

feature



SUN *dance* & SOLITUDE

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY

Pristine water, lofty pines and quiet solitude have drawn the Johnstons to Kinnesis Lake for generations. *Continued on page 38*



A solid wood-burning fireplace with a pine mantel helps heat the ground floor of Blair and Catherine Johnston's lakeside home. **LEFT:** Stamped concrete supports the black metal furniture on the screened ground floor verandah windows by Connor Windows, Doors & Sunrooms. **BELOW LEFT:** A dead hemlock tree was carved into a forest denizen guarding the path to the lake.



The butler's pantry has a wine fridge, bar and coffee maker. Steps away is a large walk-in pantry with a swinging door. Anyone walking through with arms full can simply push the door to get through. On the other side of the pantry, family antiques and a collection of glass goblets furnish the formal dining room.

The living room opens to an enclosed veranda that runs the full length of the house and overlooks the lake. Sunroom windows by **Weatherwall Enclosures & Window Systems** were installed by **Connor Windows, Doors & Sunrooms** and let in cooling summer breezes. A stainless-steel barbecue and a small kitchen serve the iron dining table and matching chairs in this space. Ample headroom on this covered deck provides space for a nearly 15-foot tall Christmas tree.

Off the veranda, eight-foot-wide sliding doors open to the master bedroom with its king-size bed. His-and-her walk-in closets flank the hall to the luxurious en suite bathroom. Heated floor tiles warm this large, airy space. Floors throughout the home are from **Whelan's Flooring**. Decorative gables define his-and-her vanities. The soaker tub sits against

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OPPOSITE LEFT: A comfortable setting for tea or informal meals occupies one corner of the great room. **CENTRE LEFT:** A well-equipped butler's pantry connects the kitchen with a walk-in storage pantry and the dining room. **BELOW LEFT:** Builders used ceilings to define individual spaces, such as the formal dining room. Family antiques and treasures furnish this room. **LEFT:** The kitchen island holds a sink as well as a flat-top stove with a concealed down-draft fan. **BELOW:** A built-in, illuminated cabinet holds Catherine's grandmother's china as well as pieces she has collected. The glass backsplash provides a view outside.

"It's a peaceful place to be," says Blair Johnston, glancing across the big lake where only one distant cottage is barely visible on the long expanse of emerald shoreline. "You'd think you were way up north somewhere. When you look out, you see nature."

Blair and his wife, Catherine, bought their waterfront property, with nearly 800 feet of shoreline, in 1987. After years of summering at the lake, they decided to move here. They tore down their old cottage and built an 8,000 sq. ft. retirement home that suits their shared tastes and leisurely pursuits. It also serves as the hub of family gatherings with their five children and seven grandchildren.

Enjoying the home with family was a priority in designing this house, says Catherine. "It evolved over 10 years of planning." Catherine and Blair made a file for each room and a wish list for their planned house. They collected magazine pictures of home features they liked and they worked with their builder, **Dave Sweeney** of **Coachlamp Homes**, to develop ideas.

They wanted an open-concept living space with views – views into other rooms and of the outdoor panorama. With 12-foot ceilings on the ground floor and 10-foot ceilings on the main floor, almost every space in the home has an angle, says Blair. "Everything flows and each room is a part of the house," he says.

The kitchen is a good example. Blair and Catherine both like to cook and the kitchen is one of their favourite spaces. The backsplash is a long glass window that overlooks the woods, the dock and the lake. "It's the best thing in this house," says Catherine. "If it's snowing, the view is very peaceful." At the built-in, flat-top stove, a downdraft fan rises from the kitchen island to pull air outside, eliminating the range hood and keeping the kitchen view of the living room and entrance unobstructed. Anyone cooking in the kitchen can see the fireplace, look over the lake, hear the stereo and remain part of any conversation in the main room.



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a glass wall delineating the walk-in shower. Windows spill light from the upper reaches of the hexagonal-shaped walls. The bathroom is deliberately angled to catch the rays of the setting sun. “I can have a bath and enjoy the sunset,” Catherine says.

The Johnstons positioned the house, built to look like an old English inn, to take advantage of the lake view and the spectacle performed by the sun on the water. “In the early morning at 7 a.m., the lake is often just like a mirror, calm as glass,” says Catherine, a painter who plies her art in a large, bright studio on the home’s lower level. Sundown is also a favourite time. “When the sun sets it goes right through the house,” says Blair. Icefall glass doors to the master bedroom and Blair’s nearby office help natural light flood throughout the house.

Just steps away from the main entrance, a spacious laundry room holds the front closet, leaving the foyer uncluttered. An open black and white staircase ascends to the family dorm above the attached three-car garage. Five beds and two cribs furnish this large open area. Downstairs two additional bedrooms provide even more space for family and visitors.

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SOURCE GUIDE

British Empire Fuels, Chris Stubbs Carpentry, Coachlamp Homes, Connor Windows Doors & Sunrooms, Keith Miller Electric Co. Ltd., D.T.P. Painting, Foster Kelly’s Homestead Plumbing & Heating Ltd., Kerr Masonry, Trevor McAlpine, VanHaltren Custom Framing, W. Everitt’s Enterprises. Ltd., Weatherwall Enclosures & Window Systems, Whelan’s Flooring Centre.



A high, rounded dormer floods the master bedroom with natural light. Cherry wood covers the floor and Catherine’s painting hangs over the bed. **TOP:** The soaker tub in the en suite bathroom provides a stunning view of the sunset. **LEFT:** The family dorm above the adjoining three-car garage has five large beds and two cribs.

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Throughout the lower level, angled corners encourage mingling and exploration. They invite you into each room. "There are no abrupt stops and starts," says builder Dave Sweeney. "One room just flows into another." A large fireplace and radiant floor heating warm the comfortable central sitting area. Family pictures, maps, photo collages and special remembrances, such as Blair's father's war medals, cover the walls around the nearby pool table.

On the lakeside, an insulated door leads to a hot tub and exercise room that can open to the outdoors, summer and winter. A stained-glass window from the old cottage sits over the door. Heated tile floors lead from the spa to the walk-in shower and sauna. English-style coach lamps illuminate the screened deck on the lower level. **British Empire Fuels** was the heating contractor.

Outside, the grounds are extensively landscaped and adorned with Blair's large metal sculptures – climbing flowers, a giant rusty pine cone and a dragonfly near the gazebo and a tennis court that's been transformed into a volleyball court. **W. Everitt's Enterprises** completed the excavation and septic system. All masonry by **Kerr Masonry**. A trail provides snowmobile access to the lake. At the opposite end of their shoreline is a shallow sandy beach, a horseshoe pitch and a foot bridge that spans a gurgling creek.

Designing and building their dream home was a great experience of a lifetime, says Blair. It's a quiet place and that's fine with Catherine and Blair. "I'll go back and work in the bush while Cathy's in her studio painting. If I come in at four o'clock, we'll have a glass of red wine and sit out here and talk about the day." Sounds perfect. **OH**



Catherine paints in a large studio in a corner of the ground floor where there's plenty of northern light. **ABOVE:** Blair's metal sculptures, such as these climbing flowers, are placed around the property.

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