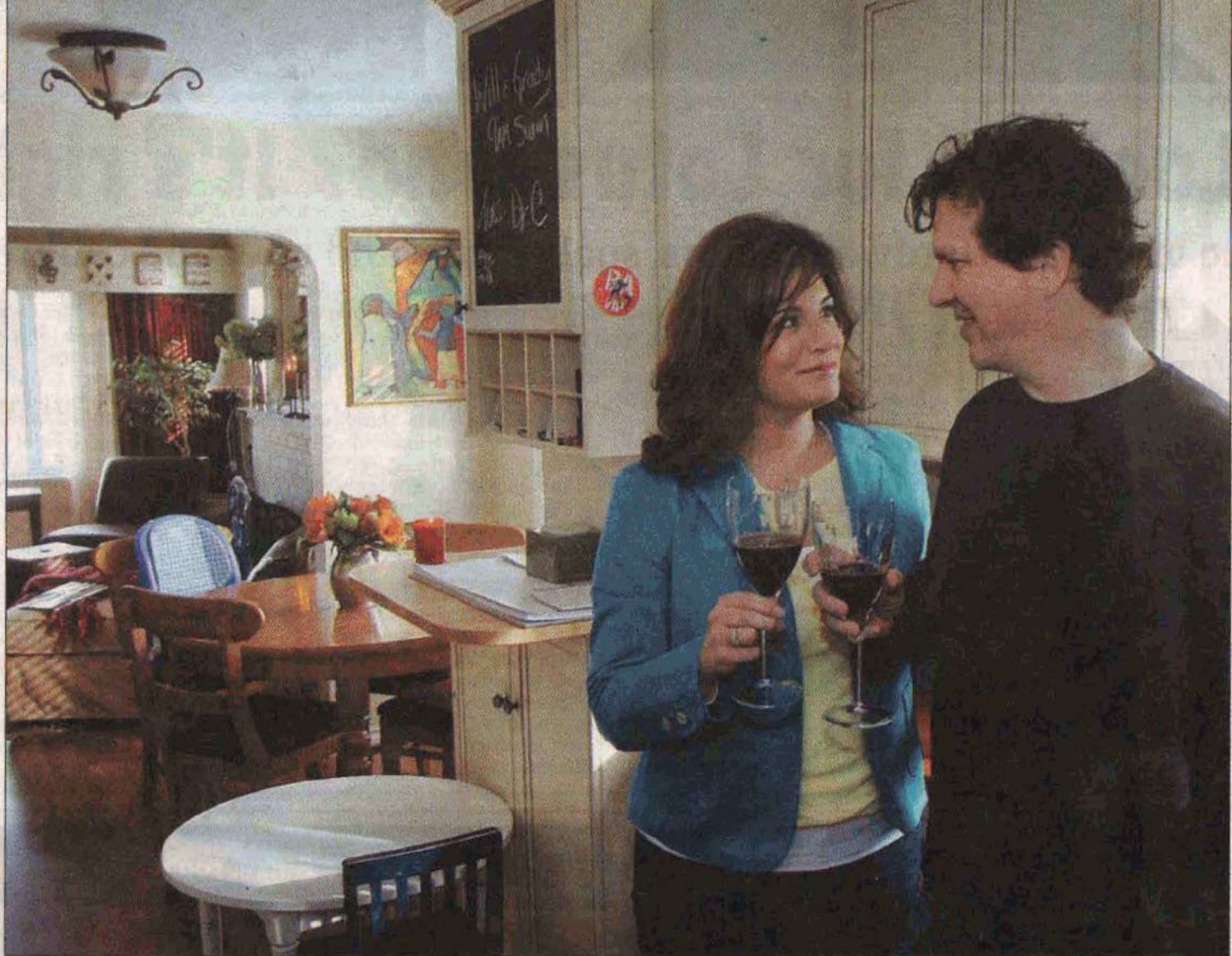




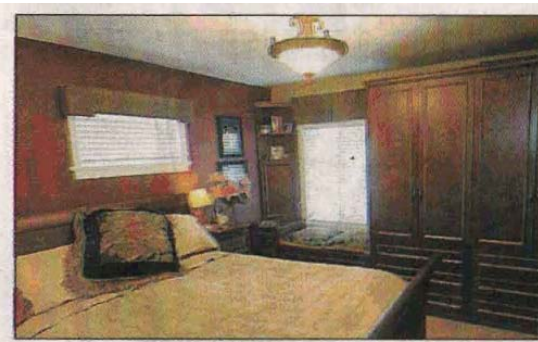
RENOVATION:

Chris Ainscough toasts his wife, Nicole Oliver, who did a great job of renovating their home. It had 'cool karma'

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Transformation a huge success



One of Nicole Oliver's favourite spots in the house is the chaise in front of the fireplace, above. From top left: master bedroom; the mirror above the fireplace; the 'family centre' with chalkboard and mailboxes; and a stained-glass window.

From '40s cottage to family friendly

RENOVATION: Four years and two children later, this home is a stunning success

BY JEANI READ
STAFF REPORTER

It was definitely a fixer-upper: chicken-coop fencing, rebar over the windows, lime-green walls and orange shag carpeting inside — and the original 1940s kitchen — with the taps coming out of the wall. Yikes!

The little Craftsman-style cedar cottage had been moved a few blocks to its current South Main location in the 1960s and a second floor added. Then it had been broken up into three separate suites.

"But it had really good bones," says actor Nicole Oliver, making the fatal observation that means massive renos.

Even better, it had "cool karma," she says. A piano tuner and his family had lived there for 25 years and he worked in the garage that would become a studio for Oliver's husband, film and TV composer Chris Ainscough. The musical connection felt just right.

It was only the two of them when they bought the house in September 2002. But, says Oliver, "Between the drywalling and the painting, I got pregnant."

William was born first, Grady two years later, and now the house is a dream for a family of four — upstairs is a great room, the master suite and Nicole's study/guest room. The boys' rooms and Ainscough's studio and office are on the ground floor.

The renos took two big stages, with Oliver working as her own



general contractor (with help from an experienced friend). What were her qualifications?

"I'm really bossy, a control freak and addicted to HGTV," she says. "I thought I could give it a go."

And she did.

Q: First priority?

A: "We took it back to a family home, opened up the boxed-in stairs and the temporary walls. And I needed a new kitchen. We called Paradigm Kitchens."

Q: Esthetic challenge?

A: "I wanted to stay true to the house, not over-modernize it but make it usable for a modern family. We made a (new) great room but there are lots of built-ins like they had in the 1940s. I kept the cove ceilings and a plaster-and-lathe wall. And the fireplace is original."

Q: Hands-on challenge?

A: "When we moved in, in November 2002, the fun really started. Kitchen cabinets in the living room and furniture every-

where. But they promised it would be done by Christmas — and Christmas Eve we were putting up the tree and sitting in front of our real wood-burning fireplace."

Q: Sentimental sign?

A: "Hanging above the fireplace is a mirror that belonged to Chris' grandparents. It fits perfectly, another clue that it all worked."

Q: Décor inspiration?

A: "Sid Dickens' tiles. They were my jumping-off point. They're old-world but modern and playful. I've been collecting them since the '90s."

Q: Colours?

A: "Lots of creams and yellows. The doors are red, a colour I pull through the house. The kitchen counters are red Corian. It's a passionate colour and good luck."

Q: Growing pains?

A: "After William came, we were thinking, do we want another kid? How will we make it work? We had to make a place for Grady, so Chris got kicked out of part of his office, which became

Actor Nicole Oliver used her collection of Sid Dickens' tiles (left) as her inspiration when renovating what started out as a 1940s cedar cottage. [The tiles] are old-world but modern and playful. I've been collecting them since the '90s,' she says.

PHOTOS BY JON MURRAY — THE PROVINCE

Grady's nursery. We made two small rooms out of one big room and I inherited William's nursery upstairs as my study. We called Instant Bedrooms to put a Murphy bed there, so it's an office and a guest room. I liked it so much, they made a built-in armoire for the master suite and built-ins in Grady's room so the space is all maxed-out and functional."

Q: Kitchen coup?

A: "I wanted a family centre, so we have a door with a chalkboard and four mailboxes underneath, but still a countertop with a butcher block that opens up with all the meds and Band-Aids."

Q: Favourite room?

A: "I love sitting on my chaise with the fire. In summer the 500-sq-ft. deck is a whole extra room."

Q: Favourite detail?

A: "The stained-glass windows. They speak to the heart of the house."

Q: Survival strategies?

A: "We had two babies. That and the rum and Cokes."

Jread@png.comwest.com

