





Fading into the forest

Sculptural, subtle and extremely eco-friendly, Stealth Cabin is an award-winning modern take on Muskoka's traditional log cabins.

BY PATTI VIPOND

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEV MCMULLEN

The architects of superkül looked out through the screen of the kitchen tent, out through the rain and ate as they contemplated the topography of a mildly undulating property bordered by a pristine little lake near Bracebridge.

Questions arose. Where would the sun rise and set? What direction does the wind usually blow? Which site for the future cottage would give the owners golden pink sunsets with their summertime dinners and unimpeded cross breezes to cool the house? But foremost, how could the architects do this and fulfill the environmental mandate of the owners to make a minimal footprint

on the land and preserve as many trees as possible when constructing the low-profile neo-log cabin on the ridge above the lake.

The resulting design by the Toronto architectural firm was "Stealth Cabin," a 1,500-square-foot sculpted cedar work of residential art for which superkül's designers were awarded a 2014 Ontario Association of Architects Award for Design Excellence. The owners credit much of the design's success to the conscientiousness of superkül principals Meg Graham and Andre D'Elia, and the designers and architects who spent time on site observing the changing light and seasons while



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the couple camped on the property. They especially praise superkül's design for gracefully blending the husband's wish for a traditional log cabin with the wife's love of contemporary architecture.

"The beauty of these architects is they had the ability to listen to both of our needs and come up with something that spoke to both of us," says the wife. "That's why the cabin's tongue and groove walls and ceilings are cedar and traditional, but the fittings are very modern."

Superkül's project name, Stealth Cabin, came from the ability of its untreated cedar wood to gradually weather to grey and stealthily blend into the forest. Even pre-fade, the wooden cottage, which was completed in 2012, is mostly unseen. An acre of land sits between the house and its neighbours and a mandatory 100 foot set-back gives a lovely long view to the 1,400-foot waterfront. Guests can relax in privacy on the cabin's cedar porch which wraps cleanly around the Muskoka room and across the living room's glass door walkouts.

The cabin's design creates unexpected interior privacy as well. A tall cedar pocket door can pull out to separate the cottage



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"When the sun hits the cabin in the wintertime, it streams in and actually warms the polished concrete floor. But because of the angle, the sun doesn't come in during the summer so the floors are cool."

into a guest wing and main living area. The guest wing contains a bedroom, a children's bedroom with bunk beds designed by superkül, a bathroom and a windowed desk nook. The cabin's main living space is open concept with a window-walled living room, dining room and kitchen that are brightened further by a skylight. The south-facing location was selected to heat and cool all areas of the cabin naturally.

"When the sun hits the cabin in the wintertime, it streams in and actually warms the polished concrete floor," says the wife, who along with her spouse loves to come up for frosty weekends of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on trails they made on the 37-acre property. "But because of the angle, the sun doesn't come in during the summer so the floors are cool. We wanted big doors to give us access to the outdoors and to feel like it is seamless, that it communicates with the surrounding landscape."

The living room's high efficiency fireplace and a radiant heating system throughout the cottage's concrete floors supply warmth when the sun is absent.

Flanking the open concept trio of rooms are the master bedroom and ensuite, and



(Supplied photo)



(Photo by Bev McMullen)



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(Photos by Bev McMullen)



a cedar-slatted Muskoka room. On the south wall of the master bedroom hangs an iridescent paper cut-out artwork by renowned artist Ed Pien that gives balance to the indoor and outdoor colours surrounding it. Deviating from the cedar theme, both bathrooms are finished in white pine and the dining room table is topped with neo-traditional reclaimed wood.

"I thought at first the table was a bit controversial," says the wife. "The architects were questioning it because they were used to having very clean lines. But I felt the house was already so spare in its cedar and gray tones that it would be nice to have something more textural. I paired the table with apple green chairs by Emeco that are made of recycled Coke bottles. I used them as accents to highlight the gray in the kitchen and the wood."

Though the gray interior doors, green pillows softening the reading nook and the couple's impressive collection of artwork are notable design accents, some of the cottage's design features are very subtle.

"There are all kinds of very interesting angles put in the house so that it's not straight on," explains the wife. "For

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example, in the screened-in porch and in our bedroom the walls are angled. The roof design was based on an overturned boat the architects saw on the property. I think it has very interesting lines."

Stealth Cabin fades further into its environment through thoughtful landscaping by Shawn Gallagher Design. A Vankoughnet resident, Gallagher used a variety of local grasses and ferns to suit the property's topography and is now creating an outdoor exercise course for the owners. The outdoors also includes a yurt once used by the couple for winter weekends during their pre-cottage camping days. Now used as a guest house, the 200-square-foot structure has custom beds designed by superkül, a wood-burning stove and French doors that lead out to a deck.

Though the Toronto-based couple first viewed the vacant property during the winter, they immediately realized it had everything they wanted in a cottage property – a two-hour commute from the city, a year-round accessible road, a lake with few power boats and a reputation for being quiet even on long weekends. This was somewhere they could enjoy all year round.



They bought the property in 2006 and came to know the lay of the land intimately through camping on it. After seeing an award-winning design of a Georgian Bay cottage by superkül, they called the firm.

"After seeing pictures of that cottage, I loved the aesthetic very much," recalls the wife. "My life in general is so cluttered. It is really nice to have my environment be sparse. In fact, we didn't have that before. This cottage inspired us to get a different place in Toronto that is more like the cottage. This cottage is really a little jewel. It's very easy to be here, very easy to come and just relax."

After three years of weekends and summers at Stealth Cabin, the couple still feels embraced by its cedar scents and the ease of living communicated by a modern design done well.

"It is a meeting of the natural elements with a really 21st century aesthetic," says the wife. "We didn't do a lot of manicuring outside, so the cabin feels like it belongs yet it has the ease and comfort that a modern sensibility can give you. Superkül really did an incredible job of taking everything into consideration and built a spectacular space." ❧



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