

Artist's take on blended family

ECLECTIC MOSAIC TURNS HOUSE INTO A WELCOMING HOME

By Claire Prime

Photography • David Bebee

AFTER MEG LESLIE married Jeritt Hemeon last year, she was looking for a way to bring their family — her two sons and his two sons and daughter — together.

“The first year before we got married and even after we got married, it was really difficult,” she says. “They were trying to figure out, who are you to me and is this really my dad’s house or is it your house?”

The Kitchener-based artist decided to look for a creative solution. So she traced the hands of all the children, ages four to 15, on the side of their brick home with a marker and drew a paisley pattern around each of them. Then she started a mosaic, gluing bits of tile, plate and mirror to the once bare north side of the house, which she had bought two years earlier.

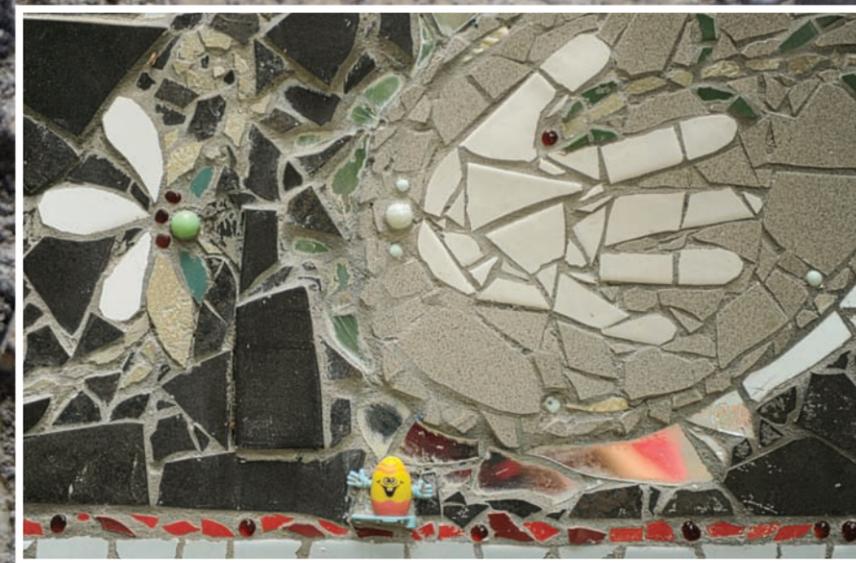
She found little toys, jewels and

porcelain flowers to put in, too. Small glass bottles are stuck beside each hand, where she leaves small notes to her husband and children.

The wall has made their children feel at home. “They feel like this is theirs, they’ve got their mark on it,” she says. She watches them hold up their hands to the mosaic, looking to see if they’ve grown since the mosaic was made.

Tiling is the newest venture for Leslie, who has an interior design degree from Georgian College but has been creating art her whole life. She’s painted, made jewelry, pottery and papier-mâché chairs. She used to have a shop, selling Canadian arts and crafts, and used to teach kids to paint, out of her home and at the Cambridge Galleries. But mosaic tiling is definitely her focus now.

“You can use your hands and you can smash stuff; it’s like painting with tile.” ▶



Meg Leslie’s mosaic tile work on the outside of her Kitchener home includes handprints and small bottles where she can leave notes for the family.





Meg Leslie created a band of mosaic tiles on the exterior wall of her Kitchener home.

► she says. “It’s not like mixing up the paint, it’s like, what colour of tile do I have? And then it evolves from there.”

Inspired by Spanish artist Antoni Gaudi, who used big pieces of tiles to create mosaics on walls and the sides of buildings in the late 19th- and early-20th centuries, she set out to find someone doing something similar today.

She stumbled upon Isaiah Zagar, a mosaic artist from Philadelphia. The artist, who had humble roots on South Street in Philadelphia, started tiling the property he was squatting on. Since then, the artist, now in his 70s, has transformed a rough part of the city into a colourful and glimmering castle.

Leslie took a workshop with Zagar for her 42nd birthday. She took her sons, now 14 and 15, with her, one to help with navigating around the city and the other was put in charge of food and drinks.

They were mesmerized by the art. “It looked like jewels. The whole building

sparkled,” she says. She worked with Zagar and other artists to tile an elevator in a warehouse he had just bought.

When she came home, she immediately set to work. Her friend asked her to tile her bathroom, even though she hadn’t done anything of that size on her own. She ended up tiling an image of the hills she saw driving back from Philadelphia with blue and white pieces. She worked out of the bathtub.

After that, she tiled another friend’s kitchen in the colours and style of a Tuscan villa.

What she really wanted, though, was to tile outside. She asked local artists if they knew of a good wall she could work on. She even asked the nearby Little City Farm, an eco-friendly bed and breakfast, if she could tile their hay bale shelter.

It wasn’t until she was walking her dog one day and looking at the bare side of her house that she realized she was looking at

her canvas.

Her neighbours watched quietly as she tiled from March until May. Now they offer her their spare tiles and broken plates. “Just leave it on the back deck,” she says, laughing.

Then she started working on her bathroom, covering it with broken white and yellow tile, roses broken off from kitschy Goodwill figurines and pieces from an old chandelier. She has tiled a pear tree on one wall, to remind her of the tree at her last house, built in 1917.

Jeritt recently picked up a tub full of dinky cars from a neighbour, and she’s thinking of tiling the garage roof with them. “You can do anything, right?” 

Meg Leslie’s work will be on display in her home during the K-W Central Art Walk on Oct. 20 and 21; www.centralartwalk.com. Other photos of Leslie’s work are available at: www.meglesliecreative.com.