

Basement a showplace for music and wine

Wine educator, musician follow their passions

BY JACQUELINE LOUIE, CALGARY HERALD SEPTEMBER 20, 2013



Renee Delorme and husband Jamie Newsom relax with a little wine in the basement entertaining space.

Music, food, wine, friends and nature are what life is all about for Jamie Newsom and Renee Delorme.

Newsom, a Celtic harp maker, and Delorme, a wine expert, have created their own piece of paradise in the countryside west of Calgary.

“Both our careers brought us here. We had to find a place where both of us could be happy in our careers, and it was Calgary,” says Delorme, a Franco-Ontarian who offers wine tasting services in both English and French through her company, Tasting Pleasures (tastingpleasures.ca).

“I think it’s perfect for those wishing to practice French to have wine tastings of, say, French wines. It’s a fun and tasty way to learn a language and a culture.”

Incidentally, Delorme will offer such a program from Nov. 15 to Dec. 6 — four sessions on Fridays after work — at the Alliance française de Calgary (afcalgary.ca), located downtown. The last session will include pairing fine dessert wines with gourmet chocolates. “Ahh! Does it get any better?”

A gourmet cook, Delorme notes that “cooking and understanding food helps you understand wine. It’s all about the interplay of flavours, textures, weight and aromas.”

Delorme grew up on a dairy farm 45 minutes east of Ottawa. She has a Bachelor of Education with a specialty in recreation from the University of Moncton, and a certificate in Arts Administration from the Banff Centre.

A lifelong learner, Delorme has continued to take university-level courses in a wide range of areas, notably in marketing and in non-profit management. Delorme has worked for the federal government for the better part of her career, managing funding programs in the areas of social justice and the arts.

She began studying wine five years ago and pursued two programs: the International Sommelier Guild and the Wine & Spirit Education Trust.

Delorme teaches about wine and the pleasures of wine tasting in a variety of settings. Her next event will take place Oct. 5, when she’ll provide wine tasting of South American and Portuguese wines at a fall extravaganza concert and gala event at the Portuguese Community Centre, 4747 30th St. S.E. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are available at singoutmysoul@shaw.ca or 403-455-6183.

Newsom lived in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Manitoba while growing up. A mechanical engineer, he graduated from the University of New Brunswick, and worked in the alternative fuel technology industry for many years. He learned to play bass in his late teens, and also plays the guitar, performing everything from folk music to jazz standards.

Newsom made his first Celtic harp a decade ago for his eldest daughter, who wanted to learn how to play the harp. Since then, Newsom has worked with a number of fine harpists to refine his design. He hasn’t looked back: Celtic harp making is now a career for Newsom, who has clients throughout Western Canada and also overseas (Newsomharps.ca).

The couple has two daughters, who are both away at university: Emilie, 21, is in her fourth year of a music performance degree in harp at University of British Columbia, and Sarah, 19, is starting a pre-law program at the University of Lethbridge.

Newsom and Delorme designed their house — a custom built two-storey with walkout basement — for the lot, which occupies 0.8 hectares on a south facing wooded hillside of aspen groves. The 2,700-square-foot house blends aspects of the arts and crafts and New England colonial architectural styles.

Question: Which room in your home is your favourite and why?

Answer: *The basement, which faces south and has french doors. It’s a very versatile room, designed specifically for music and wine tasting.*

Question: What activities do you — and other family members — do in this room?

Answer: *It's multi-purpose. The main use is as a music room, a harp showroom and a wine tasting room. It's a place where people can come and enjoy themselves, taste wine and be social.*

Jamie is quite involved in the local music scene, and we have a lot of music practice happening, with him on his own, giving bass lessons, or practising with bands.

Question: What is your favourite piece of furniture in this room?

Answer: *The trestle table. It is made of Douglas fir, and has been aged a little bit. We finished it matte, in a walnut colour. It's rustic looking wood, yet has contemporary lines. We designed it especially for wine tastings.*

Question: What is your favourite piece of art in this room?

Answer: *A painting that was done by a cowboy who had fallen down on his luck and became homeless due to alcoholism. He was part of an art program where he learned to paint and was overcoming his addiction. His dream was to get back on his horse, become a guide, bring people into the mountains on vacation, and bring them to vistas where everyone could paint. I met him at a concert by the Land's End Chamber Ensemble with Onalea Gilbertson.*

Question: Who designed this room?

Answer: *It was a collaborative approach between Jamie and I.*

Question: Is there anything you would change about the room if you could?

Answer: *If anything, I would like to have a bit more storage space for wine supplies, and music equipment.*

Question: Do you think of it as exclusively your room only, or one shared with others?

Answer: *It is very much shared.*

Question: How long have you lived in your house?

Answer: *Since 1998.*

Question: What community is your house in? What do you like about the area?

Answer: *In Bragg Creek. I grew up in the country, so I need my space and contact with nature, and nature in this area is absolutely stunning. It's close to the mountains, it's very clean, and it's close to Calgary, so we really do have the best of both worlds.*

Question: Have you seen your street and/or community change since you've moved there?

Answer: *Yes, it has been evolving like every town in Alberta. The struggle for Bragg Creek is to ensure the place evolves in a good way. The main concern currently is the pressure put on Kananaskis by industry, especially the latest approval by the province to allow Spray Lakes Sawmills to clear-cut some areas of West Bragg Creek.*

Question: What do you like most about living in the Calgary area?

Answer: *The spirit of the people, their can-do approach and desire to try new things. The arts and the wine industry are also quite vibrant.*

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