

Globetrotter's décor

Waterloo psychiatrist Dr. Loys Ligate has brought her travels home with her



Loys Ligate reads a book in her living room. Two low couches placed back-to-back both divide and connect the large, rectangular living room. One side looks to the sleek marble fireplace, the other faces extra chairs. All sit on a 100-year-old handmade Moroccan carpet.



BY KATHRYN STORRING

PHOTOGRAPHY • DWIGHT STORRING

She has the world at her fingertips.

It's there in the gorgeous living room carpet hauled back from Morocco; it's there in the distinctive marquetry cabinet from China; it's there in the traditional artwork from Peru, its holy figures shrouded in vibrant tent-like clothing.

Dr. Loys Ligate's three-storey townhome in Waterloo reflects her life and taste in so many ways it's hard to keep track. As we tour the home, accompanied by her whippet, Vanna White, it's clear that almost everything — the art, the carpets, the collectibles, the furnishings — has special meaning, whether from world travels, or her love of whippets, or her late husband's fascination with birds, or just the sleuthing behind a particular decor piece.

"It's my personal space," Ligate says. "I spend a lot of time here so it's really important that every time I walk in, I love my space."

Ligate and her husband, Keith Gummow, bought the condo in 2013 as a future retirement home. They rented it to a family member in the meantime. Then, in January 2015, Gummow died.

"It was a difficult year," Ligate says. "You can't imagine that all of a sudden your life is completely changed."

Ligate chose to stay busy. She resumed work immediately as a psychiatrist with the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, where she heads an intensive program for youth experiencing their first psychotic break. The work is fulfilling, and she praises her team for its creativity and commitment.

Beyond her job, she focused on her part-time courses in interior decorating at Conestoga College.

"You either give up or you go on," she notes. "To me, it's not a choice. You go on. I still have things I want to accomplish."



Loys Ligate sits in the living room of her Waterloo townhome amid her many-storied decor, including a painting that bears a striking resemblance to her.

It wasn't long before she also realized she should move. Her large property in Conestogo was too much for one person. The Waterloo townhome, part of a stylish condo complex built in 2008, was a better prospect. All it needed was some reshaping — an immersive project that ran from May to September last year.

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Working with Pioneer Craftsmen, Ligate gave the townhome a facelift that would showcase her decor training to the max.

On the main floor, pillars that acted as a visual divide between the living room and the dining/kitchen area were removed, and the living room's hand-distressed oak flooring extended.

The space now flows seamlessly through to the double-hinged doors that open to a spacious deck. The deck not only overlooks her lawn and gardens below but also an expanse of Grand River Conservation Area land and the Grand River beyond. It's a peaceful setting that evokes country living.

Back inside, the traditional mantel on the living room fireplace was replaced by sleek, floor-to-ceiling Carrara marble. The kitchen countertops and expanded island were also switched to marble.

The original kitchen cupboards were in good shape, so Ligate updated them with grey paint and new hardware. A new backsplash features small, bevelled tiles. Her Wolf range, popular among chefs,



Vanna White, a whippet, lies in a dog bed beside the kitchen, one of several stylish beds throughout the home.



ABOVE: The dining area includes a built-in padded bench along one wall, plus a glass-top table on marble posts that match the nearby kitchen island.

RIGHT: A bronze statue by Cambridge artist Jane Hook captures Loys Ligate and her daughter, Ashling.



TOP: A clever upstairs renovation transformed a windowless storage area at the top of the stairs into a cosy sitting area with a fireplace, cabinetry, artwork and an intriguing multi-tendrill floor lamp.

ABOVE: The bedspread in the master bedroom is made of hand-embroidered fabric from India that Ligate spotted in a fabric store in New York City.

defines her as a serious cook, but she is also a cook with an eye for stylish convenience. The microwave is hidden in a drawer in the island and a movable shelf lifts her heavy mixer up to counter level. A wine fridge makes entertaining easy.

In a clever upstairs renovation, a windowless storage area at the top of the stairs has been transformed into a cosy TV or sitting area by enlarging the doorway and replacing one end with a half-wall. Add a fireplace, cabinetry, artwork and an intriguing multi-tendrill floor lamp, and a forgotten space becomes an integral part of the home.

The second level also includes a large bedroom suite, a laundry room, another bathroom and a roomy, sunlit office. The latter, complete with walk-in closet, has a murphy bed that accommodates guests as needed but tips up into the wall the rest of the time. A chalkboard stretches across the wall above the desk, ready for ideas.

The renovation team also finished the basement, producing a comfortable sitting area with multiple cabinets plus an exercise corner. One wall has a world map, its numerous push-pins marking Ligate's travel destinations. A washroom sports wallpaper with a tasteful bird motive; a walkout leads to a covered patio and the yard. Cork flooring ties it together.

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Overall, the renovations have re-envisioned the space, but it is Ligate's decorating that takes everything up a notch. Little was left to chance as she measured, made floor plans, sourced products and fussed over details.

For example, the shower in the upstairs bathroom features large, graffiti-style tile. She lugged the tiles, one 23-kilogram box at a time, upstairs so that she could lay them out and puzzle over design options before the installers arrived.

Light fixtures have special appeal. The most striking, hanging over the upper staircase, features about 20 glass birds perched on a

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TOP: The basement lounge features comfy leather furniture, built-in cabinets and a fireplace and painting. The basement include an exercise corner and a walkout to the back garden.

ABOVE: A light fixture, hanging over the upper staircase, features about 20 glass birds perched on a large brass ring.

large brass ring, reflecting the light.

And then there are the carpets — small, long, large and everywhere, even on closet floors. They are from India, Iran, Morocco, Turkey and China. The dramatic handmade carpet in the living room is 100 years old. A wool carpet in the basement once graced her parents' home. Others are new works picked up during her travels.

The decor mixes old and new, shapes and textures. Leather poofs (hassocks) act as colourful accents or seating. For the upstairs sitting area, Ligate ordered a Barrymore sofa to complement the dark pink Indian rug. The fabric for her eye-catching bedspread was hand-embroidered in India; she spotted it in a fabric store in New York City.

Although some elements perfectly enhance or complement, others create bold contrasts. In a small powder room, the sink is a patterned Moroccan basin while large, vibrant artwork from Peru dominates the nearby wall. A dark carpet runner can be just around the corner from a large rug awash in soft shades.

Ligate's steady guidance makes everything work. Overall, her results are elegant as well as unexpected.

Not that her decorating doesn't include a dash of whimsy. For one thing, she sometimes chooses a shade of paint by the colour name — melted ice cream, first crush, dark chocolate, cashmere wrap.

"The colours speak to you, but the names



Graffiti-inspired tile is used in the shower of the second-floor bathroom.

speak to you too. And they are such delicious names," she says.

Then there are the five artworks by the late painter and figure skater Toller Cranston. Cranston's images are like fanciful, joyful creatures that have just escaped from dreamland for a mad romp up her staircase.

Ligate's other art ranges from muted landscapes to refined abstracts that draw a viewer into the figures within — a nurse, an angel or a woman reclining in a lawn chair. Some are prints or sentimental pieces, but most are by established artists, including Dorothy Knowles, James Gordaneer, Alex Katz and Bill Schwarz.

Her bronze statues include a work by

Cambridge artist Jane Hook that captures Ligate and her daughter, Ashling.

Space is maximized throughout the home. In the dining area, the wall seating is a padded bench — so much more compact than chairs. Plus the bench has storage within. The table features a glass top on marble posts, matching the nearby island.

Her living room is a large rectangle, about 26 by 20 feet, a space that can be challenging to tie together. Ligate's solution was to divide — and connect — the room using two low couches placed back-to-back. One side looks to the fireplace, the other faces extra chairs. The height of the sofas guarantees visual flow.



Toller Cranston's fanciful images line the staircase to the second floor.

Ligate admits that even careful planning can go awry. Like her trip to Morocco to track down the perfect carpet for the living room.

"After all this negotiating and bargaining, I bought this rug and that night I thought, you know what, I think this rug is too big."

A call home to Pioneer Craftsmen confirmed her fears — her ideal carpet would not fit. Fortunately, she was being transported by a trusted driver, who not only took back the carpet, but also arranged for a wide selection of new possibilities to greet them at their next destination. The hunt began all over again.

"But that's half the fun, right?" she says. "It's the memories of the things that you've brought back."



LEFT: This traditional piece of art from Peru, of a holy figure shrouded in vibrant clothing, dominates the main-floor powder room.

BOTTOM: The main-floor powder room features two Moroccan sinks.



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The carpet search underlines a life lesson learned at a young age. “If you want something, go after it,” Ligate says. “There’s a way. You may really have to think about it and go at it from a different route, but go after it. It’s kind of how I live my life.”

This philosophy helped her find her way in medical school in an era in which she was one of only four women in the class.

Considering her side interests in decorating, sewing and quilting, it’s interesting that she describes her chosen field of medicine, psychiatry, as a creative process.

“You have to put the pieces of the puzzle from a person’s life and their experiences into a story to explain how they got to where they need help today,” she says. “Everybody has their own story and it is really important to find out those pieces. So often there are pieces missing, so if you don’t get the whole story, you’re not going to get it right.”

She is passionate about helping young people through the Canadian Mental Health Association. She also works at the Grand Valley Institution for Women, and some of her travels have included volunteer work with Mother Teresa in Calcutta and at a Mother Teresa Orphanage in Ethiopia.

“I guess my philosophy in life is, basically, if there’s a door that opens, I want to go through it,” Ligate says.

So what doors are opening now?

She mentions a work-related conference on the horizon, but one can’t help but notice the way her eyes light up as she talks about a certain 1870s Regency cottage in Guelph. Her daughter has bought it — and has asked Ligate to help decorate. 📍

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