

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

House rich with family memories

Celebrating beauty and local design style

BY THELMA FAYLE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY TED GRANT, VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST, JUNE 18TH, 2011



Danuta Le Poole's living room is warm and bright with natural light, and adorned with treasures she has collected or received over the decades.

Celebrating beauty and local design style

This weekly series takes readers on a tour of outstanding homes in Greater Victoria. Writer Thelma Fayle and award-winning photographer Ted Grant take you inside houses that show off unique architecture and design. Look for House Beautiful every Saturday in the Times Colonist Homes section.



Visitor's approach the house on wooden decks and steps, surrounded by shrubbery

White and red rhododendrons in May form the live and large garden sentinels that welcome guests to Danuta Le Poole's home in Ten Mile Point. What warmer or more appropriate reception than nature's own offering of the Polish national colours?

At 84, Danuta still enjoys the garden she has lovingly tended since she and her husband bought their retirement home 30 years ago. In those days, the dilapidated garden was without charm - the house, built in 1941, and had been rented to students for several years before being sold. Danuta and Chris Ball, the man famous for helping to design and maintain the Abkhazi Garden, seeded a transformation on the rolling slope of the half-acre lot.



Each year the rhododendrons burst into the colours of Danuta's native Poland.

Chris designed the colours that are so outstanding today, Danuta says. "And his father George maintained the garden for 15 years."

They made their plans with care and set to work with determination. Their projections have taken fabulous and magical form over the decades.

The recipe for success is one that has been repeated many times by Danuta. The richness of a garden is just one outcome of an elegant approach to life.



Flowering shrubs fill the front garden



From the deck of Danuta Le Poole's home, which was built around the time of the Second World War, the family can gaze over fields, trees and rooftops to the waters of Cadboro Bay.

You cannot stand in Danuta's garden without being inspired.

The 17-year-old girl who escaped from Poland in 1944 has worked hard to achieve her ends. Although she suffered a substantial injury from being hit with a grenade, both she and her determined husband won scholarships in England, where she earned a master's degree in chemical engineering.

Danuta and her husband came to Canada, where she started working in a university hospital, teaching chemistry to interns. While they raised their three sons in Edmonton, she loved teaching math for 10 years.

The twice-widowed grandmother of six feels extremely fortunate to have found two wonderful husbands in her life. Her first husband died in 1971 when her youngest son was 12. She married another "terrific" man, who was also an engineer, in 1982.

As we tour the house, Danuta leads the way to a veranda where she leans over a railing entwined with a travelling vine. She playfully grasps and kisses a small orange rosebud. "A friend gave me this rosebush and my older son says it reminds him of me - in that 'she will go where she likes.' This plant is definitely a 'she,' " Danuta says.

While the house is lovely and contains the richness of family memories, Danuta suggests the main attraction is the garden and the view of Cadboro Bay and the Olympic Mountains.

"There is nothing special about this house," Danuta says, and then mentions the nearby family of ducks that return each year. And then, just as an aside, she points a casual finger to "my very normal kitchen and pantry."

The breakfast room is now a workspace, where Danuta uses the special magnifier she needs for reading due to her macular degeneration.

Danuta loves the art in her home and reveals so much of the story of her own life through descriptions of the prints and mementoes that she can no longer see, but that she knows intimately. A painting by Polish artist George Nehring of a castle by the sea reminds Danuta of Poland. It looks a lot like her present-day castle by the sea.

She runs her hand over the Polish silk scrolls, and the copper wire inlaid in wooden bowls in the Polish folk tradition, and describes the Polish charcoal drawings. A sculpture of a large copper sailboat was brought from a long distance as a gift for Danuta



The kitchen is separate from the other rooms in the style that was popular in the 20th century.



The airy pantry is adjacent to the kitchen.



A home office with Danuta's reading device on the table beside the computer. At 84, she is comfortable using technology to compensate for deteriorating eyesight.



In a sunny sitting room, a sailboat sculpture sits atop a console table, and beneath the table stands an elephant figure. from a cherished Venezuelan daughter-in-law, an engineer who collects art.

Several paintings and a precious plate of traditionally painted goose eggs are gifts from John Vata, a dear friend who was an officer in the Hungarian army and who died last year in Duncan.

"John mentored my eldest son in painting," Danuta says.

The heavy old furniture carved with fine detail was made in Holland by a village carpenter. A friend of her son's made the stained glass lamp in the dining room. The exquisite dining room table - "where all 14 of us can sit together" - was made by her eldest son.



A dining room cabinet contains dishes, glassware and decanters to hold drinks.

"We have had a lot of fun at this table," says son Tom Benz. "We are a very close family and I have three fantastic daughter-in-laws," adds Danuta.

"I love my home," she says, "I walk to the bus. I shop in the village. I have really wonderful friends in my community."

"Many of the merchants and friends in Cadboro Bay Village have looked out for my mother for nearly 30 years and she treasures these relationships as family," says Benz, best known for his work as a production manager on the film Brokeback Mountain.

Benz lives in Alberta and is staying with his mother for two years while earning a master's degree in communications at Royal Roads.

"There was a time in my 50s when I could easily work for 10 hours surrounded by nature in my garden," says Danuta. "But there is the hyperbolic curve."

"The first 10 years are an incredible incline - from babe," she explains, "but from 75 onward, there is a steep decline.

This year I don't have the energy I had last year." In addition to a large circle of family and friends, Danuta's gardeners are supporting her through the predictable curve. They are helping her to maintain pride and joy in her garden and the fading red and white rhododendrons.



The dining room is large enough to accommodate family gatherings of 14. The hanging lamp was made for Danuta by a friend of one of her sons.



Danuta's bedroom has a large window allowing her to drink in the view from first thing in the morning.



A media corner is arranged beside a built-in floor-to-ceiling book case



The upstairs study opens onto an upper deck and offers gorgeous views of the Olympic Mountains and Cadboro Bay.



Danuta Le Poole's home in Ten Mile Point show cases a beautiful garden, classic furniture and remodelling done in the 1980s. She doesn't think the house built in 1941 and last updated in the 1980's is nearly as wonderful as its dazzling setting.

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CREDITS - Garden: George Ball, Christopher Ball
Blair Hudson of Hudson's Horticulture