

Families get into the early holiday spirit for Christmas Home Tour



(Homeowner Sunny Davies will open up her Metcalfe Street home with the design work of Margaret Campbell.)

By Brock Weir

The holidays are just around the corner, and whether you're looking for something traditional or a bit of modern bling, next week's Aurora Christmas Home Tour promises something for everyone ? all for a good cause.

Seven homes in Aurora and the surrounding area will deck their halls on Friday, November 15 and Saturday, November 16 with proceeds supporting the Jennifer Ashleigh Children's Charity, which assists seriously ill children and their families.



Designer Jean Bisnaire of Aurora's Niche Decor is helping spruce up the King Valley home of Kerry Bulau. With two tour packages available, ticket holders will not only be able to take in the homes, but get in some holiday shopping in special boutiques at Niche Décor and the Aurora Cultural Centre, and receive some design and decorating tips in person from Frankie Flowers and Sharon Grech.

Designers are busy putting the finishing touches on their selected homes with the homeowners, and while some have known immediately what they want to show off, others have been through two or three drafts to get everything just right.

?People come out and they get ideas, and then they can go home and implement some of the ideas they have found in the different homes,? says Aurora designer Margaret Campbell, co-chair of the event, collaborating on a home on Metcalfe Street in Downtown Aurora. ?I find the homes are very diversified, so there is something for everyone.?

The level of work is quite intense in the lead-up, says Ms. Campbell, although they have had considerably more time to prepare this year than last year's inaugural event.

Sometimes in the decorating game, Ms. Campbell finds homes ?speak? to her in how they should be decorated. This year's home, however, presented something a little bit different.

'My client mentioned how much she likes glam and bling and shiny things, so [my initial] thoughts flew out of my mind and I realised I had to change the whole look I had for the house,' she says. 'It is not about showcasing yourself; you're building a relationship with this homeowner.'

Sunny Davis will, along with Ms. Campbell, be welcoming people into her home on Metcalfe, a newer home designed specifically to fit in with the surrounding historic neighbourhood.

'I love the idea of any way to help the foundation,' said Ms. Davies, a mom of three, noting she wants her home to be seen as comfortable and family friendly. 'We get a lot of wandering eyes all the time [a tour home] because it is a very unique home for the neighbourhood.'

'I think a lot of people have gotten away from what the holidays are all about. It is so commercialized and I think you can still have a glitzy, glam Christmas ' even with some Goldfish crumbs on the floor!'

Over in neighbouring King Township, designer Jean Bisnaire is collaborating on a comparatively last-minute addition to the home tour with homeowner Kerry Bulau. Ms. Bulau, a director at TSN, and her husband Horst, an Olympic skier, offered their home after taking in similar tours in Markham.

'In this case, we see ourselves as her ghostwriters,' says Mr. Bisnaire of finding a meeting of the minds with Ms. Bulau. 'She has a great vision and I love that vision. Our job is just to help her pull it together and what's missing, we'll provide.'

Mr. Bisnaire describes the vision as he looks out of large floor-to-ceiling windows, out to an expansive tree canopy just beyond the Bulau yard.

'Christmas should be a reflection of who you are and how you live,' she says. 'For some people, they take advantage of wanting to live a very glitzy Christmas. For some people, Christmas is all about entertaining. Other homes, where there are kids and it is full of family, it is more of a slipper, barefoot and cosy atmosphere. You still want to make it representative of who you are as individuals and who you are in terms of where you live.'

That is a vision shared by Ms. Bulau who also has three active children at home. When holidays come around ' whether it is Halloween or Christmas ' the kids have a free reign to express themselves through decorations.

'It's all about family and getting together and enjoying the winter,' says Ms. Bulau. 'A lot of people in Canada just hate the winter. November is a depressing month, but when you get to December and see Christmas and the Holidays it gets exciting. My husband's family is from Ottawa and we usually celebrate Christmas Eve in Ottawa and then drive back at Midnight because Santa comes here and we celebrate with my family Christmas morning. It's all about kids and the magic of Christmas for them. It's about being with people and having fun and relaxing.'

'Open houses were huge around the Christmas season. You would just open up your door and invite other people in. It was a chance to bring people together and that is how I look at this tour. It is an open house, you're celebrating, and you get to meet new people that way and make different connections.'

Describing themselves as 'outdoorsy' as well, Ms. Bulau says she and Horst have many old-fashioned ski decorations, but shy away from 'kitschy chalet stuff' towards things more 'rustic, sophisticated and comfortable.'

'I don't want people to come in and think, 'Jeeze, I don't want to sit.' We use this room. The kids make a mess. I'm not afraid of things spilling. I want it to be a home that is loved and you feel comfortable. That is what I want with this ' that it is a happy time, it is a family time, and just to make it all inclusive.'

For tickets, scheduling information, and more information on charities benefiting from the second annual Aurora Christmas Home Tour, visit www.aurarahometour.com. Tickets are also on sale at Niche Décor (242 Earl Stewart Drive), Aurora Paint and Decorating (15216 Yonge Street), or Jonathan's Restaurant (14845 Yonge Street).