet it blends in so well with the century homes that many locals thought they had simply renovated the house that formerly sat on the lot.

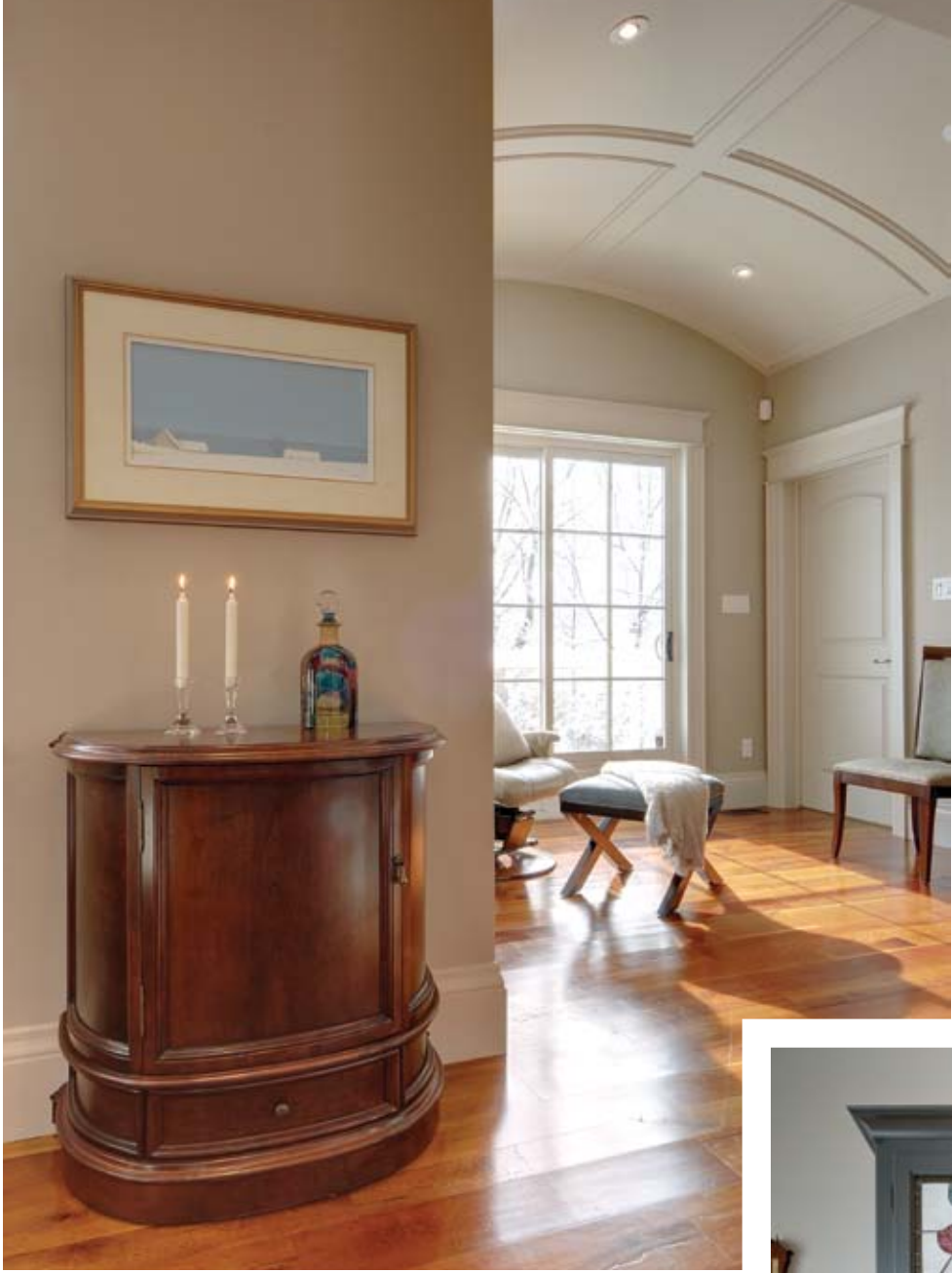
*Continued on page 113*



With its traditional Victorian-looking exterior, this Creemore home looks as if it's been a part of the village forever, but in fact, is less than a year old.



A dark island paired with light taupe cabinetry by Riverside Custom Cabinets helps separate the kitchen, and offers a focal point in the large, open living space. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: (1)** Collingwood drywall expert Marcel Rutte incorporated a stunning barrel ceiling above a sunny sitting area off the kitchen. **(2)** Builder Doug Abbott and designer Lejla Eden chat in the front entranceway. **(3)** The home's front entranceway is elegant and simple with lots of space to store boots and coats. **(4)** The kitchen hutch is one of the Strains' home-crafted creations with stained glass doors by Creemore's Maggie Sears.



Bill and Lorraine did the initial design themselves, then had **Jasper Design** refine it and prepare the construction drawings. For the build, they secured **Doug Abbott** at Creemore-based **Village Builders Inc.** Abbott helped source brick that was most reminiscent of the other homes in the area. "It was fun to build an old Ontario-style house and put modern conveniences in it. It has old-style trim work and antique floors inside, yet it's a very modern house in terms of its insulation value and the technical aspects," says Abbott.

The Strains had lived 12 years on an acreage on the hill overlooking Creemore, but decided in retirement that they wanted the convenience of town living. They found the large block-wide property in 2009 and noted that its tall cedar hedge and significant elevation change from side to side offered interesting possibilities as well as privacy. The couple, both retired accountants, considered updating the existing home but found that the structure wasn't sound and so opted to remove it and build new.

Part of what pulled them to live in Creemore was the town's appreciation for heritage and quality. "We committed to the community and we wanted to build a place that fit in," says Lorraine. "We didn't want a modern structure, because it is a very pretty street with all the old homes so we wanted very much to build something in kind." *Continued on page 115*







**OPPOSITE:** Traditional and contemporary styles are combined to achieve a warm, elegant and clean look. **TOP LEFT:** The Strains enjoy watching the snow fall while playing a game of chess in the living room. **MIDDLE LEFT:** A sofa topped with baked goodies helps make the transition from the dining room to the living room. **BOTTOM:** Bill and Lorraine reminisce with Village Builder's designer Lejla Eden, who worked on the project from start to finish.

They longed to keep the beautiful old ash tree out front and to accomplish a traditional Victorian look, yet they wanted a bungalow-style interior with all their main living spaces on the ground floor. With these constraints, Bill set about thoughtfully designing the home. While Jasper Design prepared the final drawings, **Vogel Landscaping Design & Consulting Group Ltd.** prepared the landscape design and later managed its implementation by **Hackstone Stone Craftsmen**.

One of the benefits of designing your own home is that you can account for your furniture and leave plenty of space for your hobbies. The Strains did just that. Their basement is a dedicated woodworking shop where both Lorraine and Bill will spend winters collaborating over fine furniture and wood accessories. The shop was specially built to be isolated from the rest of the house. "It had to have its own heating system," says Abbott. "It couldn't be part of the house system so that there would be no dust transferred from the shop to the other parts of the house." The main house is forced air gas, but they used in-floor heating in the basement (**Nottawasaga Mechanical**). They also made the room fireproof. The walls are fire rated, doors are fireproof and it has its own electrical supply (**Lorne Bunn Electric**). *Continued on page 116*





Over the years, in their previous workshop, the couple built themselves a bedroom set, grandfather clock, dining room hutch and numerous side tables among other projects. Bill was able to keep those dimensions in mind when laying out the bedroom, living room and office. Once they had their new house plans, they spent the winter of 2010 designing and building bathroom vanities for their master en suite and main floor powder room.

“We find it takes two to think things out and hold and glue,” says Lorraine. “Two heads are better than one.” Their joint efforts are gorgeous. The powder room vanity has a modern feel – its four legs were part of one large round that Bill turned on the lathe and cut into quarters. A mirror

featuring a tree motif, made of brushed steel by an artisan in Elora, was the inspiration for the room. Tiles were picked out at **Dean’s Carpet One Floor & Home** in Duntroon.

Sourcing wood from local suppliers like **Hamilton Bros. Farm & Building Supplies**, the Strains have occasionally collaborated with other artisans, such as Creemore stained glass maker **Maggie Sears** for the doors of their kitchen hutch.

The width of their handmade home office furniture dictated the space they would need between the upper bedroom windows, which were mirrored on the other side of the house and duplicated on the lower floor. A filing cabinet set in the hall has its own custom-sized alcove. *Continued on page 118*



**FAR LEFT:** Soft, neutral colours and lots of natural light make the living room a calm, relaxing space to enjoy year-round. **LEFT:** The master en suite features double sinks, a large glassed-in shower and leads to a full dressing room. **BELOW:** The main-floor master is a dreamy space filled with sunshine, and gorgeous linens and accessories from Victorian Values in Creemore.







**LEFT & BELOW:** Bill and Lorraine collaborate on a woodworking project together in their lower-level workshop. The shop boasts its own heating system, as well as an industrial vacuum and an assortment of saws and tools. **BOTTOM:** The couple crafted the unique vanity in the main-floor powder room.



Their love of wood brought them to **Danny Farrow** of **Nostalgic Wood Inc.** to source flooring. He found just enough gorgeous, reclaimed wide-planked cherry to install as flooring throughout the main level and had enough left over to build the upper staircase. The rich tones of the aged cherry help the home look like it has stood for decades.

Abbott and the Strains praise mason **Chuck Kenney** for the historic-style brickwork. "I thought a brick was a brick was a brick," says Lorraine. "But you can look at bricks in so many sizes and colours. We wanted one that worked on our bay window, where like with old houses, the bricks can come in a 45-degree angle so that there is no mortar line on the corner. It's one of those details that you don't think about until you start buying brick."

In the kitchen, Lorraine knew that she wanted to work with childhood friend and cabinetmaker **Rob Perry** of **Riverside Custom Cabinets Ltd.** Light taupe cabinetry maximizes the space. Features such as a walk-in pantry and slide-out corner cabinets make the kitchen very functional. The island's cook top has a pop-up downdraft vent that stows away when not in use so that a hanging range hood doesn't have to impede on the home's open concept. Appliances are from **Macdonald's Countrywide Furniture & Appliances** in Meaford and all countertops are from **City Stone** in Thornbury. *Continued on page 120*

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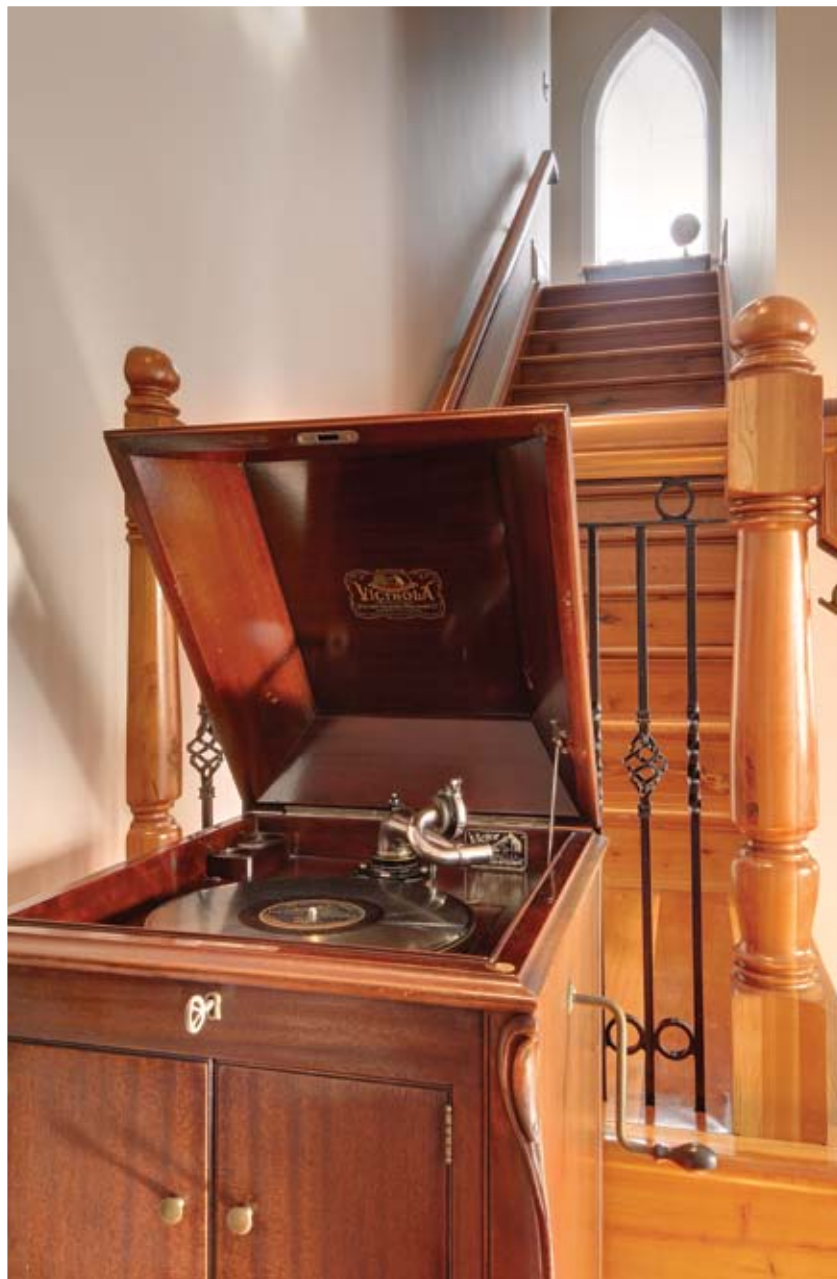
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**ABOVE:** The upstairs landing offers a quiet place to enjoy a good book, welcoming natural light through a stunning cathedral window. **RIGHT:** An antique record player adds to the character of the home.



Before building their home, the Strains visited Village Builders' office where Collingwood drywall expert **Marcel Rutte** displayed beautiful samples of various styles of his work. The Strains spotted a stunning barrel ceiling and asked to have Rutte incorporate one into their home. The barrel ceiling now tops a sunny sitting area off the kitchen.

Finishing touches in the home were handled by Village Builder's in-house interior designer **Lejla Eden**. "Because the whole house is so open, we used Benjamin Moore's Smokey Taupe colour throughout," says Lorraine. "Lejla suggested the walls and ceiling be done in the same tone, but cut in half. Instead of using white, which would have been too much, this colour is wonderful and warm."

Village Builders is one of the only firms in the area to have a full-time interior designer on staff. "Most construction companies offer good building skills, but when it comes down to the final interior product, there's a bit of a disconnect between the expectations of the client and

*Continued on page 122*

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A charming guest room on the upper level provides friends and family with a quiet and comfortable place to stay when visiting.

the expectations of the builder,” says Abbott. “We’ve stepped that up a notch. When all the finishings are going on at the end of a build, Lejla takes over. She makes sure that the clients get exactly what they want and the finishes are of a high quality.” Eden also helped source several décor accents for the home, such as towels, bedding, throws and cushions, from Creemore shop **Victorian Values**.

On the exterior, the Strains brought in Hackstone Stone Craftsmen to complete the landscaping. Over 200 tonnes of local rock and flagstone were brought in to construct a formal entrance on the main street as well as an inviting, yet private backyard space. A mix of new hardscapes and softscapes blend with the existing ash tree and hedge on the property. A majestic, graceful stone staircase inset with a patio and several landings helps transition from the back deck of the home to the lower yard. Hanging exterior lanterns were found at the **Glass Lighting Gallery**.

Combining the Strains’ immaculate taste with the skills brought by Village Builders and respective trades, Creemore’s newest stately home holds its own among the oldest. **OH**

## SOURCE GUIDE

Armour Roofing Co., B&R Hearth and Geothermal, Cedarport Window & Door Centre Inc., Chuck Kenney, City Stone, Dean’s Carpet One Floor & Home, Glass Lighting Gallery, Gorilla Gutters, Hackstone Stone Craftsmen, Hamilton Bros. Farm & Building Supplies, Jasper Design, Lorne Bunn Electric, Macdonald’s Countrywide Furniture & Appliances, Madill Plumbing, Maggie Sears, Marcel Rutte Dry Wall Inc., Merv Allen, Nostalgic Wood Inc., Nottawasaga Mechanical, Riverside Custom Cabinets Ltd., Stayner Tim-Br Mart, Victorian Values, Village Builders Inc., Vogel Landscape Design & Consulting Group Ltd., W.D. Dimitroff Central Vacuum Specialists

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