



HISTORICAL GEM SPARKLES

200-year-old stone house has charm and lots of bling

BY DEE GIBNEY • PHOTOGRAPHY: KELLY HORKOFF • STYLING: LAURIE CLARK

DESIGN
Autumn 2013

RUSTIC BLING, RUSTIC GLAM: these oxymorons define Shirley Walters's taste and her surroundings. Matriarch of the country music group The Walters Family, Shirley has a style that epitomizes the genre's glitzy side.

"We like the old and the chunky – but it's got to have bling," Shirley says.

If it glitters, it will find its way into the Walters's 200-year-old stone house nestled on a picture-postcard property in the gently rolling countryside between Kitchener and

Woodstock. Sparkly crystal chandeliers dangle from newly uncovered rough-hewn wooden beams. In the kitchen, mirrored upper cabinet doors with crystal knobs add sparkle to the modern black custom cabinetry and reflect the post-and-beam ceiling. Flecks of rich garnet embedded in the granite countertop punctuate its mottled, rough-chiselled edges.

In the living room, a silver bench draped with a throw Liberace would have coveted cosies up to the glossy digital baby grand

piano. Family photos are framed in rhinestone-embedded metallic frames. Silver lamé cushions adorn the white kidney-shaped sofas.

"We love to shop," Shirley acknowledges as her daughter Kimberly nods in agreement. Asked about the "one in, one out" maxim for avoiding clutter, Shirley exclaims with a laugh, "Oh no, we just find room for it." ☞

The theatre graces 15 perfectly groomed, gently undulating acres of landscaped grounds on a 180-acre farm.



Busloads of faithful fans arrive daily from across North America, often hours before the dinner theatre performance, to stroll the carefully tended decorative gardens. The 200-year-old, three-storey stone house, with walls two and a half feet thick was built by a German stonemason who used rock from the large property.



*“We like the old and the chunky
– but it’s got to have bling,”*

Previous owners once held Saturday dances in the large living room for all the neighbours from surrounding farms. The white kidney-shaped sofas, discovered by Shirley on one of her shopping expeditions, were custom built for someone else who decided not to purchase them.

“No matter what we do, we’re a collective. Every decision is a family decision.”

One might well wonder when she finds the time. Shirley’s still performing after some 40 years on stages across North America (including the Grand Ole Opry) and even on European cruises. Six days a week, from the beginning of June to the end of September, she dons her rhinestone-studded high-heeled boots and glittery costume and plays bass with two younger generations of her musical brood at the family’s onsite dinner theatre.

It all began when Shirley and her husband Garry were persuaded by their children, all under age 10 but already playing a variety of instruments, to take up bass and drums to form a band. The children taught their parents. Soon they were playing on local TV, and eventually much farther afield.

Eldest sibling Brad plays guitar and, along with sister Kimberly on keyboards, sings lead vocals. Brother Darren plays violin (and nine

other instruments). He’s also the group’s lighting and sound engineer. Kimberly’s 11-year-old son, Schyler, already a veteran model with his own website, has joined the family act, proving his skills on the fiddle.

A barn on the property was converted into a 160-seat theatre in 2000 to give the Walters more time at home. Visiting artists have included the late Rita MacNeil and a plethora of Nashville stars whom the Walters often

entertain in their home. Shirley’s home-cooked dishes are a welcome change from the indistinguishable restaurant meals that are a performer’s steady fare on the road. When time is tight, Shirley brings in professional chefs to cook for her guests. ☞

The living room is reflected in the entertainment room’s floor mirror next to the staircase.



The kitchen floors are random-patterned silver travertine, replacing the old pine floors built by Shirley's father from trees he cut on the lot 43 years ago. Mirrored upper-cabinet doors with crystal knobs add sparkle and reflect the post and beam ceilings. The solid ash cabinets were custom built by Cuisine Laurier. The rustic island legs at the end of the white granite counter are re-purposed studs from the section of an old wall that had been removed.

“Sweetheart, I want you to have the kitchen of your dreams.”



An accomplished cook (she has published her own cookbook), Shirley decided two years ago that the old 1960s-style kitchen, “the heart of our home,” was not working for the family. The blue-tiled island built by her father decades ago had awkward U-shaped steel-frame benches with limited seating. The space was chopped up and did not allow the home’s original character to shine through. The ground-floor bathroom walls protruded into the kitchen, and the large, frequently

used deck (with a commercial-grade charcoal barbecue and wood-fired pizza oven) could only be accessed by going through the narrow front door and around the veranda to the side of the house. A change was in order.

This would be the first time that the Walters handed over the reins to professional designers. Other areas of the house, such as the dramatically transformed master bathroom, reflect the family’s own ideas as executed by their contractor.

The bathroom is now a luxurious fieldstone sanctuary, with slate floors replacing wood. It was previously much smaller, only five feet by six feet, and covered in drywall, which was removed to reveal a beautiful stone niche – a perfect spot for the new soaker tub. The bathroom was further enlarged by borrowing space from the adjoining workout room. The matching standalone bureau-style vanities are topped with granite and crowned with a twinkling veil chandelier. ✍



The master bathroom was the Walters's own design executed by their contractor. The exposed stone walls create a perfect spot for the new soaker tub. Space from the adjoining workout room was borrowed to lengthen the bathroom. The separate vanities, crowned by a twinkling veil chandelier, boast granite tops.

“They took the seriousness as well as the quirkiness of who we are and blended that into the design.”

When decision time for the kitchen reno arrived, the whole family participated. “No matter what we do, we’re a collective,” says Kimberly. “Every decision is a family decision.”

The Walters considered six quotes. The day was won by certified kitchen designer Andréa Balfour and interior designer Brenda Anderson, who are the principals of Anderson Balfour Kitchen Design Inc.

“They just clicked with us,” says Shirley. “We liked them and we liked their ideas.

They homed in on the bling immediately.”

“It was a big change, a big decision,” Kimberly explains. “And we were still not sure. We wanted someone who would work side by side with us and not impose their ideas. They took the seriousness as well as the quirkiness of who we are and blended that into the design.”

But there was a glitch. At the final meeting, after Shirley and Kimberley had decided on Anderson Balfour, the designers found themselves facing the men of the family.

“Darren was just hammering away at us,” Balfour recalls, now able to chuckle about the tense moments. “He was relentless, challenging us: ‘Well, we can get this for less with so-and-so designers.’ We had already presented and we didn’t know what more we could offer.

“Garry listened, then stood up and leaned across the counter and took his wife’s hand and said so tenderly, ‘Sweetheart, I want you to have the kitchen of your dreams.’”



*“We grew up in this house.
Our memories are here.
This is the house that ‘built’ us.”*



The inquisition came to an abrupt end. “I thought ‘ooh,’” says Balfour. “Everyone was in tears.” Adds Kimberly, “Mom and Dad worked so hard all their lives, and it was time to do something for themselves.”

Over the years, descendants of previous owners who lived in the house have come by to visit. The Walters, in fact, generously hosted the 60th wedding anniversary of one previous owner who was born and grew up in the old stone house, was married there, and flew from British

Columbia every year to visit the house until she was 102 – an attachment that lasted her entire life.

“And that’s how we feel about the house, too,” says Kimberly, who now lives with her son and husband in a modern house nearby. “We grew up in this house. Our memories are here. This is the house that ‘built’ us. I still consider it my home.”

Shortly before press time, Garry passed away. After a full life well lived, he leaves behind a family and a “new” old house full of fond memories. ☛

Garry Walters designed and built much of the home’s original furniture. He hand-carved the bed in the master bedroom in 2005 in keeping with the rustic style of the house. The bedroom in which daughter Kimberly grew up remains as it was when she was a child.

