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Function key in cottage design, renovations, says 'Summer Home' host Karen Sealy

By The Staff - Global News
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Interior designer and "Summer Home" host Karen Sealy is pictured in this undated handout photo. THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO, Shaw Media.



TORONTO – Karen Sealy can sympathize with cottage owners faced with the challenge of sprucing up their home away from home.

The interior designer had a sentimental attachment to Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto, recalling time spent growing up sailing on the waters. But her current cosy getaway spot was hardly idyllic when she first saw it.

"It was a falling down little log cabin," Sealy said in a phone interview from her refurbished cottage, remembering a time when the place had carpenter ants and rotting logs.

"It was on the market two years, didn't even have a lockbox on it. 'Wander through at will' was how bad this place was."

But Sealy said the location fit the bill for reasons beyond the sentimental. It wasn't too distant a commute from the city, was a nice lot on a sandy bay and family-friendly.

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To replace the rotting logs, she removed good ones from her kitchen and put up plywood that would be covered anyway by hanging cabinets and backsplash. She made other changes to customize the cabin, from bringing in an integrated washer/dryer to moving walls to better make use of the space.

As host of the new HGTV series "Summer Home," which debuts Sunday at 9 p.m. ET, she's bringing her insights and experience to help other cottage owners revamp their space to better suit their evolving needs.

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Sealy said virtually everyone she met while filming the series said the same thing: they wanted the feeling of the cottage but the conveniences of home.

Sealy said people tend to be more emotionally connected to their cottage or summer homes. While concerns about their main residence are often centred around making improvements for resale, for example, cottage dwellers tend to talk about passing their property along to other family members, and they see it as a respite from everyday life.

Regardless of whether it's a cottage, condo or mansion, the rules of design are the same – looking at why changes are being made and what needs fixing, Sealy said.

Once people have planned what they want to do, Sealy said it's just a matter of implementing the changes needed within the confines of their budgets. That could mean perhaps opting for a smaller kitchen, going for a plastic laminate counter instead of quartz, or even salvage shopping to buy furniture, she noted.

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One episode of "Summer Home" focuses on a family cottage on Cameron Lake near Fenelon Falls, Ont., where on any given weekend, 12 people are sharing the home. Sealy said family members were sitting crammed around a tiny table balancing plates on their knees, and their kitchen was so small their fridge was in the mud room.

"I always say anyone can make a pretty room but if it's not functional it's missed its mark," said Sealy. "How many people do I want to sit around family room area? Ask yourself the functional questions first. What are the priorities?"

In another upcoming episode, Sealy said there were three girls who had to fit into a tiny bedroom. The family had purchased a bunk bed kit that didn't fit by just a few centimetres within the small alcove. Sealy mounted the upper and lower bunks to studs on the walls. On the other side of the room, she built a platform bed out of medium-density fibreboard with cubbies underneath for storage.

"One of the things about the cottage that's different from the city is we're not hanging as many things," Sealy said. "We tend to have lots of fleece and shorts and bathing suits and T-shirts, and most of those things can go like in a basket or on a shelf or in a drawer. We don't need as much closet space."

Sealy also suggests looking around the cottage to find new ways to use or display things. She puts that method into practice in the show, transforming jars into hanging lights and stirring nostalgia when unearthing a family member's old drum to place in the kitchen.

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Whether it's decluttering, adding new appliances or building a new deck, you can make your home more appropriate to your needs, Sealy noted.

"Maybe the cottage is really small and you want to have more people up there when you are out there, so maybe you'd consider spending some money on your outdoor space, like a cupboard area with a heater to prolong your summer, or screens to keep out mosquitoes so you can sit out there in the evenings," she said.

While the frequency of use will vary from family to family, Sealy said a key



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thing to consider is how important the space is to you – not how often you get there.

"I think most people will tell you that their cottage is a pretty special place," she said. "Given that, I think it's OK to spend money on some renovations because they are so special to us."

"When we do get here, we really do love the time up here, so you might as well let them function for you."

Online:

Summer Home: <http://www.hgtv.ca/summerhome>

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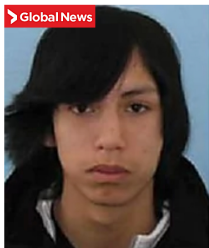
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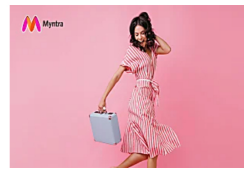
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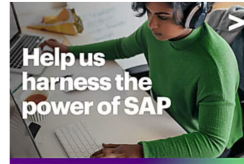
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