

# LABOUR OF *love*

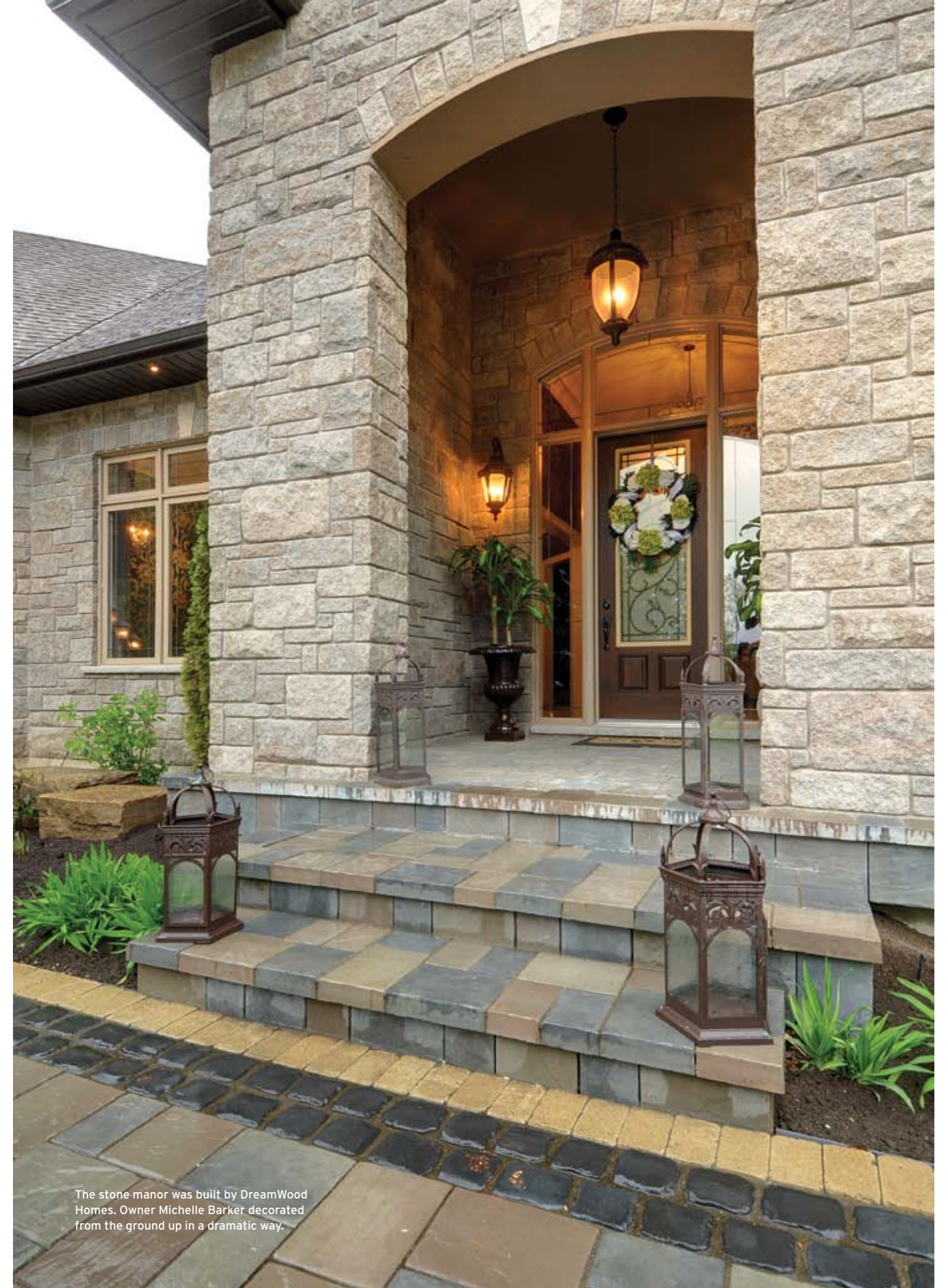
BY KATHLEEN DUNCAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY



The stone manor in the woodlands of Springwater Township stands testament to a man's love for his bride, and her desire to create the perfect family oasis.

"This was Tim's gift for me," says a beaming Michelle Barker, looking around the 5,000 sq. ft. custom-built bungalow by **DreamWood Homes** that showcases her design and decorating preferences. "Our first house in Midhurst was supposed to be our dream home. We created a paradise backyard and renovated the entire main floor, but I wanted to do something from the ground up."

This may not be the first project Michelle has tackled – as evidenced by the sewing machine (and home-made curtains and quilt) in the guest room, knitting needles and crochet hook tucked by her four-post bed, and a series of hand-trimmed wreaths awaiting their season to shine – but it's certainly the largest. *Continued on page 31*



The stone manor was built by DreamWood Homes. Owner Michelle Barker decorated from the ground up in a dramatic way.

Dark cabinetry and tumbled marble meet in the kitchen. Built-in appliances (TA Appliance) make preparing and cooking a meal a snap. The butcher block was made especially for Michelle. **OPPOSITE:** The elegant dining room seats 12-plus and the Barkers host family gatherings often. The crystal chandelier is a fabulous find. **TOP RIGHT:** The laundry room has a handy exit to access a clothes line. **BOTTOM RIGHT** The kitchen table, where the family eats most meals, has a view of the acreage out back.



The indulgent smile on Tim's face speaks to his obvious pleasure in watching her craft the perfect home for their life with son Aidan, now five. Judging by the plush dog beds throughout the house, Rusty, a three-year-old Standard Poodle, isn't far from their considerations either.

Giving back to her supportive spouse, Michelle carved out a man (and big-boy) cave in the three-bay garage where Tim and Aidan bond in the comfort of a large couch – and in the company of exotic cars, tools and an assortment of off-road vehicles. The projection TV is coming soon.

Aidan's south-wing haven boasts a race-car bed and associated décor, making Michelle a shoe-in for coolest mom of the year. So does the playground's built-in fort and circular slide that are clearly visible through a wall of windows.

The same prairie-style mullion grid repeats in the many windows, transoms, sidelights, doors, dormers and architectural portals that splash natural light into each corner (including the walk-out basement, garage and even a couple of closets). *Continued on page 32*



Aidan's blue walls (PPG Pittsburgh Paint's March Wind 25-12 from [The Paint Shoppe Colour Consultations](#)) and darkly stained hardwood flooring (that continue throughout most rooms in the house) give way to tile in a well-appointed bathroom shared with the adjacent guest room. Here, a dual-sink vanity, glass-fronted shower and whirlpool soaker tub with a nature-loving view outside provide the tools for serious relaxation for children and adults alike.

"You might as well install from the beginning what you know you'll want eventually," Michelle reasons, illustrating the attention to detail obvious in each room. Helping take advantage of every nook was [Ferndale Cabinets](#), which provided built-in shelves, drawers, cupboards and multi-bin cubby units. "You can never have enough storage."

The Barkers also have high praise for DreamWood Homes. "We have had and continue to have a very good experience with this builder," says Tim. "We have found their knowledge of the home building

requirements and all associated materials that have gone into our home to be exceptional and the care and quality that they put into our initial home construction and subsequent projects is second to none. We would definitely recommend without hesitation [Tino Zarcone](#) and [Chris Nitsopoulos](#) and their company." The Barkers were also impressed with the care and expertise of on-site construction manager [Aldo Santia](#) of [Aldo Santia Construction](#).

Guy Dumas from [The Design House](#) designed the home and, Michelle says, was committed to quality and easy to work with. Local trades, including [Rainers' Siding & Roofing](#), [High Definition Home Systems](#), [Sunsational Landscapes Inc.](#), [Riverwood Irrigation](#) and mason [Rob Benson](#) took care of the details.

[Decorating Den Interiors' Melanie Potter](#) helped Michelle achieve the timeless appeal she desired, including sourcing the dining room's bold black wallpaper and a table large enough to welcome extended family.

*Continued on page 34*



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tim, Aidan and Michelle Barker relax with their three-year-old Standard Poodle Rusty. **LEFT:** A nook off the grand foyer has two doors – one leads to the powder room while the other will soon become a large walk-in closet. **BELOW LEFT:** The powder room. **BELOW RIGHT:** The loft above the garage is a wonderful space to work and unwind.





The master bedroom is a peaceful oasis with an incredible walk-in closet, a large en suite with a tub that Aidan loves, plus a balcony for watching the sun rise and set.

“Using some black or dark brown grounds a room,” she explains, acknowledging the neutral walls of the great room (Coffee Kiss 418-5 and Dark Granite 520-7 satin finish, from PPG’s Speedhide brand) that contrast with Monterey White (HC-27) trim, high baseboards, crown moulding and lofty ceilings (coffered and vaulted in some rooms to increase the lift and interest).

“I like the warm, classic look that lasts for a long time,” she adds.

She didn’t, however, require a shopping spree to outfit her family’s new home, preferring to recycle pieces from previous homes, trade with her mom and sister, and incorporate furniture, accessories and souvenirs that add more than beauty or functionality alone.

While granite countertops, state-of-the-art appliances and custom cabinetry provide luxurious mod-cons to prepare either a dinner party or cosy meal, elegant assistance is also close at hand from Aunt Holly, in the form of her silver tea set. Michelle and Tim’s wedding guests are recalled to the gathering by a set of votive candles, and the shared amusement from a day of cross-border shopping returns with an upward glance at the “crazy chickens” from Frankenmuth.

Elsewhere, antique sock stretchers and shoe trees handed down from grandparents add historical depth to the laundry room, while artwork

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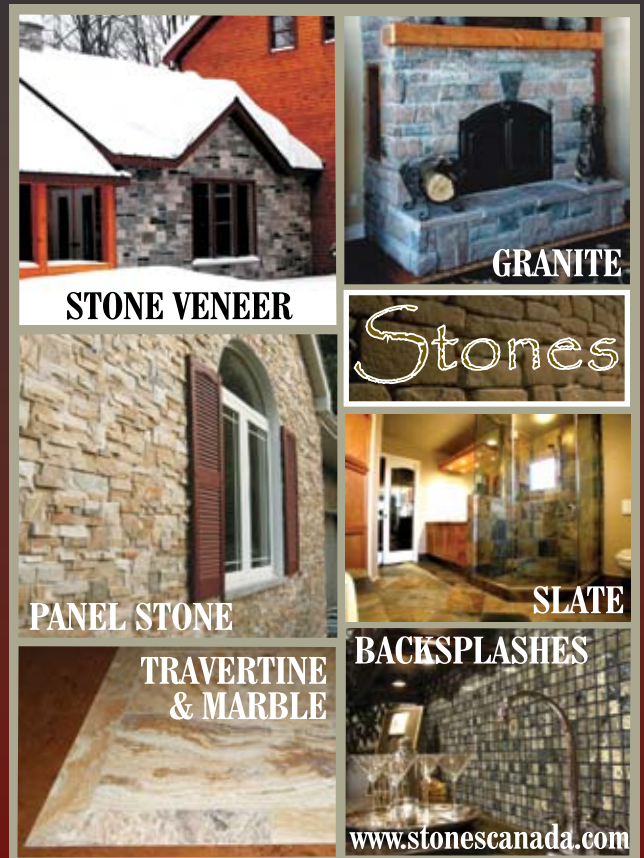
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gathered from the honeymoon in Paris and a Dominican Republic vacation brightens the master suite and the garage-top loft. Dotted throughout the house is an assortment of weigh scales collected and gifted by Michelle's mother. Michelle's father's lineage is honoured by the recurring fleur de lis motif. Not to be forgotten, the Barker coat of arms is displayed with pride as well, as are reminders of Tim's hockey glory days – including his invitation to an NHL training camp.

"It's our piece of paradise," says Michelle standing on the private balcony off her bedroom. She points beyond the deck to the starting point of a trail system cleared by Tim and his Polaris Ranger. After meandering to the ravine at the back of the property, it returns to a campfire set-up in the back yard.

"It's like being at a cottage," she reflects, charmed by the chirp of crickets. "I just want Aidan to enjoy his home and have the best of everything."

With the needs and wishes of her family in mind, she plans the final touches of this multi-year project that has been a labour of love from the start. **OH**

Aidan's love of cars is evident in his ultra-fun bedroom. Tim and Aidan spend a lot of time in the "man cave," where Tim stores and tinkers with his exotic cars and all-terrain vehicles.



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