



Changing cities was a part of life for the Foots, until eight years ago, when they moved into their custom home by Gilkon Construction. Georgian Bay living is easy with access to the outdoor space from both the main or lower level. **OPPOSITE, TOP:** The sunroom at the front of the home offers panoramic views and a quiet place to start the day. **BOTTOM:** A well-worn curved boardwalk leads down to the water where the summer fun never ends.

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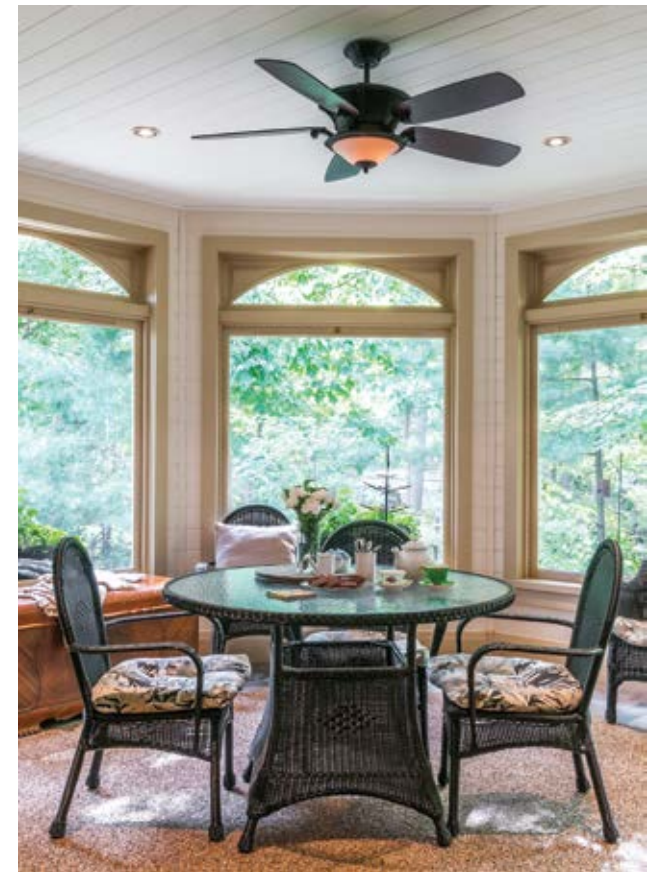
STORY **ANDREW PHILIPS**
PHOTOGRAPHY **SANDY MACKAY**

After nearly four decades of riding the rails, Kathy and Neal Foot are happy to settle down.

A long-time Canadian Pacific Railway executive, Neal and his wife of 46 years have lived across Canada and also enjoyed a sojourn stateside.

“We’ve been here for eight years and that’s the longest we’ve ever been in one place,” Kathy explains during a tour of their lovely, two-storey home overlooking the shores of Georgian Bay. “We’ve lived in London, where we met while going to school along with Schreiber, North Bay, Calgary, Revelstoke, Sudbury, Revelstoke again, Burlington, Minneapolis, Saint-Lazare and Calgary again.” But what made a couple who have seen so much of North America decide to settle near Balm Beach in Tiny Township, about 10 minutes down the road from Midland?

“In Saint-Lazare, we had friends who talked about this area,” Kathy explains. “We went to visit (them) one winter and ended up buying a cottage here while still living in Calgary. We liked the idea of being on the beach and being able to walk it.” *Continued on page 48*



home & builder

While that original cottage is long gone to make room for the Foots' spacious and fully-accessible home, their love for the area they discovered by happenstance has only grown.

Both have become active in the community, Kathy following her creative passion to Quest Art School and Gallery, with Neal relishing his role as chairman of the Georgian Bay General Hospital Board, which actually began after a visit to the Midland hospital's emergency room.

"You get what you give," Kathy says regarding the couple's desire to become active community citizens. "When you live in a bigger centre, you don't get to know people as well."

Neal says he likes the community feel one finds in a smaller place. "You've got to get immersed in the community," says Neal, who is also involved with the local Shrine Club. "You also get to know more people. We hope the friends we're making here are long-term friends."

The Foots, who have four grandchildren, give plenty of credit for creating their dream home to Toronto-based architect Brian Lee of The Ideal Environment, who managed to design everything they wanted on a relatively narrow piece of property.

"He had to fit everything into that footprint," explains Neal. We wanted it to fit in with the landscape."

Both Neal and Kathy also can't say enough about local firm **Gilkon Construction Ltd.** Gilkon brought Lee's drawings to fruition while incorporating many of their own personalized design touches to ensure the home has a number of unique characteristics.

"We're very different people so we each had to have our own space," Kathy says, noting that while Neal can be described as more "straight lines" she is more "abstract."

Adds Neal: "We really relied on Gilkon. We only visited the building site a few times."

Antero Kontkanen, who ran Gilkon at the time before passing the reins on to current owner **Chris Bondar**, says the narrow 50-foot-wide lot did present a few issues when beginning construction.

"There were some pretty good challenges," Antero says, noting the Foots were a pleasure to work with during all aspects of the project.

"For the size of the home, it's a narrow lot. And it was tough working in that area, especially when it's so sandy." *Continued on page 51*



ABOVE: The open-concept living area includes plenty of room for fine dining off the kitchen. **LEFT:** Kathy Foot stands between two talented gentlemen, Gilkon Construction's current owner Chris Bondar (left) and Antero Kontkanen, the previous owner who passed on the reins. **OPPOSITE:** The two-storey ceiling in the great room is clad in painted wood panels. Majestic beams appear to float between the upper walls. The windows up high fill the house with light.



The yellow kitchen has curves, a just-the-right-size oblong centre island and chef-quality Viking Appliances. There's no shortage of granite-topped counters for prep and stained-glass inserts by Linda Bennett add an artistic flair to this upcountry kitchen. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Art fills the walls in this home – a testament to Kathy's artistic roots and the couple's appreciation of creative talent.



But with those early challenges successfully addressed, Kontkanen, Bondar and the rest of the Gilkon team never looked back.

Starting from the first floor, one can tell the home has managed to retain a warm cottage feel with plenty of large picture windows that provide stunning views of the bay and the mature trees that were left standing during the building process.

An open-concept living room/dining/kitchen area ensures no one is ever left out of the conversation because, as Kathy notes, "I don't mind working in the kitchen, but I wanted to be part of everything and still see the water."

Throughout the main floor, one finds many special touches from enjoying the glow provided by one of the home's two Town & Country fireplaces to selecting a book to read from the adjoining custom bookcases built by Tiny's **Matthew Whetstone**.

Gilkon also used reclaimed hemlock flooring to give the first level a warm touch along with custom interior beams that provide an airy feel while also allowing extra natural light.

Painted in an inviting Dijon yellow, the spacious kitchen offers plenty of workspace with would-be chefs able to enjoy the high-end appliances purchased from Midland's **Barber & Haskill**.

A really neat room located just off the foyer manages to provide the cosiness of an old-style front porch while offering modern functionality. Its windows can be lowered into a crawl space to provide a screened-in look, a Gilkon signature.

There's also a large mudroom and powder room as well as a master bedroom complete with a large en suite and wonderful views of the bay.

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Throughout the home, one finds inviting decorative touches thanks to the inspiration provided by companies like Midland's **Cabin Boy** and **Jann's Custom Window Fashions** in Penetanguishene, which provided colour and décor consulting and draperies and window fashion help, respectively.

The upper level has several guest bedrooms, a three-piece bathroom, a cosy sitting area and what could arguably be considered the home's pièce de résistance... at least for those with an artistic bent.

Kathy's made-to-order art room features cork flooring, more large windows to provide lots of natural light, loads of workspace and enough art supplies in a variety of mediums to make any would-be Alex Colville or Jean Paul Lemieux envious.

"I always kind of dabbled in art," Kathy says. "I used to ski, golf and curl, but when my knees got bad, I really started to paint. I like to paint at night and can play my music as loud as I want."

That love has also led to both Neal and Kathy becoming involved in the local art scene and a chance to meet a number of other artists.

"I still take courses and with lots of artists in the community, I can pick up on their energy," she adds. *Continued on page 54*



A beautiful guest room upstairs awaits a visit from the grandchildren. **BELOW:** Kathy's art studio upstairs is a special place. The views of Georgian Bay inspire her creativity. Kathy says she's always working on "about four things at once."



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An elevator helps Kathy get from one floor to another when she has a knee flare-up. “I also can use it when I’m carrying things up to my studio,” she says.

Taking the elevator down two flights brings one to the basement, which features Neal’s office, or as Kathy refers to it, his “playroom.” It’s stocked with plenty of memorabilia from Neal’s days with Canadian Pacific, including a working train bell he received upon retirement, and custom cabinets designed by Midland’s **Georgian Kitchen Centre**.

There’s also a wonderful family-room for watching TV, reading or playing games. Another enclosed space houses the home’s essential HVAC and water filtration systems installed by Midland’s **Tom Downer Ltd.**

The bay also plays an important role in the basement’s evolution with an entertaining kitchen for those needing a refreshment, a mudroom with plenty of beach towels, another guest room, a beach-inspired bathroom and resilient tile throughout to handle both water and sand.

A large walkout gives guests the chance to enjoy the effective landscaping by **Kelly’s Northern Landscapes Inc.** of Victoria Harbour. Neal added his touch with Kathy as foreman and built a curved boardwalk leading to the beach.

The Foots were so happy with the end product that they hosted a barbecue party catered by nearby **ELM Catering** for all the tradesmen and their wives.

“We can’t say enough about Gilkon,” Neal says. “We can’t say enough about the house. It’s weathered very well.”

And after so many years of staying in one place for only a short period of time, the artist in Kathy says it’s refreshing to not have to worry about eventually being able to sell a home quickly by only painting rooms in neutral shades.

“We don’t have to paint everything beige,” she jokes. “We can put our own stamp on it.” **OH**

TOP LEFT: The river-rock fireplace surround on the lower level captures the home’s style and location. **LEFT:** When the Foots are entertaining in the summer, the lower level kitchen comes in handy. It’s a short walk to the lakeside entertaining area. **ABOVE:** Neal’s office is full of memories from his career with the Canadian Pacific Railway.



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