



For Greater Opportunities

Ideally situated just north of the Greater Toronto Area, stretching from the shores of Lake Simcoe to Georgian Bay, Simcoe County's combination of location, lifestyle and opportunity make it a great place to live and do business. The region's diverse communities and natural amenities inspire residents and the business community alike. The region commands a unique and enviable position in Ontario. Known as one of the

province's premier outdoor playgrounds, Simcoe County also boasts excellent regional health-care and education facilities, a vibrant industrial and commercial base and quick and easy access to the GTA and Highway 400.

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Dramatic effect

**A varied and exciting property becomes home
to an equally intriguing cottage**

BY ANDREW WAGNER-CHAZALON

ANDRE CARRIERE PHOTOGRAPHY



When designing a new cottage, sometimes it's as helpful to know what you don't want as what you do.

The owner of Idyllwood had spent nine years looking at cottages and lots in Muskoka, long enough to know that she didn't want faux-traditional. "If I saw another gabled entrance, I thought I was going to scream," she said.

"I was looking for something dramatic. And I knew we wanted all-day sun."

She found the property, eight acres on Stephen's Bay on the east shore of Lake Muskoka. The site is private, varied and endlessly fascinating. There's drama here already; the cottage she and her husband

built adds even more.

There's something on the site to please all six members of the family: rocky shores for sunbathing, forested trails for walking, open barrens where the sun bakes the clifftops, and even low cliff faces which the younger members of the family have turned into a do-it-yourself parcours course.

Taking full advantage of the site started with carefully locating the cottage. The three-storey structure sits well back from the lake, a design that makes the lakefront and boathouse a destination in itself. In fact, on this spacious site the waterfront forms several destinations, with trails leading to the boathouse as well as a couple of



The boathouse (right and above) is located away from the cottage (top right), turning it into a separate location within the eight acre property.





different swimming, sunning and diving destinations. "Our older girls are in their twenties, and they're happy to come up here with their friends," the owner said. "They go out to a dock with their towels and we don't see them."

Like the site itself, the nature of the cottage changes depending on which level you're at.

Enter at ground level and the view is of rugged granite and cool forest. Go upstairs to the main living area and the view peeks through the treetops, offering a slightly filtered view of the lake and the feeling of being in a tree fort. From the bedrooms



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The cottage has spaces that transition between indoors and outdoors.

at the top of the cottage, the glory of Lake Muskoka spreads out in a panorama above the treetops, while the view out the land-side windows encompasses open rocky headlands.

There are even different views to appeal to different people: one of the bedrooms has a window that looks out on islands, which he likes, and another that looks out to the open water, which she likes.

To fully embrace this ever-changing environment, the owner and her design team have crafted a cottage that has multiple effects, with spaces that transition from fully indoor cosy environments to indoor-outdoor spaces, to fully open spots where the sun and wind are your companions.

The ground level entry is one of those transitional spaces, flowing back and forth between indoors and outdoors. Walk the flagstone floor that leads from the front door, past a lounging area at the base of the stairs and a spacious workout room, through a set of doors at the rear of the cottage, and you find yourself standing beside a hot tub, unsure whether you're still indoors or not. The floor is the same, and there's still a roof over your head, but the walls are suggested rather than actual. Take a few more steps and you've fully returned to the outside. It's a magical effect, and it works beautifully.

Return inside and a gorgeous Douglas fir staircase beckons upward. Careful engineering (and masses of structural steel concealed in the walls) have created a floating staircase that rises the full three storeys through the centre of the house.

The walls are lined with barnboard set off with bookshelves and vibrant art from the homeowners' travels, and light streams down from windows and a skylight above.

Enter the main living area and the combination of light and wood textures becomes



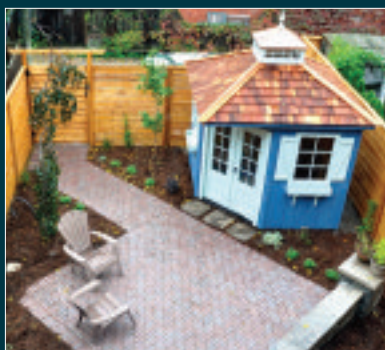
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even more pronounced. The open series of rooms is rich in wood, with fir beams providing structural support, salvaged barnboard on the ceiling, and a mix of four kinds of hardwood on the floor below.

The wood texture is repeated in the kitchen cabinetry, which is also custom-made from barnboard. Unlike the rough-textured board on the ceiling, the cabinets have been sanded and varnished to create a unique look and feel, bringing out the glow and character of century-old wood.

The wood is offset not only by the stunning views to the lake, but by industrial details – cement countertops and stainless steel appliances in the kitchen, and even a set of floor-to-ceiling garage doors that define another indoor-outdoor space, this one

equipped with a fireplace that makes it a perfect spot to enjoy cool autumn evenings or warm winter days.

Detailing throughout the house is impeccable, with a mix of found objects (including furniture that's reclaimed from thrift shops) and high-end fixtures like Tom Dixon lights.

Creative elements are found in the most surprising places. A bathroom on the third floor has a stunning backsplash made from slices of 4-by-4 timber, cut to varying lengths and arranged in a frame. Doors were made on-site from barnboard, to the owner's design. A sink in the boathouse bathroom sits atop a pedestal made from a chunk of once-rotting tree trunk. "I asked the carpenter if he could scrape the bark off

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it," she said, adding that he was skeptical. "By the time it was done, every tradesman on the site had come down to have a look at it."

The owner gives full credit to her partners in the project, including her friend Jeanette Varga, an architect, and builder Jamie Watkinson of Lakeridge Developments.

Working with them, she said, was a delightful experience. So delightful, in fact, that she's anxious to build another cottage. In order to do that, though, she's selling this one: the cottage is on the market for \$5.895 million, listed with Re/Max Hallmark Realty of Port Carling.

"It's only for sale so that I can do it again," she said. ☞