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Change of pace

Couple finds life in Sunningdale development far different than living near U.S. capital. Page H6

LIFESTYLE LESS HECTIC: Shari Dunsire joins husband Ian Maxwell in his office in their new London home.

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Long-distance contract



A couple arranged construction of a new home in London from their Virginia residence

BY JUDY LIEBNER
Special to The Free Press

When Ian Maxwell and his wife, Shari Dunsire, moved to Sterling, Va. six years ago, they knew they would eventually return to Canada. As it turned out, their flight home couldn't come soon enough.

The couple was living in a new, two-storey home just 33 kilometres northwest of Washington, D.C. with their son, Kyle, now six. Maxwell, the founder of an engineering firm he later sold, worked less than a mile from the Pentagon. On Sept. 11, 2001, he was in a meeting at his office.

"Some of us saw the plane go right into the Pentagon and the big explosion. Our building shook," he recalls.

A few weeks later, the couple had to don gloves and masks and open their mail outside, because of the anthrax attacks. Their mail was handled at the Brentwood mail-sorting facility where two postal workers died of inhalation anthrax.

Next came the one-year anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

"It would be like, 'Today is 70 degrees, the pollen count is 300 and your terrorist alert is yellow,'" Dunsire recalls.

Dunsire recalls.

The precautions extended to Kyle, whose teacher gave him a checklist of supplies to take to school with him in case of a chemical assault. When the terrorist alert was elevated to orange, the couple organized a kit for him with three days' supply of food and water, a picture of his family and a blanket.

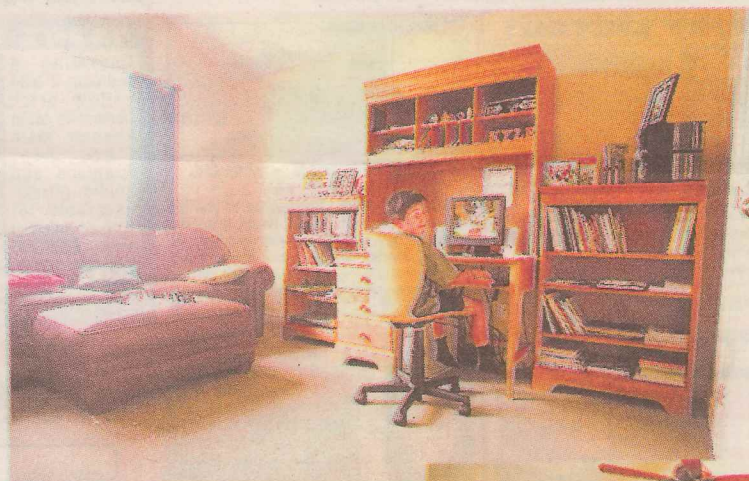
Once that anniversary passed, residents were faced with the sniper attacks in October 2002 in which 10 people were killed and three were wounded. Although Maxwell and Dunsire are low-key in recalling that time in their lives, they admit the events took their toll on them.

"For us as Canadians, it was unsettling," Maxwell says.

After selling his business, Maxwell decided to stay on for three years, which gave the couple time to plan their return to Canada. He and Dunsire considered Ottawa, where they'd once lived, but were concerned they would find it cold after living in Virginia.

They were attracted to Southwestern Ontario's more temperate climate and chose London because of its amenities.

Dunsire, a Fanshawe College



LEFT: Six-year-old Kyle Maxwell checks out the computer desk in this second-storey study.

BELOW: This spacious family room is located just beyond the kitchen.

Photos by DEREK RUTTAN The London Free Press

graduate, had some familiarity with London, having lived in the city while she was attending school.

Her brother had worked in the home-building industry in London several years before and recommended four builders by reputation.

The couple then interviewed the builders and toured the developments in which they were building. They chose a pie-shaped lot which backed on to green space in the Neighbourhoods of Sunningdale.



"We picked Sunningdale because there were so many lots available, whereas in some of the other ones they were more developed and the selection was less," Maxwell says.

The timing was also ideal since there would be a gap of only a few weeks between the time they would be moving from Virginia and when their new home would be ready. They discussed their likes and dislikes with their builders, Mike and Milena Harasym of Harasym Developments. Among their priorities were an open-concept design with a spacious family room and casual, large rooms.

Because of the long-distance factor, Maxwell and Dunsire communicated with the Harasym by e-mail, courier, telephone and fax.

"The Harasym were very accommodating; we made weekly changes to the plans. We must have driven them crazy," Dunsire says. "We had lots of time to play with it (the design) and we changed the plans right up until the very last week."

Because they were building a home long-distance, they had only 48 hours in which to select flooring, plumbing fixtures, cabinets, hardware, lighting — all of the components that most homebuyers select over the course of several weeks.

"We were just so overwhelmed," Maxwell says. "There were some anxious moments."

The construction of the 3,500-square-foot home began in the spring of 2003 and was completed in August at a cost of \$640,000.

Since moving into the home, the couple has held many parties for friends and relatives. The chance to spend time together was a particular novelty for their families since Maxwell and Dunsire had spent three years in Kansas before moving to Virginia.

"When you're away for 10 years, everyone wants to see you and your new home," Maxwell says.

Because Dunsire had always wanted to hold an open house during the holidays, the couple invited 50-plus neighbours on their street to a party last Christmas. They discovered the open-concept design of their home made traffic flow easy, particularly for large groups.

"People like the informality; they don't want to go into the dining room or into the formal living room," Dunsire says.

The kitchen is undoubtedly the heart of the home with its traditional raised-panel cherry cabinets, dark green granite counters and sleek stainless steel appliances. A breakfast bar provides casual seating and visually separates the kitchen's workspace from a nearby hearth area where two plaid chairs are arranged in front of a two-sided gas fireplace.

On the far side of the kitchen is a comfortable dining area where long casement windows create a gazebo effect. A bar area with two

vertical wine racks and an under-counter bar fridge is balanced on the opposite side by a desk, which makes bill-paying convenient.

Warm yellow walls and textured ceramic tile floors in earth tones enhance the cosiness of the space.

Just beyond the kitchen, a spacious family room with enormous casement windows overlooks the backyard. Golden oak hardwood floors provide a contrast to the moss green and rust colour scheme.

A home office at the front of the house features built-in cherry bookshelves across one wall, as well as a window seat. French doors open from the office on to a two-storey foyer dominated by an oak staircase with cream-coloured spindles.

In the dining room on the opposite side of the foyer, a pale green area rug anchors a traditional dining suite. Crown mouldings and deep baseboard accentuate the nine-foot ceilings.

At the top of the stairs on the second floor, double doors lead into the master bedroom, which includes a reading area with a gas fireplace and a built-in television cabinet. The ensuite bathroom features a whirlpool bathtub, a glassed shower and a makeup table for Shari. Pale green walls, off-white cultured marble counters and California shutters accentuate its conservatory feeling.

A pretty guest room down the hall boasts its own ensuite bathroom and a walk-in closet.

Kyle's room, too, has an ensuite bathroom that's located between his bedroom and a study with a vaulted ceiling and a Palladian window.

After residing for 10 years in the U.S., Maxwell and Dunsire appreciate living in a smaller city where they can reach many of their destinations within 15 minutes. By con-

trast, Maxwell used to commute from one to 1½ hours one way daily to work.

"You feel as if you've added 10 years to your life just because you don't have that pace," he says.

The couple also enjoys the Neighbourhoods of Sunningdale.

"The neighbourhood's great, we have a great street and we couldn't ask for better neighbours," Dunsire says. "Everybody knows everybody and watches out for each other's kids."



ABOVE: Long casement windows create a gazebo effect in the kitchen dining area.



LEFT: The master bedroom includes a reading area and a built-in TV cabinet.



BELOW: A traditional dining suite is the focal point in the formal dining room.

"You feel as if you've added 10 years to your life just because you don't have that pace."

Ian Maxwell, homeowner



LEFT: The kitchen features raised-panel cherry cabinets, dark green granite counters and sleek stainless steel appliances.