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"I tell you, God led me to this place."

Fashionista at the farm

Consider the stomping grounds of Fashion Television's Jeanne Beker — Toronto, New York, London, Paris, Milan, ... Roseneath. Now consider that she is at home in every one of those locales, except perhaps Paris where she is in heaven. Mention the City of Light and Jeanne's head tilts slightly and the words come tumbling out. But ask her about her pastoral sanctuary in Roseneath and her signature smile spreads across her face, she takes a deep breath, and becomes peaceful.

One of Northumberland's newest residents is an accredited member of the glitterati. Since 1985, she has been the face of the long-running Canadian production, Fashion Television, which is now syndicated in over 100 countries. She is a syndicated columnist and author of her biography, *Jeanne Unbottled*. On top of all these laurels, her own line of clothing will launch at Eatons on September 17.

The inclusion of Roseneath on Jeanne's regular itinerary is both wonderful and puzzling. The question may be brazenly naive, but really! Exactly how does poodling around in Alnwick Township balance with the rest of her life on the fun side of the velvet rope? "I think I would go crazy if it weren't for this place," she exclaims — because if this woman is less than enthusiastic about something, she's probably asleep.

"This is who I really am — not that I'm a fraud when I'm hobnobbing. Oh, ►

When you think fashion in Canada, you think Roots, Kodiak boots, and, who else? Jeanne Beker, catwalk reporter extraordinaire and the face of Canada's Fashion Television for almost two decades. She jetsets her way to Milan, Paris, London — but she's found home in Roseneath.

Cynthia Amsden pays this city girl a visit



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Ted Amsden

► some of the people I deal with are frauds! But then there are people like (couture designer) Karl Lagerfeld. They're the originals. They are

ultimately true to themselves and dealing with them is how I get inspired. But if it was just all that, I think I'd have the most meaningless, shallow life if it weren't for this place. This is where I can hear myself think."

Life for Jeanne Beker began to make sense in 1990 when she and her former husband bought their first cottage in Muskoka. All the hustling and schmoozing and pushing herself so hard suddenly had a purpose and a reward that involved a lakefront, some loons and a wood fire. When her marriage ended, part of Jeanne's evolution included finding a country hideaway she could call her own. "I tell you, God led me to this place," she says laughing with pure delight.

She had met an art collector at an auction preview at Toronto's Casey House. He invited her and her two daughters to his Dale Road farm that weekend for his young daughter's birthday. Coincidentally, it was also the birthday of one of Jeanne's daughters. She went. She saw. She fell in love with the area. After contacting a real estate agent with her price, pond and distance-from-Toronto requirements, one location with extensive acreage was suggested. "We drove into the driveway and I thought, 'Ah! I'm home again.'"

There was a wrenching moment after the purchase when the vice grip of reality caused her to second-guess the decision. "What was I thinking?? I'm a single mother with two young girls and a farm." OK, a farm with a moose because she bought one of Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman's art moose which had been scattered around Toronto and shipped it out to the Roseneath property. But still, had this been the right idea?

Her answer arrived in the form of a second coincidence. While calming herself with a few decor purchases for the farm (an eminently reasonable remedy for any woman's anxieties), Jeanne wandered into Elte Carpets in Toronto and was drawn, naturally,

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toward the designer room. "I go into this fabulous Ralph Lauren room and what appeals to me is not the furniture, but the antique chatchkas (Yiddish for "the small things you're not supposed to notice, but they steal the thunder from the big merchandise") that weren't for sale. In particular was a table covered with old trophies."

At this point, Jeanne dashes into the house and returns with a tarnished silver loving cup. "I picked this up, thinking it was for bowling or swimming, and it's for public speaking. And then I read it was presented by Alnwick council! What? I live in Alnwick! I turn it around and read all the little plaques around the base: Edward Coyle. Emily George Fenella. Steven Robins of Robins Country Store fame. This trophy dates back to 1931 and everything rang a bell — either the name of a road or a family. I thought, I have to take it back to where it belongs." Elte Carpet had no intention of selling its props, but Ms. Beker is not to be denied. Elte relented for a ridiculous price, but clearly, price was not the issue. "That was the moment, when I knew I was meant to have this place."

The 401 pilgrimage out to Roseneath is a trek Jeanne makes as often as possible. She was a "50 out of 52 weeks a year" regular with Muskoka, so the same applies here, except she often has friends staying over when she is away. Two nights before the interview, Jeanne held a small fete. "We had friends up and just blasted the Motown. We were dancing under the stars and weren't bothering anybody! It's great because you can't do this in Muskoka. It's so congested there you can smell what your neighbours are having for dinner."

Part of each visit is recuperation and part is exploration. "That's what I love about this place. You can go to all these fun, little towns and villages like Hastings and Warkworth. It's fabulous. Stonehouse Gardens is..." she turns to

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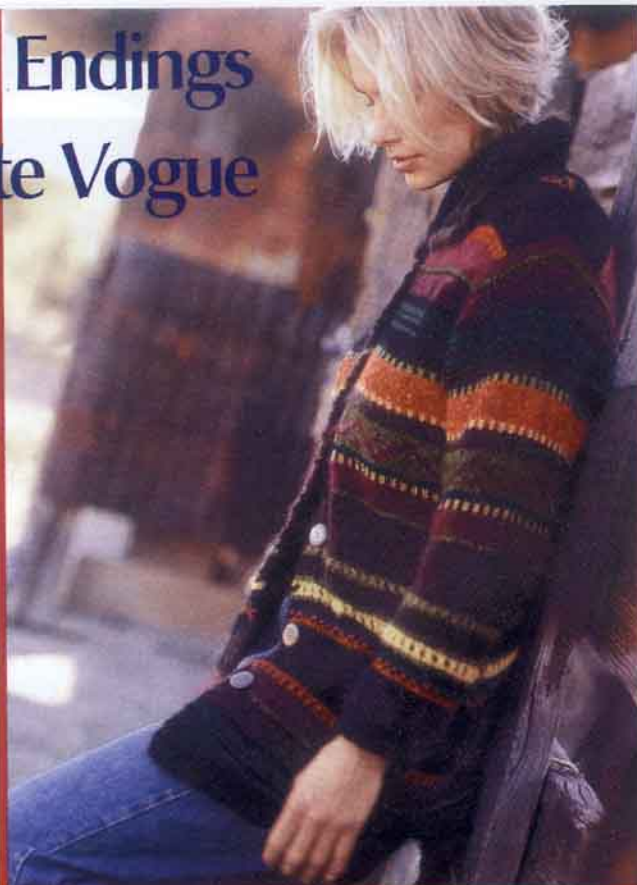
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*Jeanne and her moose at her
Roseneath farm*



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▶ assess the state of her flowers and makes the face of a weekend gardener who has been doing more weekending than gardening. “Well, you wouldn’t know it by looking at it, but Neil Graham (Stonehouse Gardens owner) is wonderfully talented.”

Understand this about Jeanne Beker — what you see of her on television is what you get in real life, except without the presence of a camera, her enthusiasm is not capped by commercial breaks, edited into clips and cuts and turnarounds. Unlike the medium which has made her famous, the genuine Jeanne is not linear. She does not systematically move from topic A to B to C. She gallops. She frolics. She gambols around a topic and her gusto is infectious. Plus, she has incredibly shiny hair.

Jeanne had a city-bound childhood. She was cottage-challenged. Her father would take them for classic 1960s vacations to



Ted Ansteele

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Lake Simcoe or to Musclemans Lake, but they never had that summer home-away-from-home. "And I wanted to give my kids that experience."

The Beker homestead is down a delicious laneway in Roseneath, offering just the right amount of privacy a city girl needs, but not so much that living there is a reenactment of Farley Mowat's book, *Lost in the Barrens*. The house is stone, sort of a "3rd little pig" construction, solid, magnificently balanced and historical, being as it was built in 1843. It has rural feng shui written all over it, energy flowing gently in and around the property.

In Northumberland, celebrity sightings take their own form and that's usually shock. "What are you doing out here?" is the most common reaction Jeanne gets. "I was at the farmers' market in Cobourg, buying corn, and the guy says, 'Oh, you're Jeanne Beker!'"

▶ continued on page 48

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► **Jeanne Beker**, continued from page 33

Another guy says, 'Oh no, she's not.' All these people started guessing who I was. One woman came up to say she had just bet her husband that it was me. And then the guy gave me six ears of corn for free. So it pays to be well known." Remember this is the same woman who receives dresses gratis from Dior, and she's gushing about a prize of six ears of corn? Yes, she's hooked.

"It's very important to me to have this frame of reference," she says, taking a moment to be serious. "I need to know there is life beyond fashion. For a lot of people, this (she sweeps her hands over the flowers clustered with August butterflies, the pond and the tree-shaded laneway) is just a state of mind. I want to be able to carry this farm with me wherever I go, on the streets of Ste-Germaine or Times Square. When I'm sitting at a fashion show and everyone is running around in their designer accessories and being so fabulous and schmoozing, I just want to be able to close my eyes and be in Roseneath." ★