



A Passion for Art and Design

Meet Andrea Graham

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PHOTOS BY IMAGE DESIGN

Your home is a reflection of yourself. How you decorate, accessorize, choose colours, and design each room shows who you are and what you love. Oakridge resident Andrea Graham has accented her home inside and out with art, sculptures, and curated pieces of iconic furniture that reflect her passion for art and her love of design.

After having lived in Halifax for nine years, Andrea was ready to move somewhere for her retirement, and truly wanted to be close to her only grandchildren who lived in London. “We had become acquainted with London over the years as our older two girls had attended Western University, and we had done numerous trips here to move them in and out over the years.” So, in 2008, Andrea and her husband Al chose a ranch-style home in the Oakridge area that this design enthusiast knew she could develop to incorporate her own style. “The house was built in 1956, and we bought it from the original owners,” she recalls.

“The previous owners had five children, and they had converted the garage into a play area for the children as they were running out of space.” The former garage now contains a cozy den, filled with pieces of original art, many from local London artists, that Andrea has collected over the years. Adjacent to the fireplace in the living room, is a stunning collection of Canadian pottery that catches the eye upon entrance.

Once they took possession of their new home, the couple embarked upon a renovation that allowed for it to become more open, yet still provide enough wall space for Andrea to display her art collection. The exterior of the home also received an upgrade. New colours for the siding and brick as well as extensive landscape design turned the yard into a stunning oasis of colour, which this octogenarian still plants and maintains herself. Andrea points out the multiple sculptures featured amongst the flowers and greenery, as well as the large pieces of unique driftwood that rise up from

the ground. “I found these along the beach, and place them and rotate them to become a focal point in the gardens.” Over the years, the front door has changed colour a few times—from eggplant to pumpkin to the now Dijon colour. “It has been a display of different food groups!” exclaims this passionate designer.

While there are so many things to love about this neighbourhood, Andrea recalls the landscape esthetics as an important aspect of their selection. “When I lived in Nova Scotia, some of my years were on the water, and others in a mid mod home amid the rocks and trees. The large, mature trees in Oakridge feel very much like that part of Halifax.” This active senior also finds that her neighbourhood offers such great access to the city, “it’s easy to get around from here.”

When asked where her love of art first developed, Andrea explains, “my sister married a man who studied under a member of The Group of Seven, and that helped foster my appreciation for

art.” Over the years, she has built many friendships with local artists whose unique pieces dot her home.

In her role with the PineRidge Arts Council in Durham Region, Andrea set a goal to increase the number of members within the organization. “I wanted to take the art to the people, to where they were,” she explains, “instead of bringing the people into an institution that displayed art.” She visited the offices of doctors, lawyers, local politicians, and asked if she could hang the art of local artists in their offices—and she had many agree. Her desire to show others the joy of art, while supporting the artists themselves, undoubtedly exposed many people to the beauty of these creations, and increased the membership of the Council.

In other public spaces, this determined woman helped facilitate a juried competition for a sculpture to be selected and purchased for a shopping centre in Pickering. “Four international sculptors made presentations to the jury. Because I had become friends with all of them, I was unable to participate in the selection of the winning sculpture, but in the end, the \$30,000 prize was given to a deserving artist.”

Her passion for creation and style were not limited to just art, but to architecture as well. In 1989, she and her husband purchased a two-acre lot just north of Ajax. The couple hired and collaborated with an architect to design a stunningly unique home situated on a small lake. “We built a

4000 square foot house and I just loved the entire design process,” Andrea reflects. “There was much interest in the home, named The Butterfly House, throughout the architectural community.” Every summer, the expansive porch operated as a stage, as the couple hosted lively parties featuring AI’s musical talents. “My husband was a singer in a Rhythm and Blues/Rock and Roll band for over 30 years, and they would put on a great show!”

As Andrea walked through her yard and home, sharing incredible stories of how she arrived at this point in her life, it is clear the journey has been full of adventures. As a young girl in 1957, she was desperate to see Elvis Presley live, and shared that desire with her mother. She watched as her mother picked up the phone, asked the box office for five of the best seats available, and purchased sixth row tickets for Andrea and her friends. At the time the family lived in Port Hope, and Andrea’s mother was adamant that the girls would not be taking the train to Toronto alone, so she hired a local taxi driver, who happened to drive a Cadillac, to take them to Toronto for the concert. In her collection of memorabilia, remains an original photograph she took of Elvis with her Brownie Hawkeye Camera, along with the negatives.

Defying the cliché of becoming a sedentary senior, Andrea remains extremely active. “I swim a kilometre once a week, ice skate once a week, and do Aquafit at the Aquatic Centre twice a week along with



other seniors.” Her energy and enthusiasm for life are matched only by her love for her three daughters. “I have fantastic, intelligent, intuitive, beautiful, and caring daughters—I couldn’t ask for anything more.”

Raising three successful daughters, finding a beautiful home to retire in and make it her own, and pursuing a life-long appreciation for art and design definitely bring great joy to Andrea’s life, and her passion and vivaciousness will no doubt continue for years to come.

Do you know a neighbour who has a story to share? Or maybe your family has an interesting story. Nominate yourself or your neighbour to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at jmatthews@bestversionmedia.com.