



After a devastating brain injury, Wayne Drew found healing and solace in a room dedicated to The Beatles

Life Re-Imagined



BY SANDRA WALNECK

PHOTOGRAPHY • TOMASZ ADAMSKI

A baby grand piano framed by the view of a picturesque Mennonite farm out back creates an elegant centrepiece in Shelley and Wayne Drew's Conestogo home. But do not be fooled by the soothing neutral palette and tasteful furnishings on the main floor of their spacious bungalow.

There is a completely different vibe emanating from a room in their walkout basement, and the giant image of John Lennon's face on a wall-sized mural is a clue behind the inspiration and theme for Wayne's musical retreat.

A self-described Beatles historian, Wayne

has been a lifelong fan. "I was alive when they performed on the 'Ed Sullivan Show,' " he says. "I was 13 years old and, from that moment on, they had me."

Working with interior designer Julia Correia, Wayne not only created a place to display his remarkable collection of Beatles' memorabilia, he found healing and renewal after suffering a serious brain injury at the age of 60.

Chatting over coffee with Correia on a beautiful June morning, the Drews show few signs of the medical crisis they braved over the past two years.

Early in 2014, Correia had started planning with the couple on a renovation to their downstairs kitchenette when everything came to a halt. Wayne woke to an

excruciating headache late in the night on March 2nd of that year. "That was the day the roof came falling on my head," he explains.

Wayne was working long hours as a partner in an accounting firm. "It was the middle of tax season, and I was slightly stressed," he recalls. "But I knew this was bad."

Shelley also realized that this was no ordinary headache and managed to get Wayne into the car for the drive to the emergency room. "I took him in his slippers and pyjama bottoms," she recalls. "I was worried he was having a stroke."

Things quickly progressed when they arrived at Grand River Hospital in Kitchener. "They gave me something to

ABOVE: Wayne Drew spent 42 days recovering at St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph after a brain hemorrhage, surgery and two strokes affecting the left side of his body. Despite his challenges, Wayne still loves to make music.

RIGHT: The main floor of the Drews' bungalow in Conestogo has a neutral palette with tasteful furnishings.





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WAYNE DREW

try to ease the pain,” says Wayne. “Then they did a CT scan and they knew it was a brain bleed.”

By 2 a.m., the medical staff informed the couple that surgery was necessary and Wayne would be transported to Hamilton. The prognosis was positive. “They said he would be home in two days,” says Shelley. “Three days, maybe, and back to work within a week. That’s not how it played out.”

Initially, Shelley was hopeful and was advised to head home and pack up a few

things before she travelled to Hamilton. She laughs when she recalls what happens next.

“I called my daughter (Deena),” Shelley says. “‘I need you! Dad’s had a brain hemorrhage!’” Despite the fact it should only have taken 15 minutes for her daughter to arrive, it was about 45 minutes later that Deena pulled into the driveway.

By this time, Shelley was frantic and Deena was confused. “‘Mom,’ she said, ‘it’s only a hemorrhoid,’” Shelley says laughing.

After arriving at Hamilton General



Hospital, Wayne’s condition had quickly worsened. Shelley found him disoriented and unaware that his family, including eldest daughter, Angela, and son, Brad, was present. An MRI and second CT scan showed two aneurysms in a different location than the initial brain bleed, which made treatment very tricky.

“It took two days before they did surgery,” says Shelley. “On March 4th at 7 p.m., he had surgery and we didn’t hear from the doctors until 2 a.m.” The family was cautiously optimistic until Wayne suffered a stroke two days following surgery and another two days after that.

Shelley had left Wayne briefly while a test was performed. “I came (back) into Wayne’s room and there were two nurse practitioners there,” describes Shelley. “They said to one another, ‘Should I tell her or should you?’” The words she heard next were devastating. “She told me, ‘The man you know is gone. He won’t walk, or talk or communicate in any way.’”

Summoning their children, Shelley was clear. “We do not cry in front of Dad,” she informed them. “If he makes it, or not, he

LEFT: This room in the Drews’ walkout basement has become Wayne’s musical retreat. Wayne has been a lifelong fan of The Beatles.

ABOVE: By the time Wayne had returned home from the hospital, interior designer Julia Correia had renovated the kitchenette in the basement with a sleek, modern countertop.

will know we are here.” Fearing the worst, her son, Brad, suggested that Shelley rest for a while, and he would stay with his father for the first shift.

Wayne takes over the story from here. “I had a vision of a long dark hallway,” he recalls. “At the end of the hallway was a door and I knew that if I walked through that door, I don’t come back out. I chose not to walk through the door.”

According to his son, Wayne opened his eyes suddenly and said, “Hi Brad!” And from that moment on, Wayne fought to regain his life.

“The doctor came in Monday morning,” says Wayne. “He said, ‘I never thought I’d see you alive again!’”

Regaining consciousness was just the first step to recovery. The strokes had hit the



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right side of Wayne's brain, affecting the left side of his body. A talented self-taught musician, it was feared that even if he regained his mobility, his creative side would never return.

But Wayne surprised everyone when a nurse practitioner wheeled him over to the piano in the lounge on his floor at Hamilton General Hospital and he picked out a tune with one finger on his right hand. His spirit was undiminished. "After being in a room full of people who were dying, I was surviving," he explains.

Wayne would then spend 42 days at St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph and credits the dedicated physiotherapists who worked with him to restore his mobility and independence, and his music. "I can't read music," he explains. "I had to learn how to catch up with the beat. The music therapy at St. Joe's is absolutely excellent. St. Joe's has been great for me."

As a show of support, Wayne has performed at St. Joseph's Music Day. Having completed his physiotherapy, he returns twice weekly to attend the Acquired Brain Injury program, a support group for adults who have suffered brain injuries.

"They put together other people who have had brain injuries," he says. "There is a lot of socializing. The best thing for someone who's had a brain injury is to do presentations, and we collaborate."

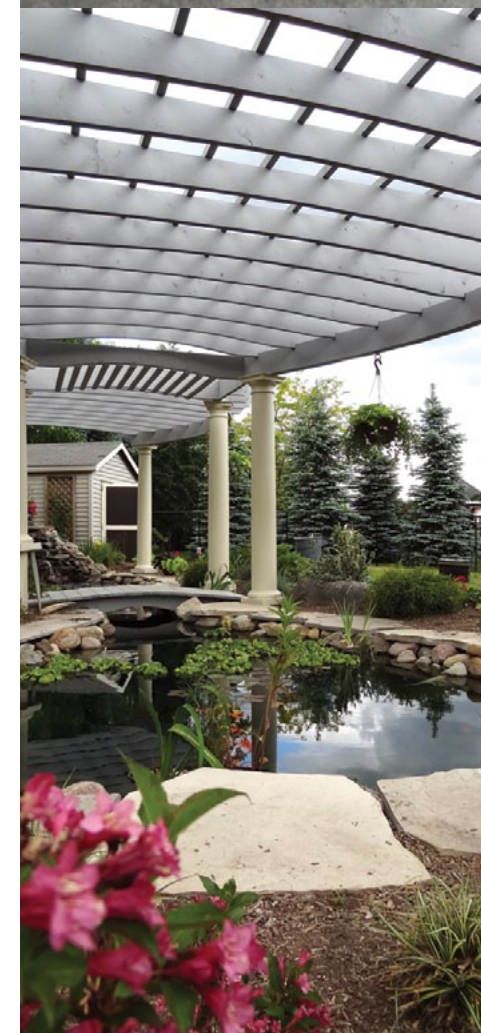
The day he arrived home from St. Joseph's, Wayne was delighted to find Correia at the house. "I was here when Wayne came home. It is more than just a client relationship," she says with emotion.

Correia knew that Wayne's return would mean changes to their home. "I worked with the therapists," she explains. "We dealt with safety issues — the shower, the bathroom and the stairwell into the garage."

And during their weeks away, Correia had worked to complete the basement

LEFT: With two grandchildren visiting every weekend, Shelley and Wayne didn't want a house that was too precious. 'We don't do 'off-limit' things,' says Shelley.

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kitchenette renovations. She also painted the kitchen cupboards white. “When it happened, we had met five or six times,” explains Shelley. “And then we had to just trust that Julia would do everything.” The renovation fits seamlessly into the existing basement. A modern, sleek countertop, complete with a corner coffee station, replaced the existing kitchenette. “There was an old bar of golden oak,” explains Shelley. “It was hideous.”

The couple purchased their home in 2000. “We loved the way it was initially,” says Shelley. “It was turnkey-ready. Well, there was a creamy white carpet upstairs, but we replaced that with hardwood.” They added a backyard pool and pool house complete with washroom to enhance family gatherings. But working with Correia on the initial renovation opened the door to more possibilities. “We always loved our home but didn’t realize the potential until

Julia helped us,” praises Shelley. With grandchildren in the picture, they did not want a house that was too precious. “They (Lucia, age eight, and Drew, age six) come every single weekend and spend the night,” explains Shelley. “We don’t do ‘off-limit’ things.” Correia includes her clients in each step of the process. “There is no right or wrong,” she says. “I will steer you in terms of design and initial ideas, but we brainstorm.” They continue to collaborate on changes to their main-floor living area. Correia encourages the couple to take existing features and enhance them to create an updated and functional space, without requiring an extensive renovation. Shelley laughs as she wonders how Correia has managed to make things work. “I like bling and crystals,” she says. “And Wayne likes The Beatles.” Wayne and Correia try to give each other credit for the music room masterpiece. “The two of you can fight over who wants to own

that room,” says Shelley. The miracle for Shelley is that Wayne was able to take part in the process. “It’s a vision that shouldn’t have existed,” she explains. “But that creative part of him that was supposed to have died with the stroke, I think it has been enhanced.” In contrast to the rest of the house, the room is a kaleidoscope of colour. There are guitars, drums and keyboards. Shelves and display stands highlight Wayne’s Beatles collection, and there is one rather striking settee, which has the faces of the Fab Four woven into the fabric of the very colourful back. Wayne points out a special framed picture of the Imagine Peace Tower, designed by Yoko Ono, on the island of Videy near Reykjavik, Iceland. Their son, Brad, made a special point of being there when it was illuminated when he visited Iceland. The tower is lit up between the anniversaries of John’s birthday and the day he died. Everything in the room is meaningful to Wayne, but he particularly loves the

eye-catching wall, which is a replica of the original Imagine wall mural in Prague, Czech Republic. “Sometimes I go into that room and sit down in that chair and I just look at that wall,” he says. “It was an incredible, incredible thing that Julia found for us.” Correia searched online to find something special and came upon a company that makes unique wall coverings. “It is, in fact, wallpaper and it was made up of two panels,” she explains. “The image was custom-sized/scaled to fit the wall in Wayne’s music room.” Despite all the progress that Wayne has made, he has lost some of his mobility. Outside of the house, he uses a cane and is still challenged by certain tasks. “If his brain doesn’t see his left hand, he can’t make his left hand do anything,” explains Shelley. One aspect of Wayne’s personality is different. “Wayne used to be closed up,” says Shelley. “Now he cares a lot about things. He wears his heart on his sleeve.”

Wayne is straightforward about how his life has changed. “I loved my work,” he admits. “And I miss it very much.” But Wayne has definitely maintained a sense of humour. On each forearm is a tattoo. One says “Imagine” and the other is a silhouette of The Beatles with the words “All You Need Is Love” underneath. “The doctor told me not to do anything impulsive after the stroke,” he laughs. “So I got tattoos.” The Dews plan to continue working with Correia as they update their home, and she is delighted with finding a unique addition to their front entryway. Looking for a replacement for an outdated intercom cover, Correia located a Beatles-themed doorbell plaque. “I found the four of them, a silhouette of their faces,” she describes. “It has the words: ‘You say goodbye, I say hello’ on it.” A beautiful acknowledgment of Wayne, who said hello when everyone else was preparing to say goodbye. 🎸



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