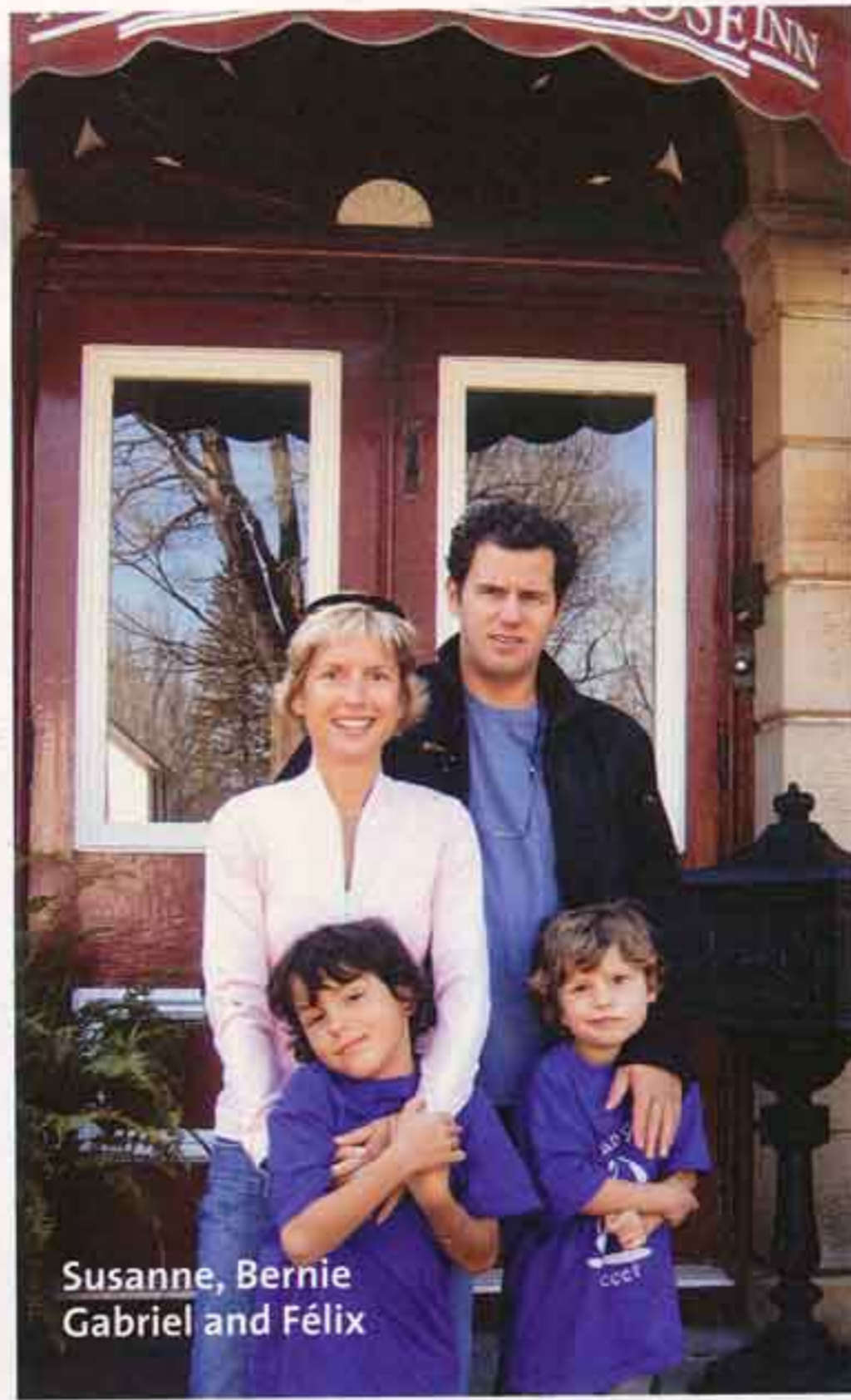


Ram and Sonya



Susanne, Bernie
Gabriel and Félix



Jim and Donna

The Innkeepers' *dreams*

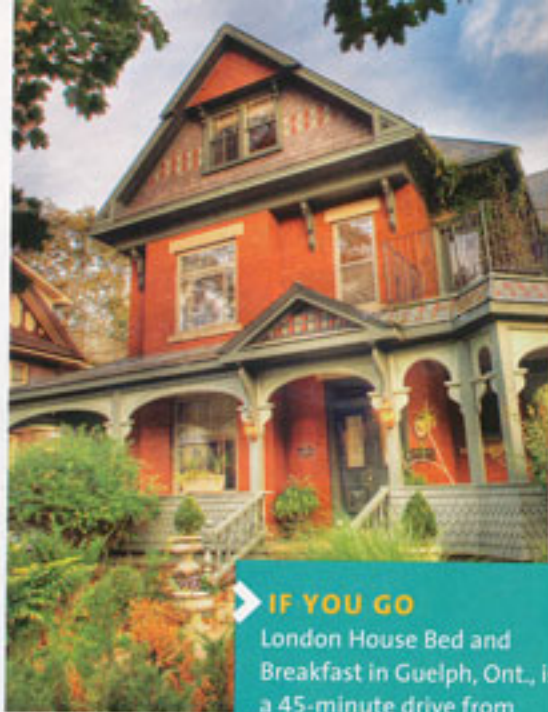
Meet three Canadian families who've realized their dream of running an inn. Here, they open their doors to you.

BY BARBARA RIGHTON

Making strangers feel like long-lost cousins is Melanie McLennan's greatest accomplishment. Along with her husband, Andy, Melanie is the owner of London House Bed and Breakfast in Guelph, Ont. For the past 22 years, with what she calls her "toolkit of skills" – sewing, gardening, cooking and bookkeeping – Melanie and handyman Andy have welcomed visitors from more than 75 countries to their heritage home, raising five children along the way. And they have enjoyed every day of it.

Running a B&B means being available 24-7, Melanie says. But no matter how much face time she puts in – or how much hard work goes on behind the scenes – it gives her a feeling of satisfaction she couldn't get at a nine-to-five job. "It definitely beats sitting in a cubicle!" says Melanie, who is also on the board of directors for a large association of B&B owners in Ontario.

Here's how three very different families made the dream of running an inn a reality.



IF YOU GO

London House Bed and Breakfast in Guelph, Ont., is a 45-minute drive from Toronto's Pearson International Airport.

RAM & SONYA
Cable Cove Inn, Tofino, B.C.



IF YOU GO

Cable Cove Inn in Tofino, B.C., is located on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It is a three-hour drive from Nanaimo, a two-hour ferry ride from Tsawwassen Bay in Delta, B.C., or a 90-minute ferry ride from Horseshoe Bay in Vancouver.

Three years ago, when Indian-born Ram Tumuluri, then 30, and his wife, Sonya, 25, bought into a slightly shabby seven-room B&B, they set out to offer something different – a couples-only retreat with luxurious rooms, a holistic ashram spa and personally prepared five-course dinners served up in a romantic oceanside cabin.

Ram had trained as a chef in India and Cyprus. He did his apprenticeship in England and worked as a manager for the Marriott Hotels chain in Chicago. When the company sent him to Vancouver, he realized that Canada

was the place to make his long-term goal of running an inn a reality. Ram already knew Charles McDiarmid, owner of the grand Wickaninnish Inn in Tofino, B.C. "I went to him to learn the pain and the gain," he says with a laugh.

Meeting Sonya was pure fate. She was a graphic artist living in California, who had come home to Tofino to visit her ailing mother. Sonya knew everybody in town, including the owners of the Cable Cove, where she had worked as a teenager. When the inn went up for sale, they decided to take their lives in a new direction. "It was my dream," says Ram. "But the inn would give Sonya the freedom to design the look of the place and our website."

Their biggest hurdle was money. "We had \$2,000 to our names," Ram says. Still, through some creative financial planning – Ram and Sonya arranged a buyout with the

previous owners – and with financing from family and friends, they took over the inn the day after they got married. Energy and youth were their aces in the hole.



Sonya dressed the inn in beautiful Indian silks, and outfitted one suite entirely in driftwood furniture made by a local artisan. The feeling she accomplished with the room is restful yet, behind the scenes, the work was

anything but. That first year, Ram and Sonya not only shopped, cooked and ran the reservations desk, they also did all the housekeeping themselves. "We both got into this knowing how much hard work it would take," Sonya says. "When it's your own place, you want to do it." Now they have two housekeepers, a spa director, three spa therapists and an operations manager to help them – and 90 per cent of their renovation costs have been paid off.

Ram and Sonya still work the reservations desk, often with their baby, Neha, in tow. They have learned to balance not only their own talents, but also the social demands of their guests, with the physical work. "You have to be a people person," Sonya says. "And you have to learn how to handle complaints." Still, Ram adds, "It's a blissful place." Both for the guests and the owners.

SUSANNE & BERNIE

Victoria Rose Inn, Gananoque, Ont.



IF YOU GO

Victoria Rose Inn in Gananoque, Ont., is located about 20 minutes east of Kingston, Ont., 90 minutes from Ottawa or 2.5 hours from Montreal.

Susanne Richter and her husband, Bernie Latrémouille, were thousands of miles away when they first laid eyes on a piece of property that would change their lives. It was late March 2005. They and their sons, Gabriel and Félix, had escaped the tail end of an Ottawa winter to vacation at their favourite inn, the Island City House, in Key West, Fla. Bernie was lying on the bed with his laptop, idly looking at real estate listings. Up popped a mansion on two acres in



Victoria Rose Inn

Gananoque, Ont., that was built in 1872. It had a colourful history. Called the Victoria Rose, it was decorated top to bottom in various shades of pink and pale blue. Four months later, on July 1, 2005, they were open for business. "Leap and the net will appear," says Susanne. Of course, the leap didn't come easy.

Bernie and Susanne were successful 40-something professionals who lived in Ottawa's tony Glebe neighbourhood. But Susanne wasn't looking forward to going back to work after the birth of their second son, Félix – and she didn't want to stay home either. Bernie was up for a challenge. "We wanted to do something that was really ours," he says. Inspired by the Island City House, they thought about opening an inn. Susanne would run it while Bernie continued to work at his day job, contributing his easy charm whenever he could.

After their first season, Susanne and Bernie closed the Victoria Rose and gutted it. Bernie was the perfect guy for the job. Raised in a family of 11, he and his four brothers had helped their dad do plumbing and wiring on various rental properties and a cottage they built together. Susanne is highly organized and a "keeper of lists," says Bernie. "Our skill sets are complementary."

And both of them love the Gananoque area with its haunting

necklace of islands. Susanne grew up in nearby Kingston, Ont., where her mother, Barbara Pusch, now the inn's gardener, still lives. At first, Susanne says, moving back to Gananoque was a trial. The boys, especially Gabriel, missed their friends. On top of that, the old house had some surprises in store. Despite Bernie's expertise, radiators blew, a ceiling collapsed (while a guest, oblivious, sat in a hot tub on the floor above) and a sewage pump exploded. As for the actual day-to-day running of the inn, Susanne says, she had to get used to "being on" all the time.

Still, as they celebrate their fourth anniversary this July 1, the positives far outweigh the negatives. Susanne, who designed eight history walls in the inn to showcase the home's various incarnations, is in love with every nook and cranny. The kids, now seven and nine, love it too. They pelt around the property in their bare feet, pretending an old stone wall is the gateway to Narnia. And they have taken an interest in the business, too, answering the phone and showing guests to the front desk.

If the children are free there, so are Susanne and Bernie. "We can tweak the business however we think makes sense because we are only accountable to ourselves," she says. And that "is an amazing feeling." ▶

THE LACEBY FAMILY

Amherst Shore Country Inn and Blomidon Inn, N.S.



Blomidon Inn

Over the past 29 years, Jim and Donna Laceby have built not one but two family inns in Nova Scotia. The first is a quaint oceanfront inn on the Northumberland Strait called the Amherst Shore Country Inn. The second is the legendary Blomidon Inn, housed in a spectacular mansion just a three-hour drive away in Wolfville. The two couldn't be more different. The Amherst Shore Inn is beach life at its relaxed best; the Blomidon Inn offers formal dining rooms, a 37-page wine list, a gift shop that sells curios from all over the world, and five acres of gardens to walk through.

Donna and Jim threw themselves into making both places equally successful. And although their sons Michael and Sean, both in their 30s, now run the Blomidon Inn, while a third son, Rob, 41, manages the Amherst Shore Country Inn with his wife, Mary, neither

▶ IF YOU GO

- The Amherst Shore Country Inn is located on Nova Scotia's Northumberland Strait, 15 minutes from Port Elgin, N.B., 20 minutes from Amherst, N.S., or 40 minutes from the Confederation Bridge (to P.E.I.).
- The Blomidon Inn is in Wolfville, N.S., part of Nova Scotia's famous Annapolis Valley, about an hour's drive from Halifax.

Jim nor Donna show any sign of retiring. "Dad's going from manager to mentor," Michael says with a laugh. "As for Mom, she doesn't have to cook anymore, but she still manages the gift shop."

Back in the mid-1970s, when they lived in southern Ontario, the Lacebys, who have five children, owned a beef operation that was not paying off. "We realized that we would lose money if ▶

we added to our herd, or if we reduced it," says Jim. He had always wanted to live on the Northumberland Strait. When he was offered a job in Amherst, the whole family decamped for Nova Scotia, staying at the Amherst Shore Inn before Jim and Donna decided to buy it in 1980.

All five kids grew up at the Amherst Shore Country Inn. They mowed the lawns, washed dishes and gardened. In the winter, they strapped on their cross-country skis and broke trails for guests. Some guests came

OK, so you're not the innkeeping type. But maybe these families have inspired you, and you're ready to try a new career. **Go online and make your dreams come true with our top 10 job-changing tips.**

www.canadianliving.com/july



Blomidon Inn:
teak, mahogany and
homespun hospitality

back so often, they watched the kids grow up. "We built a bridge of friendliness," says Jim. "It wasn't a big stretch for us; if you enjoy having friends, you enjoy your customers."

Still, he surprised the community in 1988 when he left Donna in charge of the Amherst Shore seasonal operation and moved with the kids to Wolfville to run the then-bankrupt Blomidon Inn – a 27-room teak-and-mahogany behemoth. "One guy told me it was crazy," Jim says. But the arrangement worked for nearly a decade, before Rob took over the Amherst and Jim and Donna turned their collective attention to the Blomidon.

Along the way they honed their skills. Donna went to culinary school and Jim learned accounting. But they both mastered the same lesson about the hospitality business. "You have to know what your guests needs are," says Jim. "They want privacy, safety, comfort and an experience to remember."

Jim says the best advice for anyone who wants to "live a dream" is to spend time at an inn and learn first-hand how much labour is involved. As far as maintaining harmony within this burgeoning hotelier dynasty, Michael says simply, "We don't dwell on who's working harder." ●