



Red Acres - an adventure in reno-land

When Toronto lawyer, Mundy McLaughlin decided that she wanted a country retreat she had a couple of points in mind. She wanted a 'stone house' it had to be ninety minutes from Toronto, affordable and with a pond, fields, and woods. Sounds impossible and expensive - wrong on both counts! She found exactly what she wanted in the rolling hills of Northumberland.

Discovering that her original location - Caledon, west of Toronto, was too expensive, she started to look eastward. Scanning the Toronto Star on a weekly basis one ad popped out after a year of reading. Located in the rolling hills of Northumberland the acreage had all she needed including a pond, woods and land and buildings for some animals and most of all it had a stone house on it. However the 1830 stone building - had been added to with a modern addition twice the size of the stone house making the structure larger and more modern. In the stone house the two rooms upstairs, the staircase leading to it and two rooms on the ground floor had been renovated over the years, but were structurally sound. The basement was the only space in original condition. The previous owner had lived in the house for five years and had worked on it during those five years, but only on the addition. However the kitchen was not to Mundy's taste - gutting the room was the order of the day.



The original stone house



The original kitchen

The decision to renovate the kitchen was easy, finding the right person to do it was harder. A veteran of a couple of renos in Toronto she soon discovered that her "people" did not want to come to Northumberland so after visiting a couple of home building centres, in Cobourg, she landed on the doorstep of Kitchen Classics in Cobourg. Mundy knew exactly what she wanted - a "French Kitchen". Using, as her bible, a

book - "French Country Kitchens" written by Linda Dannenburg, Mundy directed the design, but Kitchen Classic's designer, Joanne Jibb, contributed extensive expertise. After deciding that all the appliances but the fridge went to the dump the fun began. Just how do you fit a new counter top, sink, shelves and cupboards, and the centre piece of the workspace - an AGA cookstove into the small space available and still achieve maximum elbow room in what is a corner space of the dining room? This was achieved by rejecting the common practice of using the counter top as an eating space and using bar stools. The counter top is more of a barrier defining the living space in the open room and separates the cooking area from the eating area, which is fitted out with a farmhouse style dining table and four chairs. The room side of the counter top has become a kitchen bookshelf space and is designed to maximise



The room side of the peninsular countertop showing the bookshelves



The countertop edging

utility in a limited space. Highlighting the design and location of the oiled cherry wood of the countertop is a rigid and utilitarian wrought iron border. This piece was locally forged and carefully fitted with handmade nails by local artisan - Adi Bulsara and his son Sorab, this item was the last piece to be fitted and held up the opening of the kitchen for a few weeks, but Mundy was unfazed. "It (the edging) was worth waiting for, it's the 'piece de resistance' of the whole design."

When deciding what kind of cabinets to be installed Mundy wanted to follow the French practise of open shelves rather than putting all into the cabinets. Consequently a minor design problem cropped up, with the cabinets how to coordinate the inside colour to the outside. In order to have a surface that would take paint as opposed to accepting the manufacturers build of coloured wood a special design-build had to be set up - extra cost.



The open shelves

The reno began a few months after the purchase date of March 2009 but although Mundy knew the basic outline of the design from that time, real design work started in January of 2010 and the



Soapstone sink and counter top

job was finished in the late summer of that year. "We thought the end date was going to be June but late deliveries of components extended the deadline" Joanne said. "As soon as the sink and countertop came in we fitted them but they were late from the suppliers and the factories." The soapstone assembly sink came from NNG Soapstone in Stouffville, the cupboards from Cuisine Building in Quebec and the

centrepiece of the space - the Aga cookstove - came from The Grange in Toronto. The tiles for the floor and walls were handmade, floor tiles were made of Mexican glazed clay terra cotta and the wall tiles of ceramic but still handmade and that ensured an arduously long installation as each one had to be fitted to the next one of a slightly different size.



The terra cotta floor tiles and the under the window bench seat

Speaking for the contractor - Kitchen Classics, Tom Hanmer, owner of the 17 year old company, said this job was enjoyable even though it had its challenges as the building was nearly two hundred years old. "Our senior carpenter Shawn Jones was up to the job of hand-fitting each tile laid on the floor and wall as well as having to spend more time on the construction of the vent for the stove, imagine having to cut through twelve inch walls just to make a hole for the pipe! As a small example of how this job was different, in just moving the stove the manufacturer recommends three people handle it as it is a precision casting, made of many pieces and weighs over three hundred pounds, so we had to have the owner present and three others just to install that component."



Mundy beside the centrepiece of the workspace - the AGA cookstove

With Mundy, armed with her book of french kitchens, watching all the moves and with Joanne translating the pictures in the book into actual drawings all went well. Joanne says that it was a challenge, "I have never had a person come in with a picture of a one hundred year old kitchen and be told, 'I would like that'. Just finding the suppliers to source the components was difficult. But we did it and I am pleased with the result. In fact as part of the process we had Shawn go out and make templates inside the actual space, measuring didn't seem to be enough!" Mundy for her part says, "I wouldn't say there is anything that I am unhappy about. Although it seems as though it took forever."

Speaking about the local contractors here in Northumberland Mundy couldn't be more laudatory. "Wonderful people (Kitchen Classics), and I am really impressed with their policy of only doing one job, with one customer at a time, it feels good to know that they are only working for you in that time of renovation." Joanne's final conclusions about the job are just as praiseworthy, "I am very pleased with the final product and pleased that the customer is happy and that the job is hers. I only had to buy one item in the job that she did not pick out. I picked out the tap for the sink, she

can really say it's her kitchen, because it is."

Asked why she calls the acreage 'Red Acres' she replied simply, "I love the TV show 'Green Acres' and I made the analogy - it fits. One day I will have animals here." Well welcome to Northumberland Mundy.