WHEN CLARE AND RUTH EATOCK DISCOVERED THE MOON RIVER AT BALA IN THE EARLY 60s, THERE WAS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THIS JEWEL OF MUSKOKA WOULD BECOME A FAMILY RETREAT FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.
Their affection for this piece of geography began during their annual two week summer vacations to the area, from their home in Montreal. It continued for some 30 years, until they retired, moved west to Toronto and finally purchased a modest one-storey cottage on a wooded acre of land on 130 feet of Moon River shoreline.

“It was all about the view and the beachfront,” their daughter Lori Forester and son-in-law Gord Forfar suggest. “It’s pretty hard to find a perfect location like this that allows you to wade into the water and also have the western exposure for those wonderful Moon River sunsets.”

“It is a very special place for us,” says Lori. “It’s a place that is comfortable and familiar and filled with family memories from when I was a child and on through to life here with our children.” Being five minutes by car or boat to the picturesque village of Bala doesn’t hurt either, says Gord. “Everything one really needs is just around the corner.”

Despite the picture perfect location, by 2016 the necessity for improving the cottage itself was becoming more and more evident. Lori and Gord’s professional lives were reaching a turning point, with retirement on the immediate horizon. Their children were now grown and independent. The cottage was old, uninsulated, a bit weary from years of service and not remotely up to contemporary building standards or current tastes. The decision was made. Lori and Gord arranged to purchase the cottage property, and the process of reconstruction began.

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At the suggestion of Keith Edwards, a local real estate broker and friend of the family, they contacted Josh Wassenaar of From The Ground Up Construction in Bala. Josh is the son of Koos Wassenaar, the contractor Lori’s dad had hired years before for the renovations on the original cottage.

The initial intention was a full renovation of the existing structure, but once Josh had a good look at what they would be working with, a serious change of plan was tabled. “The old place was sitting on piers, not on a block foundation,” says Josh. “Structural beams beneath the house were compromised, wiring and plumbing were not up to code, and the fireplace was sketchy at best. Even if it were repairable, it would be extremely expensive and simply not worthy.” Given these deficiencies and fundamental design issues like low ceilings, a full design and an entirely new construction was launched.

Lori, Gord and Josh worked with Muskoka Lumber Building Supplies Centre Ltd., an integral supplier to this build, to come up with a plan that not only suited their requirements, but also reflected the traditional Muskoka construction style they had come to appreciate so much. It has all the earmarks of the traditional north country form, but incorporates the latest materials, surfaces, engineering and technology. “We wanted it to be a comfy cottage but with efficient, modern and contemporary finishings,” Lori reflects. This was accomplished in spades, from the waterfront to the landscaping and from the foundation on up.

The lake house has 3,200 stunning square feet on three floors, four bedrooms, five bathrooms, a gym, a family room, complete with ping pong table, and plenty of thoughtful areas to gather as a group, or perhaps tuck oneself away for some private time. The extended family returned the first summer after construction was completed and everyone agreed that the added functionality was not achieved at the expense of the warm, comfy feeling to which they were accustomed.

This charming home is extremely well designed and beautifully executed, down to the last nail. Not surprising, given the fact that both Lori and Gord worked in the banking industry and have more than a passing “interest” in the details. “Lori is a machine,” Gord says with a laugh. “She is mission-based and always on top of her game.” That certainly shows when it comes to the choices made throughout the space.

Those details start at the bottom with in-floor radiant heating by Stevenson Plumbing Electrical HVAC, to keep the basement...
consistently comfortable, no matter the weather. “I made the recommendation because I know it is the right way to go with this kind of heating requirement,” offers Josh. “One of the best suggestions Josh offered and one of the best decisions we made,” remarks Gord.

Elegant matching quartz countertops and meticulously designed and milled cabinetry were fitted in the kitchen and every bathroom, with the assistance of Sue Benattar-Vibert of Woodsmiths of Muskoka Knowles Plumbing supplied bath fixtures while Brown’s Appliances furnished kitchen equipment. Twig added beautiful home décor and accents.

Eight-inch, engineered white oak flooring in a brown grey stain from Muskoka Lumber offers that superb combination of the traditional rustic look, with the benefits of the latest manufacturing. Rugged and striking, tongue-and-groove Lumberock flooring is used in the Muskoka room and flows out to the deck where the same material is gapped for drainage. This affords the texture to flow seamlessly from inside to outside. That notion of flow is the theme throughout – a floor surface moving from foyer to bathroom or a wood surface connecting one room to the next. It is not simply the materials or textures chosen, as much as it is how they were applied.

Josh proudly points to the barn board employed tastefully on the fireplace over the mantel, on an entry hall wall and in the master bedroom. “We had it milled on one side, finished with a clear protectant and then mounted it with black tar paper behind, so that any knot holes would be discreet,” Josh says. It is also cut and installed with precision and modern aesthetics in mind. The Fireplace King supplied the Valor linear propane fireplace in the great room. All of the

LEFT & TOP LEFT: Upstairs bedrooms are quiet sanctuaries for family and guests. ABOVE: On the ground floor, shelves stocked with brightly-coloured towels and refreshing drinks in a mini-fridge await swimmers and paddlers, just inside the door to the beach. ABOVE RIGHT: Sliding barn doors save space while providing a rustic look.
interior painting and staining was expertly completed by Brendan O’Brien Painting of Bala.

The smooth flow continues outside. The charcoal grey Cape Cod cedar siding from Muskoka Lumber, a must for Josh, is contrasted by generous white mullion-styled windows all around and trimmed out with tongue-and-groove woodwork in a complementary, subdued colour as a finishing touch. The colours and the look of the cottage transition effortlessly to the stonework designed and developed by Jason and Jessica Sinasac of TrueNorth Landscapes Design & Developments. Stone stairs cascade from the base of the structure down to sitting areas, a fire pit for evening gatherings, and plenty of patio space to enjoy the shoreline and the spectacular view of the bay and western sky. These are the kind of considerations that truly make the difference. Mindfulness that goes hand-in-hand with comfort and authenticity.

To that end, the Eatock family history also flows throughout the home, from old family photos and artwork accumulated over the years, to the carved wooden Eatock sign hanging proudly in the Muskoka room. This is a location that generations have enjoyed for close to 60 years and now they have a new home that guarantees this tradition will continue for years to come.