

# The Santa House

By MARY ANN MCGANN Photos by AMY BALL

**J**ohn Hadamuscin fancies himself somewhat of a Santa Claus look-alike. And, with his white hair and beard, round belly and twinkling eyes, he does bear an uncanny resemblance to that right jolly old elf.

"I love Christmas — it's part of my personality," says Hadamuscin, 69, of Chatham. "I love the whole story of Santa

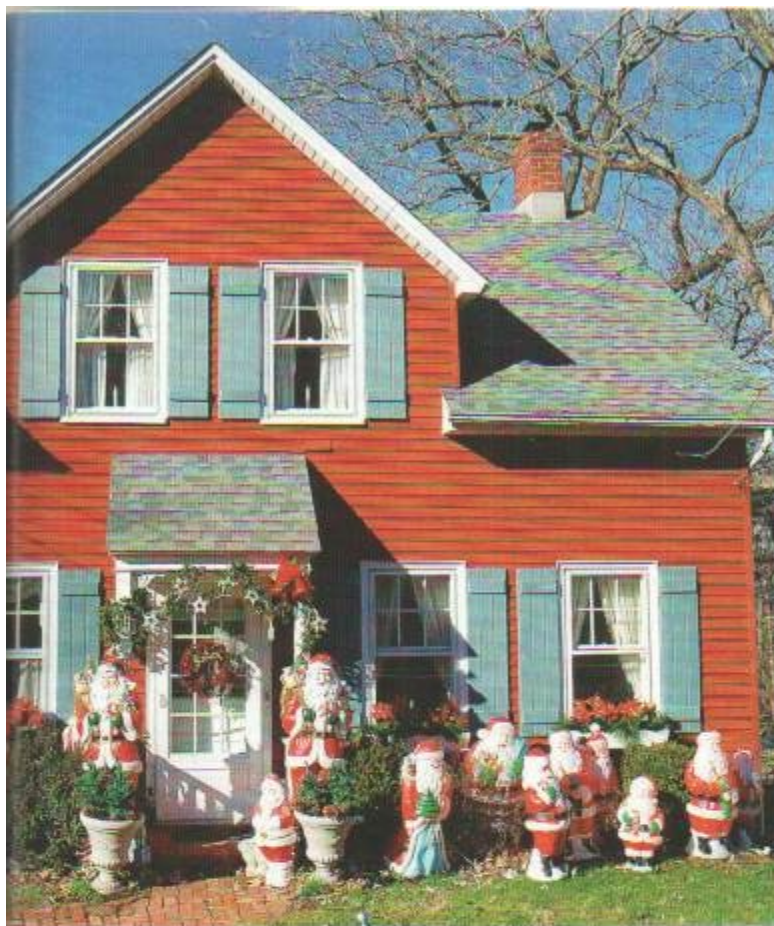
Claus and how it all developed."

So it may not come as a surprise to know that Hadamuscin, the author of eight cookbooks, is also an incurable collector of Santa Claus figurines and other Santa memorabilia. At last count, he had 2,500. Yep, that's right — two thousand, five hundred Santa Clauses perched upon shelf upon shelf in his 1852 little red farmhouse.

There are Santas riding reindeer, horses, cows, chickens, polar bears and a kangaroo; Santas on tractors and sleighs. Cowboy Santas in elaborately detailed boots, and Fourth of July Santas waving American flags; Santa Claus cookie jars, lamps and tablecloths; antique Santas dating back to the 1900s and old-world Santas from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, England and France; even a Blarney Stone from Ireland with a painted image of Santa.

"It's very strange — only two times have I gotten duplicates of anything," he says. "It's amazing how many Santa Clauses have been made."





Opposite from left: Cookbook author John Hadamuscin poses with his prized collection of 2,500 Santa Clauses; exterior of his Chatham home; another portion of his vast Santa collection.

Each May on his birthday, Hadamuscin finds Santas in his mailbox. He throws a huge party every January, at which guests try to outdo each other with new offerings for their host. And through a now-deceased friend who once designed books for a major publishing company, he has amassed a who's who of famous Santas.

"Ella Fitzgerald gave me a Santa Claus made by her mother or her aunt. And this was given to me by Milton Berle," says Hadamuscin, showing off his collection. "I have Santas from Tennessee Williams, Rock Hudson, Truman Capote, Connie Francis and Tom Selleck."

There are four prominently placed Santas on his fireplace mantel, given to him by the flamboyant British singer of the 1980s, Boy George. And one reminiscent of a Dr. Seuss-like character from Dr. Seuss himself, children's author Theodore Geisel. Designer Laura Ashley couldn't decide on just one, so she gave him three. And the Santa from 1930s film actress Claudette Colbert is carrying fruit and small presents.

"What fun we have trying to guess the giver of each Santa," says Helen Bryant, a Chatham friend who has attended many of Hadamuscin's holiday parties.

For most of the year, the majority of Santas are kept in what Hadamuscin calls "the Santa room," which is dusted twice a year. The rest of the house is cleaned twice a month — no small feat, because Hadamuscin's penchant for collecting extends well beyond Santas.

He has 40 copies of "The Night Before Christmas," 50 turkey platters, 30 turkey figurines, 50 small glass dogs, 75 horse lithographs, 50 quilts, 80 collectible china plates in delicate blue-and-white patterns and a powder room that is covered floor to ceiling in Queen Elizabeth II memorabilia — oh, and 700 Donald Ducks.

Begging the question: Would Hadamuscin notice if one of his Santas had gone missing?

"Oh, my gosh, I probably would eventually, but not for a while." ■