

# naturally NORTH

BY WILLIAM SHELLEY // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY



**LEFT:** A contemporary branch-like chandelier anchors the open kitchen-dining space. It's the first thing you see when you walk in the front door, and the one thing homeowner Nancy Watson "just had to have." **ABOVE:** Named "The Watson," the home naturally blends with its forested surroundings north of Lion's Head. **RIGHT:** The front entranceway features a contrast of natural elements, including a bench handcrafted by builder and homeowner George Benes.

The dolostone cliffs and clear waters of the Bruce Peninsula make it one of Ontario's iconic landscapes. Something about the confluence of rock, water and trees – that contrast of colour and texture – will always enthrall. The presence of the Bruce Trail, several nature reserves, and a national park drive home the fact that this is part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Thankfully, much of the coastline is protected from overdevelopment but if there are going to be new houses here, **North Green Living, Inc.** should be the company to build them.

**George Benes**, founder and owner of North Green Living, can't say enough about the beauty that surrounds the home he shares with his wife and design partner, **Nancy Watson**, on three forested acres north of Lion's Head. "It's a privilege to work here," he says. The talented couple recently completed this house, which also serves as the model home for the

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company. They've dubbed it "The Watson," and it's an impressive build with the rustic touches of a cottage married with a minimalist design.

Rarely does a house seem to spring so naturally from its landscape. With local stone and wood and an abundance of large windows, the 2,363 sq. ft. house – slab-on-grade, one-and-a-half storeys, with three bedrooms, two full bathrooms, a powder room and open-concept floor plan – seems a part of its surroundings rather than an intruder. This is the result of North Green Living's attention to detail and philosophy of sustainability and low-impact building.

George and Nancy don't plan to build off-grid homes, though they do have plans for solar arrays, either on the roof of The Watson or on the ground nearby, to supplement the high-efficiency fireplace insert and radiant in-floor heating throughout. The carefully considered materials are the key to the home's sustainability. The lightweight "lifetime" steel roof is 60 per cent recycled pop cans, plus zinc and sand grit. The dormers and upper exterior siding are cedar milled locally at [Liverance Home Building Centre](#). "As much as we could, we used local materials," says Nancy. "All the stone except for the kitchen wall is local, and all the wood with the exception of the interior doors is reclaimed barnboard."

An elemental marriage of stone and wood, this house – like the peninsula itself – has many stories to tell. George and Nancy source their reclaimed barnboard from Andy Bowman of [The Rustic Wood Company](#) in Chatsworth. The Watson maximizes the utility and beauty of this irreplaceable old-growth hemlock cut so long ago by pioneer sawyers. The main open staircase, interior trim detailing and window frames, as well as the interior and exterior beams, are all barnboard. The upstairs floor

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**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** (1) Brimming with colourful personality, thanks to Nancy's textile talent, the living room takes full advantage of the natural beauty outdoors. (2) Nancy created a fitting holiday centrepiece out of fresh greenery, birch branches and pomegranates. (3) A sliding barn door opens to a pantry and helps tie the open space together. (4) The high-efficiency fireplace insert from The Fyre Place & Patio Shop is surrounded by a rare shore stone that's no longer quarried. (5) Nancy and George comfortably at home.







**LEFT & ABOVE:** Nancy and George awake to spectacular views of their acreage each morning and can continue to enjoy them from a cosy sitting area outfitted with a reclaimed wood sofa and coffee table. **ABOVE LEFT:** One of two spare bedrooms on the upper level, which features a colourful reading nook and lots of natural light.

is also barnboard, cut into quarter-inch tongue and groove, sanded and sealed, then glued and nailed into two-inch concrete with sleepers. So the floor is not only solid and soundproof, but also quiet. "On a regular wood floor after some years," says George, "the nails will start to squeak when you walk." Not this floor. To fill in the knotholes, George and Nancy took dead branches from hemlock trees on their property, cured and cut them, then sanded and glued them into the holes. This floor is a masterpiece of heritage restoration.

The downstairs floor, kitchen and bathroom countertop, shower surrounds, sills, side patio and front porch stone are all from **Owen Sound Ledgerock Ltd.** in Wiarton. An interesting study in contrasts greets you upon entering the home, where the floor is Ledgerock polished Eramosa (vein cut) and the wall a much rougher shore stone. *Continued on page 26*

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The master en suite takes the term spa-like to a new level. A reclaimed wood vanity is paired with modern sinks and faucets; a glassed-in shower sports a stone wall and a loose pebble floor with wooden slats for standing.



This shore stone, that composes the façade as well as interior accent walls and the magnificent centerpiece hearth and chimney (fireplace from [The Fyre Place & Patio Shop](#)), is a rare type that is no longer quarried. George found it while digging out the foundation of an old cottage he was renovating for a client at nearby Barrow Bay. "We hauled it all here and power-washed it many, many times – it was all covered in clay," says Nancy. Examined closely, each stone reveals fossil textures that could never be imitated synthetically.

All the interior detailing, décor and furniture is innovative and unique. Two of the bathrooms feature vintage cabinets and hardware while the gallery-worthy dining area chandelier, created by Brothers Dressler in Toronto, is made of reclaimed walnut and bolts. A vintage Lebanese fish mosaic adorns the main floor bathroom wall, while a pillow made by Nancy out of a multi-coloured patchwork of leather samples, tops a living

room bench built by George. He also made the eye-catching reclaimed wood sofa in the master bedroom, which sports old copper pipe for legs and orange cushions – more of Nancy's handiwork.

Since his apprenticeship in Communist Czechoslovakia where he was born, George Benes has always made the most of the resources around him. "It wasn't like today, when you can buy everything," he says. "If you wanted to build something under communism, you had to think about it. You had a long list of what you needed, but you could get only two things. So you had to figure it out, because there was nothing in the market!" After coming to Canada in 2000, George built houses for large-scale developments in London. Today, he prefers to design and build one house at a time, with a smaller footprint, out of durable and beautiful materials. Proudly indicating The Watson, he says, "This is a house for the generations." **OH**



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