The thought of using their own ideas to build a lake house in Muskoka appealed to Susan and Stephen. That’s why they chose Royal Homes to construct their nine-bedroom vacation home. “They were wonderful,” Susan says of Royal Homes, a modular home builder that specializes in custom homes and cottages. “They were very accommodating,” Stephen agrees. “Anything Susan wanted to change, they changed.”

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Finalizing their house design took two years, time spent negotiating building details with the municipality, researching and sourcing products and finishes. Royal’s design and sales specialist Selena McConnell expertly guided them through the process. “She was really great, absolutely wonderful,” says Susan. “She was more than happy to get the design my husband and I wanted.”

The entire family provided inspiration for the overall flow and design of the home, says Selena. “There are multiple generations that use the family cottage and the design allows for them to all be under one roof.”

Susan says all families have different needs. “We had ours and that’s where we went.” The upper floor of the cottage, a three-bedroom loft, is their youngest daughter Cassandra’s area, a space where she can host friends and someday her own family. The ground floor, with four bedrooms and a walkout to the front yard and lake, is for their daughter Jessica who has three sons.

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Stephen and Susan’s master bedroom is on the main floor, where the kitchen, great room and dining room is a gathering place for the entire family. “We all come to the main floor for breakfast, lunch, dinner and barbecues,” says Susan.

With 5,400 square feet of living space on three levels, their lake house is embedded in colourful, folded bands of granite on Loon Lake, a narrow waterbody, four kilometres long, carved out of the Canadian Shield by glaciers thousands of years ago. Susan’s mother has had a cottage on the lake for nearly 40 years. Susan, her sister and brothers and their children all grew up at the cottage with neighbours who are like a second family. When a cottage owner next door decided to sell, the couple bought the property for the land and began planning their own vacation home. (Continued on page 42)
“It’s a getaway,” says Stephen. “It’s that getaway from the city, that calm downtime. The time you need to recharge your batteries.” Susan describes it as a place for families to get together. “We have barbecues, bonfires, waterskiing, wakeboarding, swimming, all the water-sport activities on the lake,” she says. “We built it for our family to enjoy, so that when they have their kids, their children will enjoy it like our kids. I’m a true believer that children need to have both the living in the city and living in the country, the fishing, the boating and the campfires. ‘They need it all.’

Built four years ago, the lake house is just minutes from town. Its dark blue exterior siding is trimmed in grey and white. The steep roof and matching dormers create a Cape Cod look. In the home’s entryway, vertically-fastened dock cleats, the first hint of a nautical theme, serve as hangers for coats, hats and lifejackets. A barrel-shaped, concave ceiling, finished in pine, hovers over the foyer, where cubbies provide plenty of convenient storage space.

Roofy closets flank the hall leading to the main floor master bedroom. LEFT: A floor of basketweave tiles supports the freestanding tub in the en suite. BOTTOM LEFT: Basketweave tiles intersect the wall of the glass-fronted shower.

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The entry leads directly to the couple’s favourite space, the great room and its high, vaulted pine ceiling that frames a wall of windows overlooking the lake. Mounted high in the centre of the wall of windows is a large replica of a wooden sailing ship, a gift from Royal Homes. It complements the nautical motif, evoked throughout with rope lamps, navy pillows and tiny white anchors. At one end of the great room, a wood-burning Napoleon fireplace enhances the warm ambience. Wide sliding glass doors open to an exterior deck furnished at one end with woven chairs around a table-top fire pit.

“We’re outside a lot,” says Susan. “We call it our party deck.”

Family and friends also gather in the sleek modern kitchen, especially when Stephen is cooking. A maple butcher block tops the long kitchen island, with a wine cooler on one end, lots of drawers and storage space on one side, and a dining bar with stools on the other. Suspended from the ceiling, large, silver-framed lanterns from Muskoka Living Interiors illuminate the space. A two-sided, propane fireplace separates the kitchen from the dining room, built in an octagonal shape and finished with pine walls and ceiling.

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At the other end of the main floor is the master bedroom with sliding glass doors that open to the exterior deck and a beautiful lake view. In the en suite, basketweave marble covers the floor. A crystal chandelier hangs over the French tub on one side of the bathroom and a glass-walled shower stall occupies the opposite space. White ceramic tiles with an undulating finish cover the walls. Outside, large granite boulders blasted from the bedrock to make room for the foundation were used to landscape the yard with footpaths and retaining walls. The grassed front yard, intersected with bands of gneiss, rambles down to the lake. On the shoreline, a large market umbrella shades the lake. On the dock, reclining, red chaise lounges sit in the sun.

When Stephen and Susan first met, Susan lived in Mississauga while Steven, originally from the farming community of Lucan, lived at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa. The family’s Loon Lake cottage, midway between their respective homes, was their meeting place. “She was all city and I was country,” Stephen recalls. They’ve successfully blended both worlds at their own place on the lake.