

# A multi-angled eco-savvy cottage

## Stealth planes

BY JACK KOHANE, NATIONAL POST    APRIL 21, 2014



All rooms have views of the lake or surrounding forest.

**Photograph by:** Shai Gil, Superkul

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Cloaked by forests that make it virtually unseen from the lake, this peaceful refuge on the shore of a large deep-water lake in the Lake of Bays area nestles into its landscape. Creating a low profile in the tall pines was the literal and figurative goal for the owners and the architects.

"Stealth Cabin is the result of the meeting of two minds," says Meg Graham, principal with [Superkül](#), a Toronto architectural firm that creates custom homes with a distinctive use of light. "It's a marriage of the owners' wish for a traditional log structure, with a contemporary twist and modern comforts." The challenge was to blend the old and the new in a way that made sense for the clients' lifestyle, while respecting the surrounding land and incorporating most of the mature trees on this 37-acre property.

Overlooking the lake whose rising cliffs create picturesque bays, this three-bedroom, twobathroom, all-season cottage treads lightly on the land. "We utilized a faceted layout, not rectangular," Ms. Graham says. "That helps the cabin look smaller, [so it's] not one long expanse of wall." The sculptural form of the cabin takes its cues from the rise and fall of the topography, and the shape of an overturned boat found on the property. The cabin's scale and proportions make as little visual and

physical impact as possible.

The interior offers ample living space with an open-plan kitchen, dining and living room, balanced by smaller spots, such as a comfy reading nook, a mudroom, log storage and laundry. Relying on wood both for structural strength and aesthetic charm, Superkül's designers - Ms. Graham, Andre D'Elia, Anya Moryoussef and Aaron Letki - kept to their mandate of a small footprint home that tied together the warmth of a wood cabin (untreated, sustainably harvested cedar is used throughout) with clean lines and energy efficiency.

This minimal carbon footprint was paramount to the clients, who are outdoor enthusiasts. Even the name [Stealth Cabin](#) was chosen to suit; as the cedar greys, the structure will blend with the forest and disappear into it.

The cabin was sited to preserve the maximum number of living trees and take advantage of prevailing breezes for passive cooling. The heating system was designed so the north half of the cabin can be closed off when not in use, to reduce energy consumption. High-efficiency wood-burning fireplaces and radiant-heat floors also reduce typical energy costs. Skylights and large wood-frame windows on all sides ensure natural light warms rooms in readiness for cold evenings, while allowing for cooling cross breezes in the summer. FSC lumber (Forest Stewardship Council, which advocates responsible management of forests) is used for sidings, ceilings and floors.

Local by-laws stipulate that no trees of significant size can be taken down within 100 feet of the shore. "But the owners always intended to do better than this," Ms. Graham says. They wanted to remove as few trees as possible throughout the entire property. So the architects shifted the cabin back and forth on paper to test its impact on the trees and the landscape in general.

The Stealth Cabin concept started in 2006 when the owners, both doctors practicing in Toronto, who enjoy sailing and wilderness and whitewater canoeing as well as downhill and cross-country skiing, purchased the undeveloped lot with 1,300 feet of sandy shoreline.

First viewing the pristine property in winter, the couple immediately saw its potential. With at least an acre between neighbouring properties, tranquility was assured - an absolute must for two people leading hectic lives in the city. As environmentalists, it mattered to them that the lake was clean and that there were few big motorboats. As well, the property had a southern exposure and year-round road access.

The couple spent their first three years of ownership camping on the site, with a yurt for sleeping, supplemented by a composting toilet, a fire pit and barbecue, a portable kitchen for washing up, and for rainy days, a dining tent with a camp stove. They say this was the "best way to experience the amount of sunlight, the wind patterns, how to access hydro, how to develop our local roadway - especially bearing in mind snow and ice on steep hills in the winter, to think about the view we wanted, how to be protected from storm activity, to appreciate what aspects of the land we generally used so that we could plan entrance and exit patterns accordingly."

They point to the yin and yang of their marriage for inspiration: hubby's love of outdoor adventure is reflected in the use of natural products, and the wife's design sense of how form could support function informed the larger picture. They "wanted to ease themselves into building a cottage," she says, "by learning more about the local environment and how they would spend their time in it."

"They loved living on the land and didn't want to lose that experience," Ms. Graham says of her clients.

*The Stealth Cabin, completed in September 2012, was the recipient the 2014 Ontario Association of Architects award for design excellence*

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