

Homeowners, businesses show creativity at Doors Open



By Brock Weir

Whether they were showing off their personal showplaces or watching a year's worth of ideas come into fruition, Aurora's creativity came into full bloom on Saturday with the annual Doors Open Aurora event.

Comprised of walking tours around town, rare glimpses into private homes, and new and creative things to do at some of Aurora's more venerable institutions, people from across Southern Ontario descended on Town to see just what we have to offer historically, architecturally and artistically.

On Saturday morning before the skies opened up to an afternoon of rain, among the busiest locations was the colourful home of Roxana Farrell on Larmont Street.

Painted a vivid blue, the aptly named 'Blueprint House' is the culmination of a long-standing vision of Ms. Farrell, who is an artist and architect by trade. The distinctive house stands out from the rest not only in colour, but with the white text that wraps around the building, mimicking an architectural blueprint, but one that has come to life.

'I had this idea five years ago when I moved here from New York and I just saw this house,' she said. 'Somehow it gave me the inspiration that even though it was in rough condition, to take my profession and showcase it in an artistic way.'

Outside, white text outlines the dimensions of the building, the elevations, and even the mailbox, along with a garden that makes practical use out of old packing crates left over from the defunct Thompson's Furniture Store, which coupled with discarded hockey masks, combine to create a very unique kind of fencing. Inside, the creativity continued with layers of time peeled back, and salvaged material finding a new lease on life - including a chandelier made out of light bulbs.

'I like finding things,' said Roxana. 'I have more or less tried to strip off all of the old paint that was on the doors and doorframes. What I am trying to experiment with is what is it to have something old against something crisp and new and just keep that collision happening? I love what happens and I like to have things and objects give me direction and tell me what they want to be and where they fit into the space.'

Valerie Otton subscribes to a similar philosophy at the Absalom Blaker House on Wellington Street, just west of Larmont. This was the second year running in which she and her husband welcomed guests as part of the Doors Open tour, but she bristled at the idea

that she was welcoming guests into a ?showplace.?

?This is not a showplace, we live here,? she said. ?Last year it looked like a museum, but this year it looks like a home. We just want to show the heritage and history of a home. These homes are just as beautiful as modern homes. This is quality and we love doing what we do.?

This beauty, however, was not always apparent, she said. When they bought the house it was subdivided into apartments. They quickly set about to rectify that, restoring it to its former glory, peeling back the paint, restoring the wood, and even finding mementos of old Aurora ? ranging from old newspapers to a Sisman's shoe box, all proudly displayed on the dining room table ? in the process.

?We love showing off our house and we are really proud with what we have accomplished in trying to get it back to what it used to be, and we love it,? she said. ?It was a disaster before?but it is a solid house.?

One of the people coming through the doors to see just what the Ottons have accomplished was MJ from Newmarket, who is drawn to Doors Open each year for the architecture. For her, there is so much people can learn from their own local history.

She started the day with a walking tour around Aurora lead by local historian David Heard who, when leading his packed group through the Aurora Farmers' Market, emphasised the importance of historical salvage.

?My favourite tidbit [I learned from the tour] is there were horse-drawn train cars that brought product from the factories over the train line and, from the train, the product got shipped all over,? she said. ?It made me really appreciate our local history and the impact Aurora had on the rest of Canada, and even the world, with the Fleury ploughs and the shoes that were supplied to the military in the First World War."