



Joined by a second-storey loft, the two wings of Anne Maheux and Greg Hill's cabin in Quebec sits among trees on top of a bluff, giving it the feeling of a tree house.

'NATURAL' WONDERS

Take note, weekend warriors: The hottest cottages right now are extremely comfortable and impeccably designed, but far from ostentatious. On the contrary, retractable walls, expansive windows and rooms that blur the line between inside and out make them one with the landscape. **Alex Bozиковic** profiles three of the most innovative

AN EARTH-BOUND 'TREE HOUSE' IN RURAL QUEBEC

When Anne Maheux and Greg Hill head to the woods – to their cottage on a small lake in Val-des-Monts, an hour outside of Ottawa – they leave it all behind: There is no Internet and no TV. “It’s incredibly peaceful,” Maheux says. “We do a lot of walking, swimming and reading.” Their small three-bedroom retreat is, in many ways, a classic cabin, modest in size and without many frills. “The interior was supposed to be Zen,” Maheux says, “and the contemporary architecture really lends itself to that kind of atmosphere.”

In part, that’s because the design defers to the landscape. The building, by Ottawa designer Paul Kariouk, is

set among the trees on top of a bluff; it has so many large, well-placed windows that it feels, even from the inside, as though it’s part of the forest. “There’s very little barrier between the property and the house,” Maheux explains. “When you walk in, you can’t help noticing that it feels like [you’re] outside.”

Large windows dominate every room – two bedrooms in one wing, a kitchen and living room in the other. The large, enclosed porch, however, is where Maheux spends the most time in the summer, reading with Hill and their daughter, Madeleine.

“The porch doesn’t have glass,”

explains Kariouk, who teaches architecture at Carleton University. “There is a very fine screen for the evenings when you need it. In the mornings, you roll it away and you’re completely outside.”

Another of the building’s inside-out features was driven by the family’s youngest member, who insisted the cabin include a loft, which Kariouk designed as a curvaceous pod, spanning the building’s two wings. Its floor curves up to one side to meet the ceiling, creating an unusual space with broad views of the landscape. It is a favourite Maheux says, among the children who come to visit, a private tree house inside a house in the trees.



The fine screen that surrounds the patio can be fully retracted, transforming the space into an outdoor room. PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN LALONDE/PHOTOLUX STUDIOS



The windows along the back of Hilton and Barbara Tudhope's cottage, built into a hillside, draw the forest into the rooms in the rear.

A SUSTAINABLE HAVEN IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

For a couple who lives in downtown Dallas, the hills of Ontario's Niagara Escarpment – rugged and richly forested – make a bucolic getaway. Hilton and Barbara Tudhope spend their summers in the township of Mulmur; for them, the experience is about recharging. “You're in nature,” Barbara says. “It feels like you're attached to the earth.” She could mean that both figuratively and literally, given that the pair's two-bedroom cottage is set right into the hillside.

Designed by the Toronto architects superkül, the long, low dwelling sits on a south-facing slope next to a large, spring-fed pond. Each of its rooms – the bedrooms, an office, a kitchen and a living room – overlooks the water through cedar-framed windows. “We gave superkül the mandate that we really wanted to bring the outdoors inside, and they

did that,” Hilton says. “Obviously the windows on the pond are spectacular – they're 90 feet long by 14 feet high – but the windows at the back of the house bring the forest in.”

The area's natural environment is both beautiful and fragile, and the Tudhopes, who spend about four months of the year in Mulmur, wanted the building to be as sustainable as possible. It is highly insulated and boasts a green roof, a geothermal system uses the pond to exchange heat and the windows are triple-glazed, giving them an extremely high insulation value. All this makes the house eligible for a gold or platinum rating from the LEED environmental rating system, a designation that is rare among single-family houses.

And while the outdoors invite them to be active – the hiking paths of the Bruce Trail are nearby – the cottage itself is an unusually healthy environment. For medical reasons, the couple requested extremely high air quality indoors, so some walls were covered in a natural plaster that requires no sealants or paint, the white-oak cabinetry was finished with natural lacquers and the interior has very few horizontal surfaces, so there are fewer places for dust to settle. You can feel it, Hilton says. “As soon as you walk in, the feeling of the air is as refreshing and rejuvenating” as it is outdoors.



Triple-glazed windows, along with a geothermal heating system that uses the adjacent pond to exchange heat, are among the many features that enable this getaway to tread lightly on the land that surrounds it. PHOTOS BY SHAI GIL



TOP The wings of this V-shaped summer home, designed by Omar Gandhi, wrap around a bowl-shaped lawn, a hub of family activity. ABOVE (LEFT AND RIGHT) A retractable glass wall opens up a gathering space adjacent to the kitchen, where a fireplace hangs above a slate-accented floor. BELOW Two walls of windows in the master bedroom afford excellent views of the surrounding woods. PHOTOS BY GREG RICHARDSON



A WRAPAROUND REFUGE IN COASTAL NOVA SCOTIA

Keith and Rosemary Hamilton's oceanfront cottage on Nova Scotia's South Shore is the couple's favourite place to gather with their children and grandkids. There, they spend their days on the lawn between the house and the water, where the land forms a bowl shape, a natural hub that inspired Halifax-based architect Omar Gandhi's design for the dwelling. The building features two wings that wrap around the central lawn, resulting in a compound that is both intimate and wide open to the sea.

One wing contains the Hamiltons' master bedroom, along with an open kitchen and living space fronted by two-storey windows lined with sunshades. The other houses guest rooms. In the middle, where the two wings meet, is a covered porch enclosed in a panelled glass wall that can fold away, turning the space into an outdoor room. As Keith describes it, "the flow to the outdoor deck is seamless."

This central area features a contemporary fireplace that hangs from the ceiling, along with an unusual twist on the hearth: strips of granite set into the floor, interspersed with planks of wood. "The stone heats up and becomes a beautiful warm mass that carries the warmth long after the sun goes down," Gandhi says.

While the building is quite unlike the traditional-style cottages that are common in the area, its design makes a fairly subtle statement. Wrapped in white-stained cedar siding and shingles, the cottage's view from the road is quiet. But "on the other side," Gandhi says, "it opens up toward the sunlight and the water, where all the action is."



BUNKHOUSE RULES

If you have a cottage, you will probably have overnight guests. Lots of them. Where to house them all? How about those underused, long-neglected outbuildings? As a top designer reveals from experience, turning a tiny bunkhouse into a stylish, ultraefficient annex can be done inexpensively and relatively hassle-free. Karen Sealy walks **Danny Sinopoli** through her process for beautifying bunkies



On her website, the award-winning Toronto-based designer Karen Sealy says that she is "equally at ease in a hardhat or heels," but she could also add "aboard a sailboat" to that list. Sailing is "one of my passions," says the owner of Sealy Design Inc., regular design expert on TV's *Cityline* and host of the HGTV series *Summer Home*. Typically, Sealy indulges that passion at her cottage on the east shore of Ontario's Lake Simcoe, "which I like to call the windy side and is great for sailing." Of course, the prospect of a spin on her boat off the bucolic property means that she rarely wants for overnight guests. In the past, Sealy would house them in a small cabin that had been on the site for years. Such bunkhouses – or bunkies, as they're informally known – are common fixtures at weekend homes in rural Ontario and elsewhere, so called because they traditionally contain bunk beds to maximize sleeping space. "But when hosting a family reunion presented itself," Sealy recalls, "I knew I needed way more places to house people." So she set out to install not one new bunkie, but two (pictured above). The one on the right, with the red door and red Muskoka chair out front, "used to be an outhouse that years later was converted to a washroom." That room was torn down to make way for the new structure – only the footprint remains. The bunkie on the left, meanwhile, was entirely new. Since both of the structures, which are about "30 steps from the main cottage," are less than 100 square feet each, no building permit was required. And outfitting them couldn't have been easier or more economical, says Sealy, who gave each a distinct style: The one on the left is bright and nautical-looking; the other also conjures a ship, but is darker and richer in tone, evoking below deck on a yacht. Here is how she pulled both off.

BUNKIE NO. 1: NAUTICAL AND BRIGHT



Although Sealy built this particular bunkhouse from the ground up, those renovating the interior of an existing structure can do so, she says, extremely thriftily. "Instead of hanging and mudding drywall, which is messy, time-consuming and requires some experience to do it well, [go] with painted beadboard, adding vertical nail-strip on the seams every 12 inches to create a board-and-batten feel." Once that's done, up to four bunk beds can be built out of MDF and plywood for under \$200, she says. The two bunks shown at left were installed at different heights and opposing angles, with lots of storage above and below. (The blue dresser, from IKEA, was dressed up with knotted "monkey-fist" pulls fashioned by "Pappa Sealy," Karen's father, while the rod holding various storage buckets was "meant for a kitchen, but works perfectly here.") Over all, the scheme is nautical, but also whimsical: "Its blue, white, red and yellow palette is preppy and crisp," Sealy says. "Its painted yellow floor is homespun and welcoming." Just about everything in the room, moreover, was either salvaged or homemade: The upper cabinets were re-faced with nautical charts, the pillow bearing the red cross is an old German flag, the drapery (not shown) is upcycled sail material. Ostensibly, Sealy says, the bunkie was designed with kids in mind, but has since "been enjoyed by young and old." It's not hard to see why.

BUNKIE NO. 2: RICH AND YACHT-LIKE



Decidedly more sophisticated in look and feel, Sealy's other guest cabin, intended to evoke a bedroom on a yacht, is often referred to, she says, as "the adult bunkie." "It has a woody feel, with rich chocolate tones and brass accents," she says. "It's cozy and feels like a warm hug, [making it perfect] for snuggling in with a good book or DVD." The room, she points out, "also has some hidden features, like under-bed 'rollies' that, when pulled out, are large enough to accommodate the biggest backpack or duffel bag. My favourite surprise feature is the hanging table (seen in the top picture at right) that drops from the ceiling for breakfasts in bed. Purchased at a salvage store and then refinished, it's an authentic nautical table that is lowered with a pulley system above the bed." Unlike its neighbour, this bunkie also boasts one more luxury: a fully functioning powder room (shown bottom left). It's a legacy of the cabin's siting where the outhouse used to be, but far less rustic – to say the least.

