



Briarcliffe Inn stands renovated and restored on PEI's south shore. It now boasts five guest rooms.

# EYES WIDE OPEN

Thinking of transforming  
your home into a B&B?  
Learn some lessons from  
a PEI couple who have  
been there.

STORY BY TOM CRUICKSHANK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WAYNE BARRETT

Sooner or later—perhaps while staring out the window during yet another unfulfilling day at the office—the light dawns on everyone who has ever toyed with the idea of renovating a country house. Why not open our doors as a bed and breakfast? After all, with the extra income it generates, it's easier to justify the thousands of dollars that farmhouse renovations often require.

Or is it?

Just ask Bill and Mary Kendrick, now into their third season as B&B hosts on the south shore of Prince Edward Island near the crossroads hamlet of Bedeque. In 2001, they bought a tired farmhouse that was approaching its 90th birthday. At the end of one of PEI's signature red-dirt roads with a view over one of PEI's quintessential ocean vistas, the three-acre setting was long on charm, an open invitation for guests eager for a walk on the beach and a taste of Maritime hospitality. But the house was another story. Vacant for the past five years, it had been neglected too long and would require extensive renovations just to make it habitable, let alone bring the aging dwelling up to the standards of a discerning bed and breakfast. Nevertheless, Bill and Mary were smitten. "We had had B&B in the backs of our minds for a long time, but figured it would be a project for our 60s," Mary says. And even though it was a little off the beaten tourist path, the house and setting made them think twice about their timing. Very quickly, the empty-nest Kendricks decided that B&B would be a project for their 50s.



a house that seemed to offer no surplus space. “So, we accommodated new baths in what used to be closets and stole an extra foot or two from adjoining rooms.” Then to compensate for the loss of storage space, new, smaller corner closets—just ample enough to hang a coat or two—were built in their place. And again in a nod toward pampering guests, the bathrooms were appointed with stylish, luxury fixtures. “No doubt about it, building the bathrooms ate up a disproportionately large chunk of our B&B budget... perhaps adding as much as 50



Despite the romance of their venture, the couple approached their new acquisition with eyes wide open. “The house was structurally sound, but...” Bill says, his voice trailing off. “There were several ‘buts.’ ” Indeed, few of the basic household amenities were operable—neither the hot water tank nor the water softener worked and the two furnaces had long since breathed their last. Water pressure was hopeless for family living, let alone a house full of guests. Meanwhile, the wind whistled through the leaky windows, the sump pump had failed and the plumbing was antiquated. And it was definitely time for a decorative update. “This would have been enough to dampen anyone’s enthusiasm,” Bill says, but as veterans of several previous renos and housebuilding projects, the couple figured they were up for the job.

Much of the work would have been done regardless—insulation, refinishing the plank floors, peeling away acres of tired wallpaper in preparation for new décor and a hundred other jobs. But



many of the upgrades were specific to B&B, starting with the number and arrangement of bathrooms. “Some B&Bs merely offer shared baths,” Mary explains, “but we had our sights on something more upscale and decided early on that each guest room would have its own.” But that’s easier said than done in

percent to the total,” says Mary.

Providing heat to the guest rooms—all on the second floor—was also a bigger factor than it might otherwise have been. “Like so many farmhouses of its time, heat for the bedrooms was next to nonexistent, with one lone register to serve the entire upstairs,” Mary observes. In an-



**Top left: Mary and Bill Kendrick pose with their King Charles Cavalier spaniels. Their bed and breakfast is attractively decorated and stocked with plenty of conversation pieces. It didn't always look as nice as this.**

other household, the logical answer might have been to extend the capacity of the forced-air system upward by fishing new ductwork behind the fireplace, closets and other cavities within the walls. “But any available space was already gobbled up by the labyrinth of additional plumbing, so there was no room left over for ducting,” Bill explains. Hence, the Kendricks opted for electric heat, despite its expensive reputation. “It wouldn’t have been our first choice, but the electric baseboards also solved another issue. They give guests the ability to control their own heat, which—believe it or not—is a significant point in separating an exclusive B&B from the ordinary.”

Although the individually controlled heaters might seem like an unnecessary indulgence, they—and any number of other improvements—were hardly a whim and, in fact, were quite deliberate. “People judge B&Bs on their star rating,” explains Mary, referring to something called the Canada Select Accommodation Rating Program, an industry-run set of



Tchotchkes rule at Briarcliffe, thanks to Mary's enduring passion for antiques. Note a particular penchant for anything with a spaniel theme.



standards for bed and breakfasts and hotels across the country. "The more creature comforts there are, the higher the star rating." Indeed, the difference between a three-star and a four-star B&B lies in such amenities as blackout shades, quality furnishings, private baths, and yes, individually controlled heat. Even the thread-count in the bedlinens is a factor. "Certainly, these add to the cost of opening a B&B, but they also offer value for the consumer that justifies a better price for the innkeeper." For their efforts, the Kendricks earned four-and-a-half stars. "For five stars, we would have had to offer air conditioning, televisions and whirlpool tubs in each room, for which there was simply no room nor budget."

As they contemplated renovations, Bill and Mary had more on their minds than their star rating. The couple was working to a deadline that would not have been a factor in an ordinary renovation. They took possession in October, which gave them nine months to render the place guest-worthy in time for the coming tourist season. "That sounds like long enough," confesses Mary, "but considering how much work lay ahead—and that we were going to do much of it ourselves—we were facing a daunting schedule." To get the job done, the couple put their careers on hold—Bill, a TV-news

and documentary producer, pared his workload to a bare minimum while Mary put her antiques business on hiatus. Working 18-hour days, they scraped and stripped, primed and painted. Meanwhile, they put the squeeze on contractors and recruited family, friends and any other able body to get in on the act. By Christmas, the house was at least habitable enough to allow the couple to move in. And by June 15, the finishing touches were, by and large, finished. "We were lucky," says Bill, "because our first guests were booked for June 17."

The project went about \$20,000 over budget, thanks largely to a couple of unwelcome surprises. "As our contractor was getting ready to install our new deck, he discovered that the main sill [the structural component on which the weight of the entire house rests] was rotten and in dire need of repair," explains Mary. "And then he uncovered a nasty leak over the bay window that had gone unchecked for years."

Undaunted, the Kendricks never

## Specs

**Concept** Two-storey Edwardian-era farmhouse with usable attic. Renovated and adapted to function as a bed-and-breakfast establishment. Owners acted as their own general contractor. Primary consultant: Darryl McHugh, Schurman Construction, Summerside, PEI.

**Genesis** Purchased October 2001; occupied Christmas 2001 with three guest rooms. Summer kitchen tail adapted as hosts' private quarters and guest accommodation expanded to five rooms in spring of 2004.

**Location** On Salutation Cove on the south shore of Prince Edward Island.

**Bedrooms** 5 plus host's suite.

**Bathrooms** 5 plus ground-floor powder room and host's bath.

**Total usable floor area** about 3,600 square feet on three levels, including host's quarters in former summer kitchen tail.

**Construction** Typical wood-frame structure on fieldstone foundation.

**Cladding** Shingle siding in typical Maritime fashion.

**Roof** Asphalt shingles.

**Water and septic** Existing well collapsed during repair, so a new one was drilled to—105 feet with submersible pump; conventional septic system with extra-large tank (to accommodate extra water demand by guests).

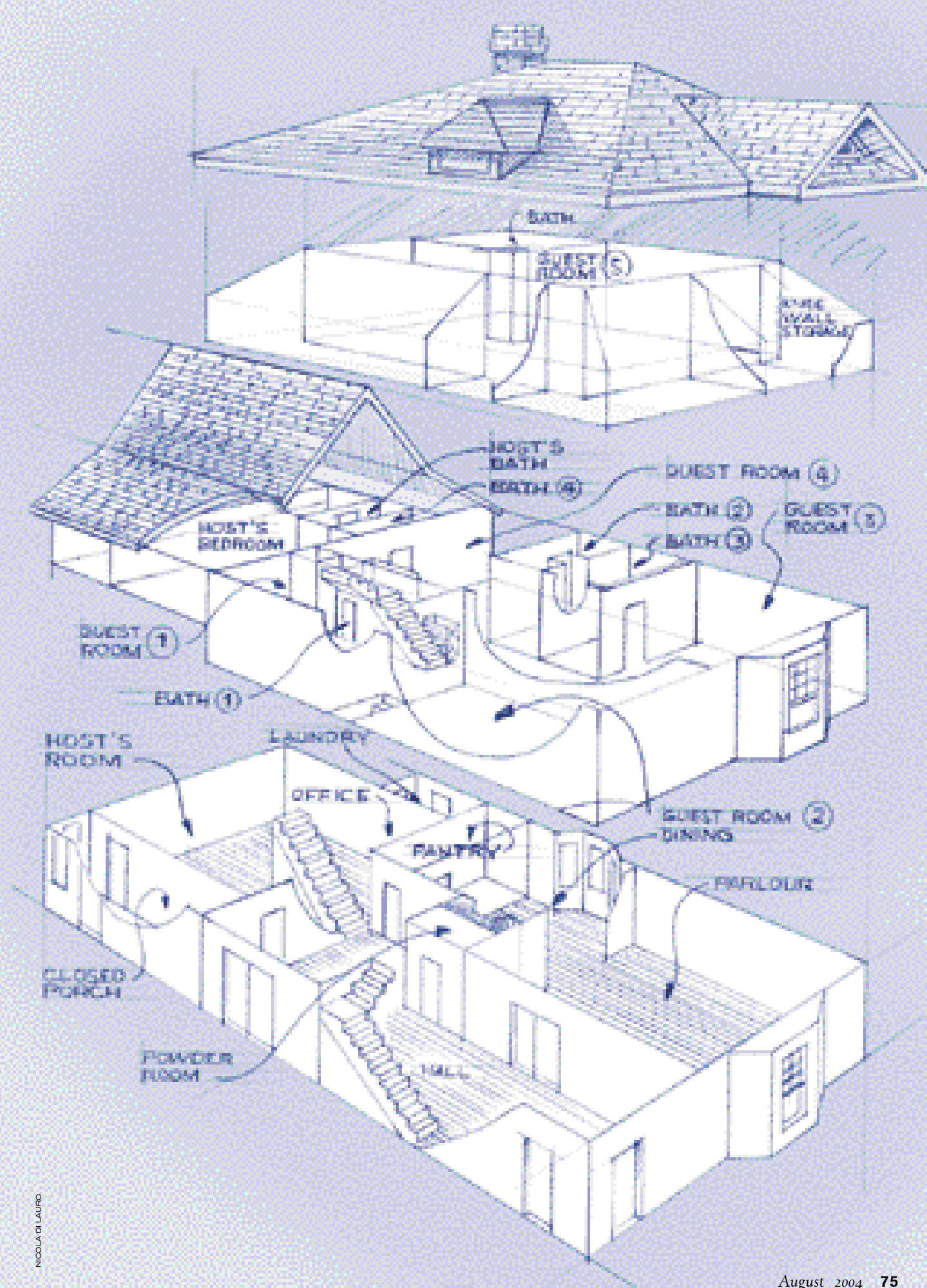
**Heat** Central oil-fired furnace with conventional forced-air ductwork. Upstairs guest rooms heated by individually controlled electric baseboard units.

**Insulation** Blown cellulose (walls); fibre-glass batts (attic ceiling).

**Electrical service** Standard 200-amp service.

**Windows** New double-glazed sash-operated thermal units.

looked back, and in fact, have since embarked on new projects that expanded their capacity from the original three guest rooms to five. "We've turned the attic into our most luxurious guest suite," explains Bill, and most ambitious of all, he and Mary renovated what was the summer kitchen into their own private quarters. Not only does this free up their



NICOLA DI LAURO

# FOR WOULD-BE B&B HOSTS

Advice that worked for the Kendricks in providing the most ambitious accommodations possible without breaking the bank.

- Start small. “We interviewed 20 B&B hosts before taking the plunge,” Mary says, “and they all said the same thing. Don’t take on more than you can handle.” The Kendricks began with three rooms and only recently expanded to five.
- Do the work yourself. Labour is the single greatest expense in any renovation, so any work that you can do with your own muscle—demolition, painting and decorating—pays off.
- Think of the little things. While the Kendricks appointed their B&B with lots of decorative charm, they went beyond the call of duty by actually spending a night in each room. “We ‘test drove’ each room,” Mary says, “to make sure amenities were well placed, to see where the morning light fell, and to see how noise travels.”
- A significant portion of the renovation

cost lies in basic services and technical upgrades that you can’t see. For example, the Kendricks’ septic system has twice the capacity of a normal household. Likewise, good water pressure is crucial, as there might be five people taking a shower at any time. The couple even bought a \$1,000 generator in case of a power blackout.

- Scrimp where it doesn’t show. Until the budget permits, Bill and Mary are content with their old stove, fridge and other appliances.
- You can save on plumbing by “ganging” the fixtures, that is, siting the sinks, showers and toilets in close proximity, which reduces the total amount of pipes required.
- Bonus! As an independent television producer, Bill decided to turn their project into a one-hour TV special. “Bed and Breakfast Dream” pops up occasionally on HGTV. Not only did the program allow him to mix business and pleasure, Bill actively recruited sponsors, whose products



Butler's pantry was adapted for use as a galley kitchen.

were incorporated into the footage. He figures the sponsorships shaved \$30,000 from their decorating budget.

former bedroom as a guest room, it allows a measure of privacy between guests and hosts. “A good host soon learns that a certain amount of separation is a good thing,” says Mary. And it seems this isn’t the only lesson she and Bill have learned, for this year, the Kendricks expect to turn a profit. \*

When Bill and Mary Kendrick were contemplating a name for their new bed-and-breakfast establishment, they learned that they weren’t the first to open their very same doors to paying guests. For 40 years until the 1950s, the original owner, Fredrica “Fed” MacFarlane had operated the house as the “Briarcliffe Tourist Home.” It was only natural to resurrect the old name, and so the Kendricks called their venture the “Briarcliffe Inn.”

The inn can be found about 15 minutes from the Confederation Bridge, a little more than a half hour west of Charlottetown. Nightly rates range from \$90 to \$135, with full gourmet breakfast. For more information, write the Kendricks at 274 Salutation Cove Road, R. R. 1, Bedeque, PE C0B 1C0. Call (902) 887-2333 or 1-866-887-3238, [www.briarcliffeinn.com](http://www.briarcliffeinn.com)