



# country COMFORTS

BY MELISSA NORTH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLY HORKOFF

Arlene and Fred Bennink lived in the country for 23 years. When they decided to move to Ancaster, the vision of residential designer John Williams and the craftsmanship of **Thomas Cochren Homes** helped them create a new home that brings in the expanse of sky and space they so love.

Set on a leafy street in the picturesque village, near walking trails, shops and restaurants, the Benninks' clean, traditional-style home backs onto the Hamilton Golf and Country Club. It was important to them that the design of their house fit into this historic setting, and they wanted John Williams' signature style – lots of interesting roof lines and details.

"We didn't even really consider other builders," Arlene says, when John recommended Tom Cochren. "He said, 'he's an excellent builder, he has excellent trades, and he'll build you a house rock solid from the foundation up.'"

Nancy Cochren, Tom's daughter and a project manager on the home, worked with Arlene on the interior design. "Nancy understood our vision. Rather than say, 'I think you should do this or this,' she'd take out her iPad and we'd scroll through pictures and she'd notice common themes," says Arlene. "She really helped me understand what I like."

What comes through is a very clean and classic style. The foyer features rift-cut white oak floors stretching through the dining room on the right, and into the open-concept kitchen and great room beyond. Nicknamed "the cherry room" the dining room has a fireplace, reading chairs, and walls of polished shelving. Despite the expanse of cherry wood, the room is bright and inviting thanks to the eyebrow window opening towards the street and the nearly 12-foot-high barrel vault ceiling. *Continued on page 24*

Floor-to-ceiling cherry wood paneling and trim by Neven Custom Trim add warmth and richness. **OPPOSITE TOP:** Comfortable seats by the bay window and close to the fireplace offer a favourite reading nook. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** From left: Tom Cochren, Nancy Cochren, Liliana Inglis (seated) and Vic Pongetti, of Thomas Cochren Homes, on a staircase crafted by Norwood Stairs & Railings.





The cherry wood is carried through to the island in the kitchen but offset by white cabinets. Windows, paramount on Arlene's wish list, run down both sides of the great room looking back towards the golf course and front towards the leafy yard, bringing in copious amounts of light. "In this room we feel we've got the outdoors right inside our living room," says Arlene.

Behind the kitchen is one of Arlene's favourite spots, a small powder room. The floor is made of calacatta marble in a basket weave pattern. "It kind of reminds me of a mosaic floor in Italy, way back in Pompeii, and the collage we have hanging up there is also an Italian scene," says Arlene.

The Benninks wanted to keep their primary living space together, so the master bedroom (with tray ceiling) and en suite are situated on the ground floor, overlooking the back terrace, swimming pool and the golf course. They get the morning sun even as they wake.

With three grown and married children and an 18-month-old grandchild coming to visit, the Benninks need guest space. The finished lower level houses two bedrooms and a large family room complete with fireplace and pool table. (The games area downstairs is also home to an impressive display of Fred's golf balls, collected from courses around the world.) Tucked away upstairs is another large bedroom across the hall from a bright, cheery bath.

Also upstairs, directly above the foyer, is a naturally lit office space with a full wall of built-in shelving. Even more inviting is the reading nook at the top of the stairs, right in front of a double window that perfectly frames a large oak tree and looks down on the first hole of the golf course.

*Continued on page 26*

**ABOVE:** Arlene and Fred Bennink, relaxing in their bright, cosy great room. **BELOW LEFT:** The cherry wood island stands in contrast to the clean white paneling and cabinetry, and provides a natural divide between kitchen and living areas. **BELOW RIGHT:** A second-storey office is airy and loft-like. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The main-floor powder room features Italian-inspired mosaic tile.



Windows along two lengths of the great room walls bring the natural setting inside and a plush rug from Vartanian Rugs keeps things cozy. **BELOW LEFT:** The en suite view, featuring floral arrangements by Fascination Flowers, takes in the manicured backyard and the golf course just beyond. **BELOW RIGHT:** A spacious walk-in closet offers room to organize and display.



# home & builder

**BELOW:** Golf balls, collected from courses around the world, are displayed on the games-room wall beyond the pool table. **RIGHT:** Turquoise wallpaper gives a pop of colour to a downstairs guest bathroom. **BOTTOM:** Carefully chosen Pennsylvania fieldstone adds distinction and character to the home's exterior.



This house was built for longevity using natural products and natural colours, with attention paid to detail at every step of the way thanks to Tom and Nancy Cochren, integral team members Liliana Inglis and Vic Pongetti, and exceptional tradespeople. The masonry, for example, was carefully crafted using Pennsylvania fieldstone, selected by colour and proportioned by size; 20 per cent of the pieces are large and 80 per cent are small and feature more shades of grey. "Sometimes they would pick up 10, 12, 20 stones before they would find the right one for that spot," explains Arlene. Continuing the natural theme, the bellcast roof is made of cedar shingles rather than asphalt, with cedar siding, fascia and soffits rather than aluminum.

You'd never know by looking at the end result, but there were challenges along the way. When the original house on the property was demolished to make way for the new one, they found asbestos. Then they found an unexpected old drywell followed by paperwork required for permits and more permits. Significantly, a steeper grade in the backyard than builders had anticipated meant plans were drawn and redrawn to incorporate the grade. (The result – a gradually stepped, walled terrace and integrated landscaping that wasn't a part of the original design – looks seamless and intentional, just the same.)

Tom, though, welcomes the challenges. "I've dug a lot of holes, I've poured a lot of concrete and I've seen a lot of wood go in, so those things are not challenging to me anymore," he says. "When you do find problems, complex details or real construction challenges, that's what I enjoy." This project was a pleasure for another reason, too. "One of the nicest parts was that the owners trusted us, right from the beginning. That was really rewarding."

"After the design was complete and the materials selected," says Tom, "I knew it had to be quality driven." He challenged the trades from the outset to help make the home a showpiece. "They responded," says Tom, "and as the house came together everyone could tell the project was going to be something quite special."

"Fred and Arlene were great to work with because they saw the value in doing it right," says Nancy. "At the end of the day, it really shows." **OH**

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