



Superkül Inc. let nature determine the form and footprint of a four-bedroom cottage in northern Ontario, making sure no rocks or trees were removed in the process

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM ARBAN

## ON THE ROCKS



Cottages, even more so than houses, seem to accrue stories as surely as the rocks of their Canadian Shield foundations collect lichen. While this particular island's inhabitation in northern Ontario goes back generations as a turn-of-the-century hunting and fishing camp (which eventually burned to the ground), it was purchased in the 1970s by a family who built a cottage on the site. Eventually, their four boys grew up to want cottages of their own.

Toronto architectural firm Superkül Inc. was commissioned by one of the sons and his wife, who imagined a summer cottage that would celebrate the remote island's beauty and provide shelter from the location's extreme weather. On a beautiful fall day in 2005, the architects and clients embarked upon a creative collaboration by walking the 4.5-hectare island in search of an ideal site.

Superkül's partners in life and design, Margaret Graham and Andre D'Elia, gravitated toward the island's northwestern end, compelling for its sculptural topography, orientation, natural clearing and shelter from the howling winds. Their initial diagrams envisioned two offset single-storey structures perched on the rocks



- 1 SCREENED PORCH
- 2 LIVING ROOM AREA
- 3 KITCHEN
- 4 DINING ROOM AREA
- 5 DECK
- 6 GLASS LINK
- 7 STORAGE WITH SLEEPING LOFT ABOVE
- 8 DESK
- 9 BEDROOM
- 10 MASTER BEDROOM
- 11 OUTDOOR SHOWER



and bound by an expansive deck. The plan responded directly to the site's elemental zones: trees, rock and water, all shaped by wind. The location also possessed the practical and environmental advantage of requiring no tree removal, and the opportunity to work with the existing rocky grade without blasting. At the dinner table that night, the clients were immediately excited by the sketches and how powerfully the landscape provided cues to a clear strategy.

Good chemistry between client and architect is always a critical component, and Graham sensed that this collaboration was a rich one. "They have a perfect balance of practical experience and an understanding of spatial vision and sophistication," she says, noting that his aptitude for construction and her vocation in the visual arts added enormously to the project's final outcome. "They share a love of doing things well and a respect for the modernist idiom, yet they also had a profound appreciation for the island's history and texture." Basically, she adds, "they trusted the design process."

The ingenious positioning of the structure takes full advantage of the setting's natural beauty and protection. Common areas, including the living room, dining room and kitchen, are situated closest to the water, and a glass corridor links the bedroom wing and the living spaces. Both roofs slope in the long direction, creating lofty interiors and a graduation of heights, from the highest point – 4.45 metres over the kids' sleeping loft – to the more intimate master bedroom at the lower end.

Any sense of spatial injustice in the master bedroom is more than compensated for by the openness of its corner window, and by how the offset plan takes full advantage of the various panoramic views. An interior-exterior seamlessness is achieved with such details as the bed-





**ABOVE** The kitchen is kept open, with no cabinetry above the countertops. Two under-counter fridge units were used to avoid having sightlines blocked by an upright refrigerator.  
**LEFT** Most of the cottage, inside and out, is clad in knotty cedar tongue-and-groove boards. Oak flooring was used in the master bedroom, kitchen and living area.



**RIGHT** The living room fireplace is faced with tiger-stripe ledge rock. **BELOW** Natural light filters into the rooms, all of which offer exceptional views.



room's oiled white oak flooring, which lies flush to the exterior cedar decking – a visual transition that brings the outside in and the inside out. An outdoor shower adds another twist of interior-exterior harmony, as does the incorporation of a scrubby white pine within the deck. It's as if Superkul Inc. has placed modern architectural quotation marks around a scene that could be mistaken for a Group of Seven painting.

Lyrical specificity manifests itself in wonderful moments, like the tree framed in the window at the high end of the bedroom wing, and the open study at the end of a glass link – the only point where the surrounding landscape of trees, rocks and water are visually connected. Such details as generous storage space built into a natural valley beneath the living area – perfect for storing boats, firewood, and furniture during the winter, when the island is inaccessible – pragmatically assure the modernist cottage's clean lines.

Like fraternal twins visually bantering with one another against a backdrop of windswept trees, this escape in two parts seems poised to educate another generation about the timeless pleasures of an island paradise. **AZ**

