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Where Alex Tilley hangs his hat

He's lent his name to a line of indestructible clothes, but revels in the seclusion of his Muskoka cottage



DONALD WEBER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Alex Tilley's cottage at Walker's Point on Lake Muskoka, with the two "air holes" over the sunroom visible. Tilley (left) reads on the front deck facing the lake.

BY AVI ROSEN

Just as Lake Muskoka, on a clear day, mirrors the magnificent trees that surround it, the cottage that clothier Alex Tilley had built on its northern shore reflects his personality. Any astute observer who saw the cottage without knowing whose it was would likely assume that the owner was a class-act person, who had a sense of humour, and loved the comforts and conveniences of modern-day living. They'd also sense that the owner loved his soli-

tude and enjoyed travelling. That he was well-heeled would go without saying.

That's a pretty good portrait of Mr. Tilley, the creator of Tilley Endurables: Hats, shirts, pants and other travel clothes made to stand up under the most severe conditions. "I've put my honour on your head and body," he once told customers. Something similar could be said of his cottage at Walker's Point, whose worth is estimated to be in the million-dollar range.

Mr. Tilley's mother bought the property in 1968, but he tore down

the existing cottage in 1998 and had a new one built. "I went to a cottage show looking for an architect," he remembers. "There was just one there who turned out to be perfect for me. He came up with all the ideas."

That architect — Brian Lee, along with his partner, Marilyn Lake, at The Ideal Environment — helped Mr. Tilley express his vision. "Alex Tilley is one of the most exciting and enthusiastic clients we've ever met," Ms. Lake says. "He was very involved with the design."

Most notably, the 65-year-old

Mr. Tilley had his distinctive mark put on the cottage. "You can't see it from here," he says as he stands on his wharf, "but on the top of the sunroom are two little holes like the air holes in Tilley hats." His now-famous hat has been discreetly — and whimsically — built in.

The fact that the cottage is somewhat hidden from view is a distinct advantage in Mr. Tilley's mind. "One of the great things is, you can't see the cottage from the lake," he says. "I'm not very social or even very sociable."

And while the house might seem

ideal for parties, that purpose just wasn't on his mind. "I'm not a party person. I do have a lot of people here during the summertime. But no parties."

Another feature of the cottage reflective of Mr. Tilley's personality — and one he is especially fond of — is the meditation room, which offers a stunning view of the lake. The cottage as a whole provides a retreat from the outer world, but this room in particular gives him a space in which to explore the inner.

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