

* 29½ EASY WEEKEND UPGRADES

Cottage Life

CABINS / COTTAGES / CHALETS

WEST

DIY IDEAS

**MANAGE
FALLEN TREES**
**REPAIR VINYL
FLOORING**
**CRAFT A
BLANKET
BOX**

THE

ADVICE

ISSUE



How to
afford
your
dream
cabin

**A SLICE OF
FRANCE
ON BOWEN
ISLAND**

SPRING 2016 \$6.99
COTTAGELIFE.COM

DISPLAY UNTIL APRIL 24, 2016



THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Forget the ferry commute. This family of artists travels 8,000 km from Montaignut-le-Blanc to their Bowen Island cottage





Rain

streaks the windows of Babette Deggan's pottery studio as she lights a fire to banish the chill and lines up yesterday's pots to dry on top of the woodstove. Classical music tinkles from the stereo as she wedges a lump of clay and then settles behind the wheel to shape a vase. Firelight flickers across a romantic landscape painting on the wall by her husband, Paul, and illustrations of dreamy female figures by her son Adrien. "I need to have clay under my fingernails," she says with a lilting French accent. "Pottery is my happiness." Her 700 sq. ft. studio with its loft guest room is just a few metres across a cedar-decked courtyard from the Deggan family cottage, but as far as Babette is concerned, it might as well be oceans away.

The Deggans are a self-described artistic tribe. Daughter Sarah Bastien, 36, is an illustrator; Adrien, 31, a digital artist; and Tristan, 18, an accomplished photographer. For most of their lives, they've wintered on British Columbia's coast—specifically, since 2001, on Bowen Island, a place well known for attracting people with creative passions. This small island, whose resident population of 3,500 swells to 5,000 in summer, was ranked a decade ago as one of Canada's top five most artistic small communities.

It's a 20-minute ferry ride from Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver to Bowen's "downtown" village of Snug Cove, with its marina, library, and a few pubs, cafes, and shops, including the whimsically named Ruddy Potato grocery store. From the village, it's just a few minutes' drive to the hilly region of Miller's Landing. En route to their cottage, the Deggans follow a winding one-lane road downhill through towering cedars and firs toward the ocean, passing the homes of a cinematographer, a documentary filmmaker, a musician, an author, a cameraman, and a professional photographer. A sign at the foot of their driveway reads: Tame Deer. Please Leash Your Dog. >>

The beauty of art and nature surround Paul and Babette Deggan (above) at their cottage on Bowen Island, B.C. He designed the clever inset planters in the cedar deck (opposite) that adjoins Babette's pottery studio. In the kitchen, she arranges flowers in one of her handmade vases, its finely crackled surface created with a glaze that's designed to shrink slightly when kiln-fired. In the living room (p. 59), Paul's conté crayon portrait of their friend Antoine is one of many sketches he's made of fellow villagers in France.





Babette and her son Tristan look out over Howe Sound, beyond their mossy bluff. The passing fishing boats, tugboats, and ferries enliven the ocean view, along with bald eagles, orcas, and dolphins. “All the neighbours call one another when we see a pod,” says Babette. Son Adrien’s illustration of a woman in red watches over Babette’s pottery studio. Finished pieces line her shelves, ready for upcoming craft sales and the occasional drop-in shopper. In the cottage’s kitchen, a polka-dot pot collects assorted chopsticks.



Babette, 59, leads me toward the cottage, past blazing red and pink rhododendron bushes and other assorted perennials. “Everything is deer resistant, and I planted just spring flowers so I could see them flowering,” she says with a smile, “because I’m selfish.” The Deggans are unusual winter cottagers on Bowen, most years spending November through May on the island. The rest of the year their home is in the village of Montaignut-le-Blanc in central France, where, for 25 years, they ran a successful summer art centre in the medieval hill town.

The aroma of baking bread billows through the cottage door as Paul, a spry 83 years old, welcomes us inside. “I’m not the breadwinner,” he quips, his British accent a lively contrast to Babette’s French one. “I’m the bread maker.”

Atop a rocky crag high above Howe Sound, the 1,900 sq. ft., three-bedroom, two-level cottage is spacious, airy, and bright with its multiple skylights and broad windows overlooking the ocean. “This cottage is all about light,” says Babette—that, and plenty of West Coast wood: fir posts and beams, stairs, floors, doors, and trim; oak countertops; built-in bookshelves of spruce; and cedar walls in the mudroom.

Artwork is in every sightline. Shelves and tabletops display Babette’s Japanese-style crackle-glaze pottery jars, vases, and bowls. Paul enthusiastically points out Sarah’s illustrations in the mudroom and master bedroom, as well as Adrien’s large *Green Cat and Philodendron* painting in the living room and, in the kitchen, his small modelling-clay busts of a wizard, a girl with a braid, and John Lennon. Paul’s landscapes and portraits hang throughout the cottage, including one of a striking elderly woman from the former Yugoslavia in the mudroom. Well before he and Babette got together, he exhibited eight pieces at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and curator Doris Shadbolt chose this one for the VAG’s permanent collection. “I saw a photo of her when we met,” says Babette, “and I told Paul he had to buy her back.”

In the open-concept living-dining room, a massive beam runs across the ceiling. “It’s 24 feet long—clear old-growth Douglas fir from the Powell River Mill,” Paul says. “It took six men to move it in here.” Paul designed the cottage, and contractors erected it. When the drywalling was done, he and Babette took over and did everything else, from constructing the staircase and the bookshelves and laying the wood



ARTWORK IS IN EVERY SIGHTLINE

Babette's strategy to combat the rainy coastal winters was to put a woodstove on the living room's far west wall and face the sofas away from the windows. "Then we could watch the cheerful fire." She enjoys regular visits from her grandchildren, Maia (below) and Kieran, who live in Bellevue, Wash. Together, the youngsters explore the tidal shore at Deep Bay (previous pages), a short drive from the family cottage. The Deggans used to own a c&c 27 sailboat for island-hopping, says Babette, but "sailing in the winter only was not our cup of tea!"

flooring to tiling the bathroom and mudroom floors and installing the modified Ikea bathroom and kitchen cabinets and counters.

As Paul pulls two browned loaves from the oven, Babette prepares a charcuterie lunch on the kitchen island. Tristan returns with his camera from an outing to the Snug Cafe, a popular island gathering spot. The young photographer has an upcoming exhibition at Bowen's Gallery at Artisan Square. To help, Paul has been working on framing a series of Tristan's landscape and macro photographs.

The four of us settle around the wooden dining table, which Babette has adorned with a pottery vase filled with fresh tulips. Paul pops the cork on a bottle of wine, and we all clink glasses with an enthusiastic "Santé!" For a moment, I feel transported to a country picnic amid the fig trees and vines of Provence.

Not so for Paul, though. British Columbia has posed an artistic problem for him since he immigrated to Canada in 1957 at the age of 25. Much as he loves his West Coast surroundings, he has been unable to coax his pen or brush to express the rainforest in a way that pleases him, despite decades of trying. While Babette and Tristan enthusiastically practise their artistic crafts on Bowen, Paul says, "I simply cannot paint the scenery here. I'm stuck with European landscapes."

Born in England, Paul studied art there and exhibited his work widely before moving to Canada. On the West Coast, he taught at the Vancouver School of Art, known today as the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. A 20-year career followed as a designer-decorator for Woodward's department stores, during which he took regular artistic sabbaticals to Europe, roaming Spain, Italy, and France in a camper van with his easel, paints, and pencils.

He undertook one of these trips in 1977 after the end of his second marriage. Lonely, puttering around France, he contacted Babette Peckstadt, a former colleague of his wife at Simon Fraser University. Babette was back in France after a failed Vancouver love affair. He invited her to tour Normandy with him. She was 21. He was 44. She said yes. Within weeks, she met his family in England. Nine days later, she moved into his home on Lions Bay, B.C., overlooking Bowen Island—a romantic story Paul relates in his autobiographical book, *All Our Summers Are French*. »





Daughter Sarah was commissioned to create the artwork opposite for a gift book. It illustrates the poem “One, Two, Three!” by Henry Cuyler Bunner, in which a frail grandmother and her disabled grandson play an imagined game of hide-and-seek together. The Deggans chose this rocky, sloping site to begin their build in 2009. The family’s collection of B.C. beach stones fills one of Babette’s pottery bowls on an antique washstand in their living room. Just beyond is son Adrien’s painting titled *Green Cat and Philodendron*.



Within a year they had baby Sarah, and both found work teaching art and French at North Vancouver’s Capilano College, now Capilano University. Their dream was to buy a property in France and open an art school for Canadian students. They sank \$30,000, everything they had, into a “ruin” in Montaigt-le-Blanc beneath the remains of a 12th century castle—three ramshackle buildings etched into the hillside, including a former presbytery that became their home.

“When it rained,” Paul recalls, “water came in through the back wall, across the kitchen, and ran out the front door.” With help from Babette’s retired father, they undertook the restoration. Paul dove into learning woodworking and masonry techniques peculiar to French architecture, skills he would employ in many subsequent renos. The school opened in August 1980.

As the years passed, they renovated more schoolrooms, took in more students, and had two more children. All three grew up bilingual and binational, schooled part of the year in France and the rest in Canada while their parents taught at Capilano and recruited students for their summer classes in drawing, painting, cooking, French, photography, and creative writing. “People called us jetsetters,” says Paul, “but we were actually commuters.” More than 1,000 students passed through Le Centre Estival des Montaigt-le-Blanc before the Deggans retired from teaching in 2006.

Mornings start early in the Deggan household, long before the sun floods over the summit of Cypress Mountain and into the kitchen, where Paul is making a pot of English tea. He squints at the dawn view. “I still feel like B.C. is the place I know least,” he says. “I feel like a visitor, and I like that.”

The household gradually awakens, and the sounds of family begin to fill the cottage. Sarah, who makes her home in Bellevue, Wash., has arrived to spend a week with her two children—Maia, 10, and Kieran, 7. Both Sarah and her brother Adrien, who commutes between central France and the West Coast, often visit the family here. Christmas has long been a big Bowen affair, including Paul’s children from previous marriages and their families. Tristan, the last child at home, has an upstairs bedroom at the cottage. The 2014-15 year was unusual for him, in that {Continued on page 97}

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

{Continued from page 69}

he spent his entire grade 12 school year on the island, living with friends until his parents arrived in November. "I'd never been here in fall," he recalls. "I had no idea Bowen was so warm and sunny in September." He knew it as a place for "hanging out with friends, mountain biking, and rain," he says. "France was sunshine." Later this afternoon, he's planning a muddy multiple-circuit ride on the popular six-kilometre path that encircles Killarney Lake, a mossy rain-forest route that Paul and Babette often stroll together.

"I used to feel sorry for other kids who grew up in only one country," Sarah says, sipping tea from one of her mother's pottery mugs. "We thought everyone was raised like that." She has fond memories of taking Tristan out for Bowen's communal Halloween celebration in Snug Cove, where nearly everyone on the island gathers for fireworks, trick or treating, and hot chocolate served from the back of the local fire engine.

"Bowen is special. It's a rural atmosphere with a sophisticated and creative population," says Paul. "It's almost like we're members of a club," adds Babette.

Bowen Island has long been cottage country. From the early years of the 20th century, the Terminal Steamship Company and later the Union Steamship Company brought visitors from the mainland to enjoy the company's dance pavilion, hotel, and, by 1930, some 200 rental cabins. The roughly 50 sq. km island was largely a seasonal tourist destination until car-ferry service was introduced in the 1950s. After the company holdings were broken up in the early 1960s, single-family lots were developed in the areas around Snug Point and Deep Bay. These days, many Vancouver commuters share the scenic, hilly island with artists and former hippies, retirees, cottagers, and a few reclusive celebrities, including Alanis Morissette and Michael Ondaatje.

The Deggans bought their current half acre on Bowen in 2008, but it was neither their first foothold here nor their first building endeavour. Over the years, while developing their Montaigne-le-Blanc property, they renovated a series of fixers-uppers on Vancouver's North Shore. >>

HalfRocks

real stone veneer



- ❖ Choose the best – choose a real stone veneer for all of your stone installation needs
- ❖ Our stone veneer is installable on most surfaces with no additional foundational support
- ❖ Our stone veneer can cover unsightly brick, concrete walls and much more
- ❖ Make your fireplace or retaining walls beautiful or give yourself a conversation starter with a stunning feature wall finished in our natural stone veneer
- ❖ Never have to touch again. 100 percent maintenance free.

HalfRocks

Box 1074
Mayerthorpe, AB T0E 1N0
780-785-2490
780-305-9746
halfrocks@telus.net
www.halfrocks.com

Doing the impossible in real stone veneer

Are you considering BUILDING OFF-GRID?

Full off-grid and grid-tie power system design,
engineering, programming and optional installation.

IPS Integrated Power Systems
Back-up and Solar Power Systems

- Over 20 years experience in the alternative energy industry
- Use **SUN, WIND** and/or **WATER** as your power source

101 2387 Dominion Road
West Kelowna BC V1Z 2Y4
Toll Free: 1-866-607-7640
Phone: (250) 769-2843
sales@ipwr.net • www.ipwr.net

Building your trust.
Building your dream home.



OUR PROCESS



01 CONSULT WITH US



02 APPROVE OUR ESTIMATE & AGREEMENT



03 COMMENCE CONSTRUCTION



04 FINISH & INSPECT



05 OPEN HOUSE



06 SIGN FINANCING CONTRACT



07 WE DELIVER YOUR DREAM HOME

Dream to Completion - we will be your trusted partner in the design, engineering and creation of your custom home.



Custom Home and Cottage Packages

1-800-667-3511
pacific-homes.com

Forest Lumber & Cooperage LTD.

Traditional Wood Burning Cedar Barrel Hot Tubs
Made in Sooke B.C



Also available in electric or gas heat

250-642-4899 • www.forestlumber.com

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

{Continued from page 97}

“We did it for business and fell in love with every single one,” says Babette, “but mostly it was how we paid our bills.”

They first visited Bowen in the mid-1980s, popping over as walk-on ferry passengers to see an artist friend. In Snug Cove, they stopped a stranger to ask about public transport across the island. “There is none,” he said and then handed over the keys to his car. “Just bring it back here when you’re done.” They did, leaving a bottle of wine on the seat.

The community’s overt friendliness appealed, but Babette feared what locals call the “green ghetto,” an insular island life dictated by the ferry schedule. It took more than a decade—and some persistent coaxing from their long-time Bowen Island writer friends, Audrey and Paul Grescoe—before they decided to try it. The Deggans bought their first place sight unseen while in France in 2001, after the Grescoes gave the waterfront lot their personal thumbs-up.

The family moved into the property’s “awful green shack,” and the couple built a cedar-and-glass cottage. They hosted day-long art classes in their winter retreat, featuring Babette’s gourmet three-course lunches with wine. The island’s tranquility suited her quiet, reflective nature, and when a friend passed along a used wheel and kiln, Babette found her bliss in the basement, making pottery and selling her work at local fairs and markets.

She has loved the medium since she was a child. One Christmas in Paris, she remembers, she appealed to Santa to bring her some clay, and the family had to travel outside the city to find someone willing to fire her creations.

Her desire for a separate studio grew as the Deggans sold their first Bowen cottage and then bought and sold a second. When they purchased this third property, they put the potter’s outpost into their building plan. “That studio is so precious to me as my creative place without distractions,” Babette says. “I enter another world, and the hours just slip away.”

There will be little time for pottery today. Babette is active in island affairs while on Bowen, and today is her regular Tuesday at the Knick Knack Nook. >>

Property experts agree

Winter Water from Heat-Line® provides the best freeze protection for your investment



A complete, job-ready, easy to install product group for all your water pipe, roof & gutter freeze protection requirements. All systems employ self-regulating technology to provide unsurpassed energy efficiency, reliability and safety unlike anything else available on the market.

 Designed and manufactured in Canada.



1-800-584-4944
www.heatline.com

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

{Continued from page 98}

Maia accompanies her grandmother to a surprisingly homey Quonset hut, where the two pitch in to sort donated clothes, toys, and other goods. The saleable items will be used to raise money for anything from island recycling projects to student scholarships.

In the afternoon, Babette, Sarah, and the children make the two-kilometre drive to Deep Bay for some beachcombing. En route from the parking lot to the seashore, we stroll past a pond, where the children dole out pocketfuls of stale bread to the ducks and geese. Maia and Kieran are briefly enticed by a tire swing that dangles from a flowering wild apple tree, but they soon succumb to the call of the shore, the barnacled rocks waiting to be overturned, and the tiny crabs sent scuttling.

A leisurely hour or more passes with Babette and Sarah strolling together, often with arms around one another, as they watch the kids uncover treasures in the gumboot-deep water. Here on Bowen, the grandkids delight in the freedoms the Deggans gave to their own three children—plenty of unstructured play and exploration to encourage their independence and creativity.

“I always wanted a mother-daughter art exhibition with my pottery and Sarah’s illustrations,” says Babette. That finally came to pass in the spring of 2012, but with a twist. The show at West Vancouver’s Ferry Building Gallery, called *A Family Affair*, evolved into a display of artwork by all five Deggans. The event was a great success and a memorable experience for the family.

Both Babette and Paul are now retired, and with their youngest out of high school, they are increasingly free to pursue their pottery and painting. They plan to continue their winter visits to Bowen: her place of inspiration, his artistic respite. Then, as they have for almost four decades, they will fly back to their home in France—“returning like the spring swallows,” as the locals say of them—assured that they truly have the best of two worlds. 🐾

Writer and photographer Margo Pfeiff profiled a Saskatchewan family’s amazing ice castle in our Winter ’15 issue.



FREE Delivery on orders over \$1000. Order today



www.leisurecraftwest.com 888-923-9813 info@leisurecraftwest.com