

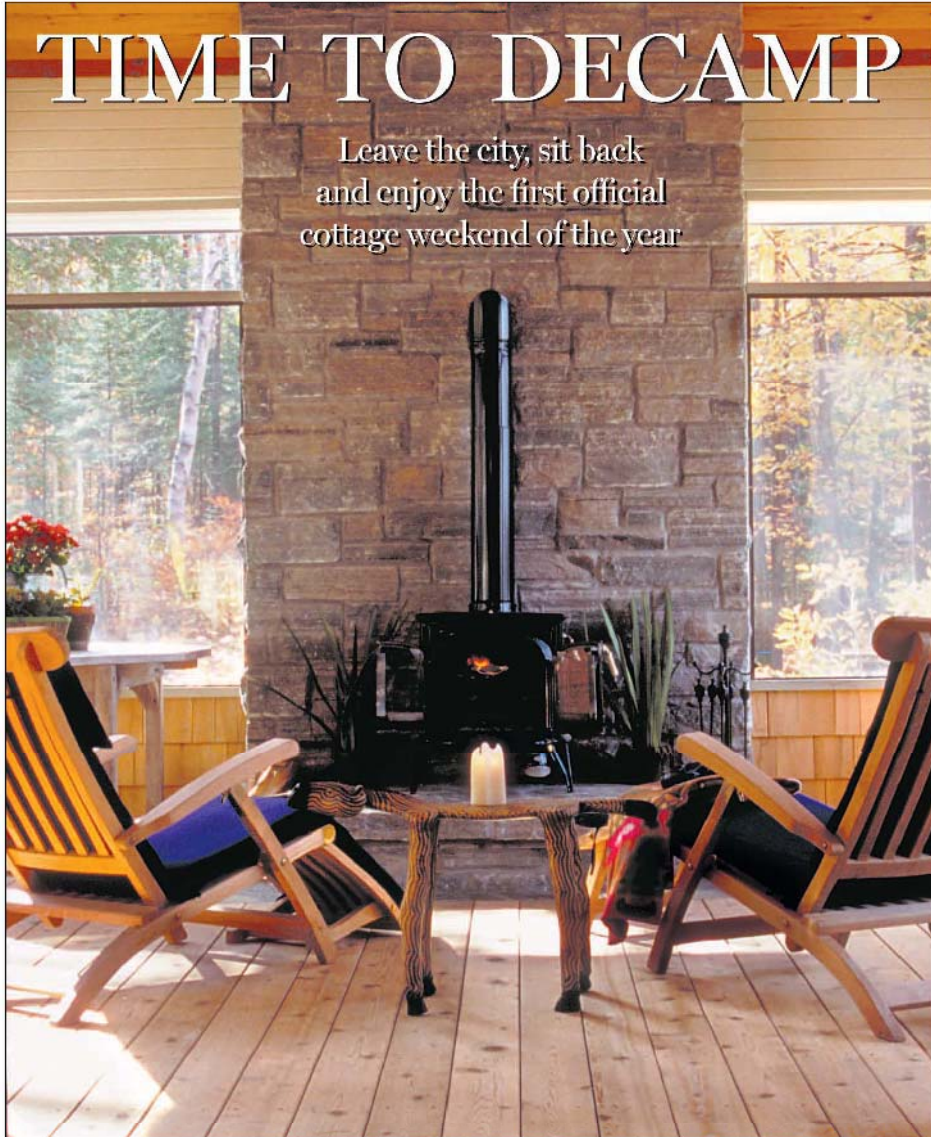


## DECK FURNITURE GOES UPSCALE

Whether it's teak, wicker or good old pine, cottage owners are taking their outdoor comfort more seriously **PH9**

## TIME TO DECAMP

Leave the city, sit back and enjoy the first official cottage weekend of the year



### BIG IMPACT

#### SMALL SPACES

Even in the tiniest condo there is room for art  
*Page PH5*

### COTTAGE COLOUR

#### EASY CARE

Perennials keep gardening simple  
*Page PH9*



### JOB JAR

Some Montreal neighbours are linking their yards with flowers and not fences. "Instead of the garden framing the house, the house frames the garden," is the way Victor Yelverton Haines describes the look his Westmount property and four others have acquired by linking their front gardens into a block-long spread. Haines calls it a political statement to link their properties.  
*Page PH6*

*'Often, what we're selling with our architecture is a feel as much as a home, and that's not at all simple to describe. With the book, we try to get people to reveal their innermost feelings, preferences, what makes them tick'*

## COVER STORY

# Ideal cottage just a feeling away

Workbook helps couple find the 'feel' they seek

By **MARTHA UNICKE BREEN**

Nestled in the side of a wooded cliff, its foundation fashioned out of the same granite as the outcroppings all around it, this beautiful Muskoka cottage seems almost to have sprung naturally out of the countryside. Designed for a Toronto-area couple by architects Marilyn Lake and Brian Lee of The Ideal Environment, with help from intern Shelagh McCartney, what makes the house especially interesting is how perfectly it embodies the owners' idea of their dream cottage.

The secret, Ms. Lake says, lies not just in being able to clearly communicate your wishes to your architect, but in knowing exactly what those wishes are.

That's why she and Mr. Lee co-authored a no-nonsense book, *The Ideal Cottage and Country Home Design Workbook* (available at [cottagebooks.com](http://cottagebooks.com) and at [theidealenvironment.com](http://theidealenvironment.com)), that helps would-be cottage owners work out, in exacting detail, everything their perfect vacation home should include — with questionnaires, spaces for clippings and sketches, and plenty of down-to-earth advice.



The cliff-side cottage, designed by Marilyn Lake and Brian Lee, is shaped so that each principal room has its own door to the outside.

"Often, what we're selling with our architecture is a feel as much as a home, and that's not at all simple to describe. With the book, we try to get people to reveal their innermost feelings, preferences, what makes them tick."

The owners had rented a century cottage in the area for years,

and their grown kids sometimes rented other cottages nearby. So their main priority was building a place that would be comfortable for the two of them, and also provide a gathering spot for as many as 14 family members — with additional room for a growing cadre of grandchildren. Also, as the workbook helped reveal,

the wife had an unspoken priority as well. "The husband works very hard during the week and she wanted to create a beautiful place that would encourage him to spend more time relaxing instead of just thinking about work all the time."

The architects found the perfect spot to place the cottage was

just where a sheer cliff levels off slightly before plunging down to the lake.

The house is shaped so that each principal room, on both levels, has its own view and door to the outside, and a terrace at one side that ends in stone steps leading to the path down to the water.

"I hate cantilevered decks on cottages; that's a very urban-feeling construct," says Ms. Lake. "Instead, as many doors as possible enable you to touch the earth, so to speak, from almost every room." To connect it to the landscape, particular attention went into the materials of the exterior. Cedar shingles in the gables, grey-green stained wood siding, and rough-cut local stone laid in a horizontal ashlar pattern for the lower half and foundation, act as a kind of camouflage.

The foundation itself is a blend of grey and soft-pink stone, precisely echoing the Muskoka granite that dots the property — all the more remarkable, since it was an accident.

"We had ordered all-grey stone originally, but when the first load arrived, it was pink. We ended up just mixing it in with the proper grey stone, and when we were finished we discovered it matched the natural rock on the property much better than our original idea would have."

The owners wanted to emulate the traditional pine-clad interior of the old rented cottage, but it set up a puzzle since wood interiors tend to be dark, especially untreated pine, which darkens as it ages.

The solution was plenty of glass windows — flattened-ellipse clerestory windows in the great room, kitchen and dining room, a big bow window in the great room, and sliding doors across the entire dining room wall.

## Dream translation

### COTTAGE

Continued from Page PH3

On the lower level, a pair of elegant arched windows banish any basement gloom. The architects also put in a screen porch — that traditional Muskoka cottage staple — but with a few modern-day improvements.

"Traditionally, screen porches were placed in the front, facing the view, which darkened and cut off the rooms inside. We placed it at one side, so the room still gets a great view without hogging it."

Along with a wood stove set on a stone hearth, the screens can be replaced by storm windows when the weather turns cool, extending the room's useable season to all but the coldest months.

Inside, the main rooms are all open to each other, perfect for calling out to crowds loitering about the place. The big family kitchen embodies another of the owners' top workbook items: Old-fashioned framed cabinetry with a pale, hand-rubbed finish, and smooth honed granite counters give it old-fashioned charm; in the centre, a freestanding island that resembles a hefty antique sports an ivory-coloured crackle paint finish, revealing hints of deep red underneath.

The dining room table, custom-made from special 10-inch curly maple boards, expands to seat the entire 14-member clan.

Overhead is another subtle detail designed to channel the past: The ceiling beam crowning the entry to the great room was hand-hewn with an old-fashioned carpenter's adze. "All the woods in the house are designed to feel as if they were touched by human hands, and to harmonize with each other," Ms. Lake says. All through the interior, reclaimed fir floors and the owners' longed-for natural pine walls add warmth, but with a modern UV-protective varnish that will maintain their pale honey colour.

The great room is as cozy for two as it is accommodating for family and friends. The rust, sage and ivory colours of the Persian carpet are echoed in the hand-picked stones of the fireplace; cozy window seats offer a place to curl up with a book or catch a nap. A specially designed rounded ceiling and hidden speakers allow the owners to indulge their passion for music, while stereo equipment stays out of sight inside a built-in cabinet to the right of the fireplace.

The lower-level rec room and additional guest quarters let the younger generation get boisterous and still allow Dad to enjoy Mozart upstairs. Board games, ping-pong and foosball tables pass a rainy day, and if the kids get bored, they can always watch a video.

"As soon as you arrive, you start to relax," says the female half of the couple. "When we're alone, we love to just stretch out and read or go for walks in the woods. And when the gang is up, there's always a game of scrabble going, ping-pong or croquet — it can get pretty noisy sometimes!"

"But what I really love here," she adds, "is winter time. I've never been a winter person, but up here you just bundle up, put on snowshoes, and go off into a winter wonderland. There aren't that many people around that time of year, so you feel as if you have it all to yourself!"

National Post