



THE ULTIMATE

cottage selfie



STORY **CHARLENE PECK**
PHOTOGRAPHY **SANDY MACKAY**

Long before his Huntsville cottage was complete, Dave McEwan was living the Muskoka waterfront lifestyle.

His decision to contract the project himself meant long days on his Lake Vernon property, waking up to the call of loons, breaking for lunch in a Muskoka chair on the dock and ending each fulfilling day watching the sun set over the lake, as he swept his work site.

Saving on labour and contracting costs was a part of his reason to self-contract, but being a “hands on” person, Dave simply loves tackling a building challenge. He’d built an addition and detached garage at his home in Ayr, and found the end result gratifying. “Basically, I was the general contractor and I lined up the trades and picked out the finishes,” he explains. But this was his first cottage construction, and his largest project at 4,879 square feet. “I enjoyed the whole process,” he says. “Even though it was stressful, it was still enjoyable.” *Continued on page 58*



Built by Stephenson Concrete, the stone veneer fireplace glows in the McEwan family cottage. **OPPOSITE TOP:** A boat and Sea-Doos tempt cottagers with summer adventure on Lake Vernon. **BOTTOM:** Muskoka Roofing Company installed low-maintenance composite shingles.

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The two-storey cottage has four bedrooms and an office, including a guest suite above the two-car garage. The full basement offers a lake-view gym, theatre room, games room and a temperature/humidity-controlled wine cellar capable of stocking up to 400 bottles.

Design objectives were achieved with a walk-out basement, a deck overlooking the lake and by maximizing windows on the lakeside. “We built everything for the view,” Dave explains. “When you’re sitting on the sofa in the great room you actually feel like you’re in a boathouse because you can’t see land. All you can see is water.”

Low maintenance features were a priority throughout, including landscaping. Most notable is the siding installed by **Muskoka Timber Mills**, which has a Timberthane polyurethane coating that gives the wood siding a protective shell and vibrant colour. Unlike latex paints, Timberthane coating makes it nearly impossible for water, sun and abrasion to affect the wood or colouring.

ABOVE: Potted geraniums add a flash of colour to the lakeside terrace. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Leather sofas in the great room are positioned for the lake view. **RIGHT:** Acrylic paintings of birch trees and autumn leaves by Maya Eventov flank the fireplace.



Keeping the design as rustic as possible was a priority. Visitors seem to appreciate the atmosphere. “They’ll say that for such a high end cottage, it doesn’t feel fancy. It feels comfortable,” Dave explains. “That was our idea.”

After ground breaking in October 2017, pouring the foundation in December and framing heading into 2018, Dave himself was a working fixture on site. By July, his wife Tricia, a teacher, and their two sons and daughter were able to join him for their summer vacation during that busy year.

“We did pretty much everything ourselves,” Dave recalls. “We did the window and door trim, installed the bathroom vanities and counters and the laundry cabinets. The list would be pretty long.”

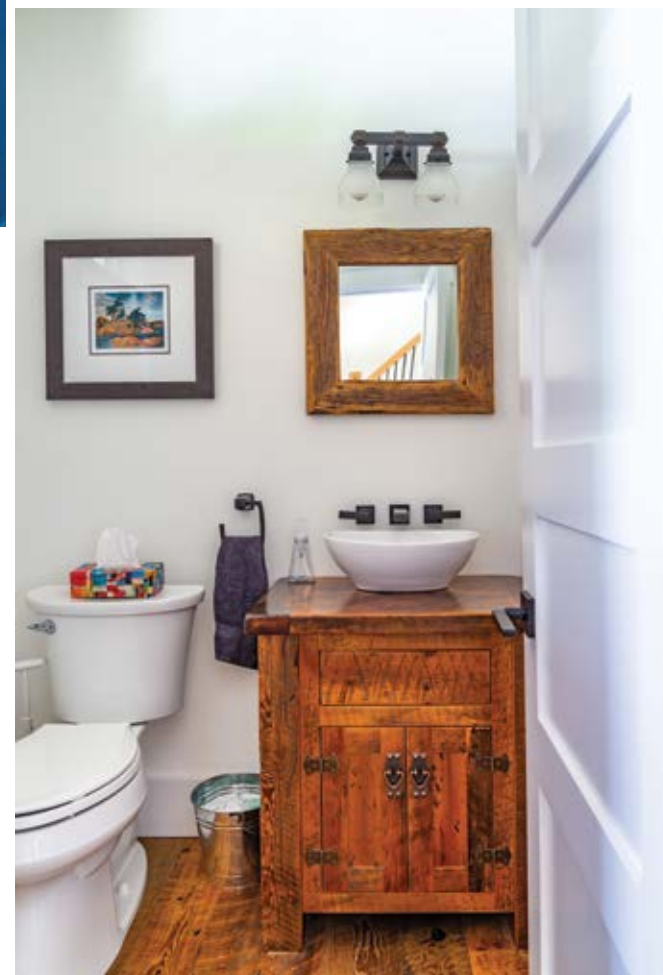
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ABOVE: Reclaimed hemlock stairs by The Stair Guy Inc. ascend to a loft that overlooks the great room. **LEFT:** Outdoor deck chairs provide a bird’s eye view of the front terrace and lake.



A wide wall of windows ensures the lake remains in sight for anyone working in the kitchen. **RIGHT:** HD Threshing Floor Furniture milled hemlock from an old barn to craft the dinner table. Muskoka Lighting Company furnished the iron chandelier. **BELOW RIGHT:** Wooden cabinetry gives a rustic look to this powder room.



Electrician **Aaron Madill** from **Madill North Electric** in Novar was among the favourite tradesmen that Dave hired. “He was easy to deal with,” Dave recalls. “He’d show up when he said he would and was always really accommodating with any changes that came along.”

Tricia, who is passionate about antiques, helped Dave with the decorating, interior design, picking out artwork and all of the furnishings. They worked closely with **Simply Cottage** in Bracebridge, which supplied most of the furniture. Together, Dave and Tricia chose an array of soft neutral colours and did some of the painting themselves.

Money saved in labour allowed Dave to splurge on his wish list.

Topping the list of above-standard expenditures is the 100-year-old reclaimed hemlock barn board flooring from **Northern Wide Plank**. In tandem, **The Stair Guy Inc.** sourced reclaimed hemlock and made the stairs, dovetailing their craftsmanship into rustic magic. **Muskoka Lighting Company** furnished light fixtures.

Scrimping on the roof wasn’t an option. The low maintenance composite shingle Enviroshake roof installed by **Muskoka Roofing Company** is guaranteed for 50 years, it doesn’t get the mould and mildew often plaguing cedar shakes and is fire resistant. *Continued on page 62*



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Deviating from the popular white kitchen trend, the robin’s egg blue ceiling plays off the nautical royal blue base of the eat-in island.
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LEFT: Double beds in this top-floor bedroom can sleep an entire family. **BELOW LEFT:** A serene autumn landscape, photographed by Peter Lik, lends tranquility to the master bedroom. **BELOW:** The loft offers a quiet space for reading or relaxing. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The en suite bath holds a soaker tub and double sinks.



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Lately, he's had more time to relax and share pizza with friends and family, including his 75-year-old father-in-law Bert Kuntz who was always willing to come out and work on the cottage, even in -30°C temperatures. It's Dave's way of saying thanks to those who helped the project progress to completion.

Finally, he no longer thinks of his cottage as being a construction site. "It's a summer home, suited for year-round use, but we're only here in the summer right now," he says. "Too much hockey with kids right now, but down the road? Probably a retirement home, we'll see. I hate having to go back to the city." **OH**