

NEWSPRINT



Inspired by Nature

Towering trees, rock and the shoreline of Sharbot Lake set high standards for cottage transformation

Karen Turner The Ottawa Citizen
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Chuck Mills didn't have to look far for inspiration when redesigning a waterfront cottage surrounded by leafy trees and a huge rocky outcropping near Perth. He let nature set the course for the extensive renovation. "It's a natural setting so I wanted to utilize lots of stone, rock and wood," says the award-winning designer, who was hired to transform the outdated cottage into a light-filled retirement home for an Ottawa couple with a penchant for lakeside living.

"We fell in love with the location," says the 56-year-old homeowner, who confesses he had always dreamt of living on a quiet lake.



CREDIT: Photo by Gordon King Photography.

With his retirement nearing, the search for a waterfront property sent the couple combing the backroads of cottage country within a two-hour drive of Ottawa.

"I didn't want to stay in town so I was looking for some place outside the city," says the former public servant who retired last October from his job with the federal government.

In the fall of 2002, he and his wife found their slice of paradise on the shores of Sharbot Lake, 110 kilometres west of Ottawa. But it wasn't the rustic cedar-clad cottage that won their affection. What sealed the deal was the idyllic one-acre property --a rocky outcrop set under a canopy of towering trees overlooking a small bay.

"It was all about the lake," says the wife, a talented potter who now has her own home studio with captivating views of the water and a kiln in the garage. Though she still works three days a week in Ottawa as an information technology manager, she hopes to eventually turn her artistic hobby into a full-time business.

Breathtaking location aside, there was no denying the 20-year-old cottage needed work. Rundown, dark and cramped, its walls were finished in old pine panelling, all of the windows needed replacing and there was no ensuite off the master bedroom. "The original cottage was a maze. It was horrible," says Mr. Mills, owner of Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development Inc., whose biggest pet peeve was the ugly covered front entrance that reminded him of a deep, dark cave.

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To capitalize on the vistas of the lush green landscape and allow in more natural light, interior walls were torn down and big windows added across the back.

"It's a dramatic difference. We opened it up extensively," says Mr. Mills who won a glass trophy at this fall's Housing Design Awards for the stunning renovation. It was also a finalist at the provincial housing awards in September. "Nature really comes into the house."

One of the biggest improvements was to the home's front entry. Gone is the dark, uninviting cave and in its place, a commanding two-storey tower supported by thick stone pillars and heavy timber beams. The treehouse-style addition is capped with a steel roof, which looks like copper.

"The tower made a very dramatic, clearly defined entry," says Mr. Mills, who carried the outdoors theme into the foyer by installing two floor-to-ceiling stone pillars that flank a display case for the resident potter's sculptural creations.

On the back half of the tower, the master bedroom's second-floor ensuite is wrapped on three sides with windows. From the oval soaker tub, the tops of the trees peek through the panes, making it feel like you're bathing in the middle of a forest. The vanity counter is made of smooth, polished concrete and the tile floors are heated to keep toes toasty on cold winter mornings.

To fully appreciate the natural setting, all of the main living spaces face the water with large windows topped with transoms to take advantage of the views. A small balcony

juts off the back of the master bedroom, providing a private perch for the couple to enjoy their morning coffee amidst the trees.

The old kitchen was completely gutted and reproduction Arts and Crafts cherry cabinets installed. Ottawa designer Penny Southam juxtaposed stainless appliances and black granite counters with the simple, warm wood cabinets to give the new space a contemporary edge.

To create a more open-air feel and allow sunlight to filter through the main level, the wall between the sunken living room and formal dining room was removed and replaced with a row of iron spindles. Sand-coloured stone stretches up the back wall behind the woodstove to blend with the home's natural theme.

Built by Steve Tarasick, the builder of the original cottage, the renovation took about a year to complete and added an extra 700 square feet of space to the 1,900-square-foot house, including a woodworking workshop for the handy homeowner and a pottery studio for his wife.

"It was more add-ons than teardowns," says Mr. Mills, who has been designing custom homes and renovations for about 30 years. "It was a classic case of buying for the property. They knew the cottage had flaws, but it had great potential."

Karen Turner is the Citizen's Homes writer.
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