



STORY **M. CAROLYN BLACK**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **SANDY MACKAY**

# Beach life



Rene Ouellet Jr.

When Phil and Elsa, who live in Toronto, wanted to build a cottage in the Tiny Beaches area, they remembered having a great experience working with builder **Rene Ouellet Jr.** back in 2004 when they and a few friends built a timeshare-style residence in the Wasaga Beach area. “We ended up selling our share to one of the other owners and started looking further north to build another place,” Phil remembers.

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**ABOVE:** Rene Ouellet Jr. of A&R Design Build Inc. on the beach. **TOP RIGHT:** A no-maintenance composite deck off the main floor has glass railings that don’t obstruct the gorgeous view of Georgian Bay. **RIGHT:** The view of the cottage from the beach. **OPPOSITE:** The partially covered back deck provides a shady spot for outdoor meals and entertaining.







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For a couple of years they kept their eyes peeled for building sites in the Tiny Beaches area and were shown at least 10 properties by their real estate agent. One day, in 2017, they had just finished seeing yet another place when their agent mentioned a nearby property that was a teardown and perhaps not ideal. “Since we were already there we thought we might as well go see it, and the minute we showed up at the property we knew this was it,” he recalls. “When we got out of the car we were like, ‘this is it’.” The next step was to contact Rene.

Two years ago Rene Jr. took over the custom building business that his father, Rene Ouellet Sr., started in 1973. Rene Sr., now semi-retired, did framing and carpentry for Viceroy Homes back in the 70s and ended up becoming a Viceroy dealer for many years, until the company closed. Rene Jr. changed the business name to **A&R Design Build** and continued specializing in custom-built cottages.

Phil says Rene is very easy to work with. “When we had to choose things like flooring or tiles, Rene was very accommodating and worked around our schedules,” Phil says. “It was really a seamless process, from the day we sat down to look at designs and all through the rest, it was great. Rene is very straightforward and doesn’t mince words. He sticks with his timeline and budget. We dealt with any changes that had to be made easily through email; he is very organized.”

The building site was perfect for their waterfront needs. They loved that it was on a bit of hill with a nice view and that the area seemed quite private. “It wasn’t teeming with people and there were no back cottages, which is nice as well just from a density perspective,” Phil says. “It was just beautiful.” They enjoy visits from wildlife like foxes and rabbits, and the seagulls are always calling from small, rocky islands offshore. “For a place just two hours out of the city it feels very secluded.” *Continued on page 64*

*The pantry door  
blends seamlessly  
with the rest of  
the kitchen.*

**ABOVE:** Slate-like tile floors in the front hallway end at the great room. **RIGHT:** A large, corner walk-in pantry was a must in the kitchen. **OPPOSITE:** The all-white kitchen with quartz counters is timeless, fresh and clean. The easy-to-maintain laminate floors look like hardwood and are a great cottage choice.







Natural stone surrounds the cosy wood fireplace.

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Phil and Elsa have two children, aged eight and 11, and the whole family loves the great room the best. The high ceiling and walk-out to the deck captures balmy breezes in the summer and the comfy seating around the wood-burning fireplace is a favourite spot in the winter. The fireplace features a 20-foot-high veneered, real stone surround. The upper floor loft with three bedrooms overlooks the space.

The durable laminate flooring (Mohawk Flooring, Reclaimed Chic in Golden Honey) throughout the main living areas is ideal for beachfront life. The couple chose tile flooring for bathrooms but love the look of the laminate everywhere else.

Rene says the flooring was installed right on top of the cement floor in the lower level. This flooring was supplied by **Therrien's Floors** in Midland.

“One of the smartest things we did with the deck was make it half-covered and half-open,” says Phil. The grey composite deck features a roofed area over the dining table, complete with a cedar ceiling with lighting. “You can sit out there when it’s raining or use



The daughter’s bedroom is one of five in the home. There are three bedrooms upstairs and two more on the lower level. **BELOW:** The mudroom and laundry room are located off the hallway just inside the front door. There’s lots of room to store the family’s gear.



it to get out of the sun.” Many of the stately cottages in the surrounding area have cedar shake siding so the couple put their own spin on the look and selected HardieShingle composite shakes in a rich grey hue. Though the couple loved the layout and flow of the original floorplan, they did make one change that has worked very well for them. The master bedroom was originally larger with an en suite bath and they felt four bathrooms in a cottage was a bit much, especially since there was already a bathroom right across the hall. They eliminated the en suite. Downstairs, they created a mudroom for more storage and a laundry space. “The mudroom was my wife’s idea, she’s brilliant with these things,” says Phil. *Continued on page 66*



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The master bedroom is decorated brightly in blue and orange. **RIGHT:** Phil and Elsa selected all the lighting in the home to reflect the natural beach setting. **BOTTOM:** The couple decided against an en suite in favour of a large family bathroom upstairs.



The kitchen has a unique feature to accommodate a request Rene hadn't encountered before. "They wanted a pantry in the kitchen but wanted the door to blend in with the rest of the cabinetry," says Rene. The kitchen company had never done that before so they attached cabinet fronts onto a regular door. The new door blends seamlessly with the rest of the warm white kitchen.

Though the family spends as many weekends and holidays as they can at the cottage, it isn't so far from Toronto that they can't also come up mid-Saturday for a one-night respite from city life. "You still feel like you have a nice break from the regular routine," he says. The family spends a lot of time in the water, stand-up paddle boarding or kayaking, and Phil windsurfs.

While the firepit sits in a sandy area between the deck and the shoreline, they are not sure if that's the permanent spot for it yet, since the family also plays badminton and volleyball in that area. The fun of deciding on sites for lots of family activities and future memories at the cottage is the delightful side of cottage ownership. **OH**

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