

# *Muskoka Lifestyles*





The Westwood, a magnificent melding of West Coast construction style and Muskoka architecture, was a collaborative effort by the builder and owner. The home's spaciousness allowed for special touches, like the custom-built armoire in the hallway (below).

# Beyond blueprints

Article and photographs  
by Heather Douglas

Creating a home is not simply a task of drawing up blueprints, according to Simon Hirsh of Hirsh Construction. Rather, it is a process of spending time on a chosen piece of Muskoka real estate and allowing the landscape, the trees, the water and the view to show him what sort of creation he should build there.

"We often start with several very different concepts and, as we spend more time on the lot and develop the different concepts, one of them always becomes the obvious choice," Hirsh says.

This was the case with "The Westwood," his first magnificent project in Muskoka. "Naming the homes really gives them their own identity or personality and is especially important during the development of the design," he explains.

The Westwood is a mix of West Coast style log structures, where Hirsh began building log homes eight years ago – in Whistler, to be exact – and the beautiful, traditional Muskoka architecture. The name refers to the western red cedar logs used in building the vacation home, and as well as the fact the home sits on the western shore of one of Muskoka's most prestigious lakes. It's located on eight acres of forested tableland, with 97 winding granite steps leading to 650 feet of shoreline.

Hidden at the end of a private driveway, winding through the Muskoka forest, the road culminates with an impressive view of the building and the lake. That first impression of the home takes your breath away every time you come around the cor-

ner. And, it is just a hint of the workmanship and craftsmanship that was put into the creation of this home.

Two towering logs hold up the entranceway and the rest of the house appears to grow from them. The cedar shake roof is aglitter with copper, including a copper chimney cap, baton style copper dormer, copper eaves and drip edge, copper lightening protection and a copper tower, the tallest point on the lake.

The elements of nature are held back by twin doors at the main entrance – two-and-a-quarter-inch thick Douglas fir full-paned glass doors with oil-rubbed bronze hardware, the texture and shape of river rock. As you step through the door, the grandness of the open concept living room, with a sprawling view of the lake, is tempered by the coziness of the interior, including heated Indian slate floors.

"Often, people buying a vacation home want a complete turn-key service, right down to the flowers on the table," says Tamara Madejski, partner of Hirsh Construction, specializing in interior



the view from here.

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At the end of this hall is a bright, well-equipped games room. Using various types of wood and finishes added warm tones.

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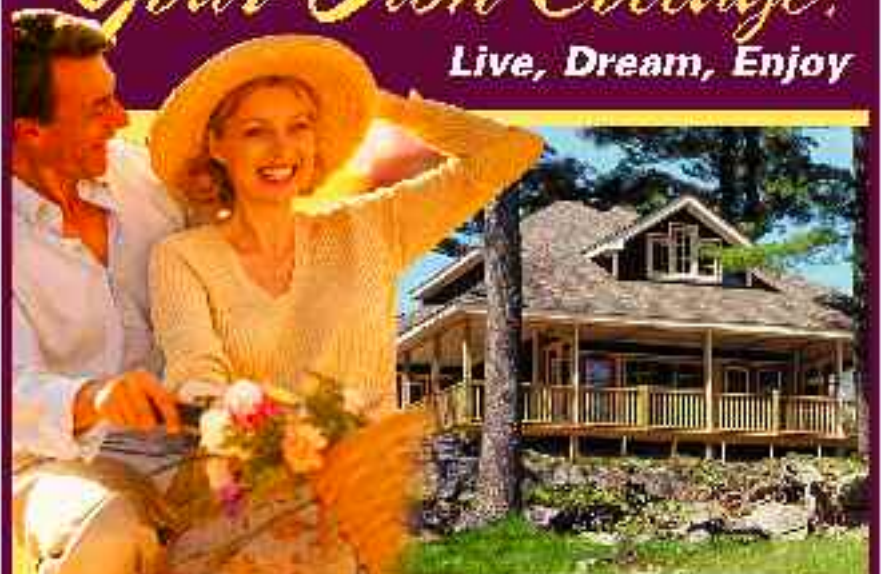


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finishing and furnishing. "The buyer of Westwood was able to be very involved. She has a great sense of style and knows a lot about and has an appreciation for fine furnishings."

Together with Madejski and Lena Patten of Hilltop Interiors, as well as with pieces from Muskoka Living Interiors and Artifacts Emporium, both of Port Carling, the owner was able to have a true collaboration of complementing styles and tastes.

Decorating a log home is an art in itself. "The size of the main furniture pieces of a log home have to be large, so they don't get lost or overshadowed by the mass of the logs and space," Madejski says. In Westwood's case, the logs are Scandinavian full-scribed, which means all the logs are hand peeled, then hand scribed laterally to the next one, enabling them to fit tightly to one another without requiring the use of mechanical fasteners or chinking (the white caulking often seen between logs). A beautiful but extremely labor-intensive construction method, it's the best example of a true hand-hewn work of art.

It is for this reason, Madejski notes, many of the home's pieces have to be custom designed specifically for the home.

One such piece is an armoire, located in the entrance area. At over eight feet tall, the armoire was designed by Nitty Gritty of Toronto to be the focal point of the room. It has the name Westwood hand painted in birch twig style and drawers made of the actual cut-offs from the western red cedar logs used in building the home.



**This impressive Muskoka room was originally designed for seasonal use but the new owners decided they wanted to be able to use the beautiful space all year.**



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“The owners followed suit and found real birch branches from the property to use as handles for the drawers,” Madejski says. “The piece, in every way, is totally specific to the house, the property and the owners.”

The house was purchased when framing and log assembly was complete, so the majority of the decisions had been made, Hirsh notes. However, there was still room for some collaboration.

The buyer had always been an admirer of log homes but had never been convinced it was possi-



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**high on the priority list for the owners, in refining the design of the Westwood.**

ble to have a grand log home with all the modern day conveniences, until he saw Hirsh's creation. "Everything I wanted, Simon had thought of," he says.

The custom-built home is also a "smart house," allowing the owner to adjust the interior climate, the alarm system and even access the 500 CD jukebox, by phone or computer.

The purchase of the home seemed to be destined – the buyer was not really intending to buy when he saw an advertisement for Hirsh's home. He and



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his family, including four young children, were at their cottage in April 2001 and there was not much going on. “I told my wife, there’s that log cabin I always wanted, and decided to go look at it,” he recalls. He called his realtor and they met in an hour.

“Walking in and up the stairs, I thought it was awesome,” he adds. “You could see the shell and imagine what it would look like.” He was impressed enough to purchase the over-four-million-dollar property.

As construction continued, the family contributed considerably to the property development, incorporating additional recreational uses. “They added something for everyone,” Hirsh says. Including more outside entertaining spaces, a giant sandbox play area, a volleyball court and numerous gates and railings to make the property more child friendly. While the boathouse and garage had been pre-designed, the family was able to tailor these to their needs.

“They have a true understanding and appreciation of the finer things in life,” Hirsh comments. “I really felt that they trusted us and allowed us to complete our vision. Trust is essential to keep things moving along. I also feel that we had complementing tastes, so everything has come together beautifully.”

This included changing an area destined to be a gym into more bedrooms. Also, the impressive Muskoka room, initially designed for seasonal use, was changed to be used year round. This room, located off the kitchen, is surrounded by windows and is a great place to curl up with a book.

Two of the most outstanding rooms in the home are the great room and the kitchen. “The Westwood kitchen was designed to be open to most common areas of the house, with direct access to the dining room, the great room, the Muskoka room and to the open foyer,” explains Hirsh. It is equipped with two black enamel cast-iron sinks, two hidden dishwashers flanking the main sink, a hidden 42-inch fridge and a 48-inch commercial style range. And, if that is not enough, the hot water comes through a separate faucet to provide instant hot water.

The great room is another outstanding space, anchored into place by a soaring limestone fireplace. The western red cedar log posts and beams, the white pine trusses on both sides of the window wall and the fireplace are balanced and complemented with a four-foot-wide antler chandelier which drops down into the centre of the room, woven like a delicate web between the branches of trees.

The sofa in the great room was chosen by Patten. A solid, comfortable leather couch with interchangeable cushions, made of either a fabric or leather. “The way I decorate is a reflection of how I want every client to feel when they enter the room, comfortable and cozy,” she says. She wants to create an environment where people are not afraid to sit down and, especially in the case of Westwood, a child friendly environment.

“This is the theme we have used throughout the house,” Patten explains. In addition to the furniture, she has used sculptures of natural materials,

metal and wood, to create a more personal space. "I think my background in fine art likes to introduce sculptures to create mood."


Madejski likes to mix mediums in her designing, using natural materials, heavy textures and earthy colors. She filled the interior with many unique finishes, like rawhide lighting with pinecone or acorn motifs, twig patterned cast-iron railing pickets and earthy green shag carpeting on the ground floor walkout, to give the feeling of walking on moss.

Having traveled around the world, the owner says there is nothing to match Muskoka, in either its pristine lakes, privacy, or accessibility to the city. "I have friends who travel all over the world and could buy property anywhere and they want to buy a place in Muskoka," he comments.

When they come up north, they spend at least five hours a day on the water, either tubing, skiing, wakeboarding or fishing.

"We live the healthy lifestyle, with intense physical exercise," he says. There is also a lot of time allocated for entertaining. "We both come from very large families."

At the forefront of it all is spending time with the family. The casual, rustic elegance of the interior reflects their lifestyle and the accommodations for their children reflect what they believe to be important.

Having a beautiful home is wonderful but what speaks volumes is the child's chalk drawing on the granite entrance way. This is a place to be enjoyed by all ages. 



Furniture in a log home must be solid, like the structure itself. In the Westwood, the designer chose large sofas that combined cloth and leather for many of the rooms.





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