

Muskoka Lifestyles



Made for Muskoka life

Article and Photographs by Heather Douglas

This unique cottage retreat brings the Bergmann family together

The inspiration for the interior design colour schemes of one of the most architecturally unique cottages on Lake Rosseau came from an unlikely source – a copper pot. But it was a long process before it even got down to the pot.

Andy and Carla Bergmann, who own the island cottage, began looking for property in 2001. A fabulous vista and southwestern exposure were paramount concerns when selecting a lot.

“Someone mentioned the island and we loved

it, it was like the property chose us,” Andy Bergmann says.

But then the family waited for two years before deciding where on the property and what type of structure they were going to build.

“We camped on the island,” he says of his family which includes his wife Carla, 23-year-old son Christopher, 18-year-old son Ryan and 12-year-old daughter Jamie. “We sat and watched the sun come up. We did moon and sun studies and decided the whole orientation of the cottage around the sun and the moon. We took in the



The view from the loft, overlooking the main floor, highlights the the exposed metal work (left). Accents such as the canoe-shaped bookshelf and moose pattern pillows give the upstairs living room a Muskoka feel (above). The dining room's proximity to the kitchen makes it perfect for entertaining and serving meals (below).





Rustic leather couches and stuffed chairs in the living room invite people in to relax and chat around the fire or watch TV. This room features a unique design in that a window is located above the fireplace, a design made possible by having two flues.



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whole situation to determine how it would fall on the land.”

Bergmann also credits architect Bill Dewson with the idea of using an inverted canoe design for building the unique and artistic cottage.

Bergmann himself has been a structural engineer for 30 years and is currently CEO of Yolles, one of the world’s most respected structural engineering firms..

“We design large and unique buildings all over the world for many of the foremost architects,” he explains. So when it came to building his own cottage, he knew what he wanted. He just needed all the pieces to fall into place.

“I worked closely with him,” Bergmann says of Dewson. “It was a great collaboration, but it is his design.”

The cottage is designed into two pods connected by a screened-in porch. One pod contains the kitchen and dining area which is open to the great room. A loft overlooks this area. In the downstairs, there are two bedrooms and a living space, designed for the kids.

The main living area of the cottage, in a nod to Bergmann’s structural engineering background, features exposed rafters and collar ties which help to provide a contemporary feel and carry the feeling of the inverted canoe indoors. The rafters look like the inside of a cedar strip canoe.

There are actually two roofs over the main area, which Bergmann refers to as the clear storey and the lower roof.

“This is to allow light to emanate through to

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the upper floor,” he says of the unique feature of the cottage.

Another unique feature was to put two flues in the fireplace which allowed for a window above the fireplace. So with windows on three sides, light floods into the main room all day and at night the interior light makes the building glow.

The second pod contains the master bedroom with an ensuite and a third bedroom for their eldest son who is disabled. The master bedroom is set on piers to give the feeling you are in a tree house overlooking the well-treed property and the lake.

Bergmann said he put the master bedroom in its own pod for three different reasons, the first being it was an interesting design, sort of an evolution of the longhouse.

“It has great vistas and a view up the bay,” he says.

The second reason being as the kids grow up and have parties, it will be nice to have the separation. And with the unique situation with their eldest son, Bergmann said putting his bedroom on the back side of the master, allows them to be close to him.

“It was a new design, the separation and connection with the walkway not lumping the building into one large massive structure,” he says.

The entire cottage was built and designed to be part of the environment, not an “in-your-face building.”

“It is a no-maintenance place that sits back in the woods,” Bergmann says. He adds that his



The spacious downstairs bathroom was designed with the Bergmann children in mind (above). A corner table in the kids’ living room provides a location for playing games (opposite page).

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wife is quite an environmentalist and objects whenever a tree is cut down.

They were also able to give back to Muskoka. When the Bergmanns bought the cottage the only thing on the property was a tiny bunkie which had been built in the 1940s or 1950s. They were required to remove the bunkie when they built the boathouse, so they donated it to the Audrey Tourney's Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary.

The interior colours were chosen to bring the outside in with dark brown and natural colours. This brings us to the copper pot.

The Bergmanns were discussing their cottage plans with interior decorator Lena Patten of Hilltop Interiors in Rosseau.

"We were going over plans talking about colour and trying to get a good feel of how they wanted the interior to look and needing the right colours to set the stage," Patten recalls.

"I had a great distressed copper pot in the store that had the colours I thought Andy was talking about," Patten says. It was and from there all the colours were based.

The cottage is predominately natural coloured wood with splashes of colour brought in from the fabrics.

The great room was a tremendous challenge to decorate, Patten says.

"It is an open concept with glass on the sides, so I made the main focus the fireplace with views outside from all angles. It is very warm and inviting."

Adding a carpet in front of the fireplace, Patten created an intimate conversation area. Patten advises when setting up a room, always choose one focal point and try to centralize the furniture to avoid a mishmash look.


The colors in the cottage are predominately earth tones with rustic comfortable furniture that is kid and dog friendly. This is exactly the way the Bergmanns like it since the cottage is one place the entire family can unite and unwind.

Having never owned a boat before, island life was quite a change for the family, Bergmann says. However, it was well embraced and now once they are at the cottage, they rarely travel anywhere by car any more, being able to get to town and the golf course and friends all by the water.

"Life in the city; it seems as if everyone is outward facing. I work, Carla rides her horse, the kids are in school," Bergmann explains. "The cottage is exactly the opposite of life in the city, here it is inward facing. I have an 18-year-old who would never dream of picking up a deck of cards at home in the city."

He adds, being on an island helps promote the intimate family time as it is not as easy to walk outside and visit neighbours.

Taking their time and getting to know their land and surroundings allowed the Bergmanns to create a home away from home that blends everything – their lifestyle, environment and family.

With this stunning cottage, they have their own private oasis in Muskoka to escape, regroup and simply enjoy life. 



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