

STRONG TIES

This cabin's whimsical design was the perfect fit for the property that holds incredible nostalgia for its owners.



This was the Bennetts' lot in the 1930s, when it was known as the Algonquin Bungalow Camp (left). It then became Red Deer Cottages before being divided into four lots about three decades ago.



STORY BY NOELLE STAPINSKY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEV MCMULLEN

Sifting through real estate listings in Muskoka was a regular thing for Marg Bennett, who grew up in Huntsville, but now lives in Burlington, Ont. Although one particular day, not too long ago, really stands out – a lakefront property on Tipper Lane, just outside of Huntsville on Lake Vernon came up for sale. The lot, which is just off Ravenscliffe Road, was once part of the old Algonquin Bungalow Camp, which was then converted into Red Deer Cottages.

The property had two cottages on it, a cascading landscape and beautiful view of the lake, but for Bennett this property was like discovering a cherished family heirloom – it was part of the original three acres her grandfather had purchased in 1925.



"It's just going to get better," says Marg Bennett. "We've always wanted to spend more time here, but now, for us, it's like coming home."

"To make a makeshift door handle, he went into the bush and cut a piece of wood. I said, 'don't even think about taking that off. I love it.'"

Her grandfather was an artist that worked in the art department at Eaton's, back when they actually drew the images for the catalogue. "He knew the Group of Seven, they were his contemporaries," says Bennett.

Standing with Bennett and her husband Doug, on their new Tipper Lane property in front of their recently built cabin, Bennett points out across the lake. "He was out on that point over there and fell in love with this spot. Back then it was owned by a farmer who had 100 acres."

Her grandfather purchased the property for \$450, built a cottage and planted trees – many of which are still there. Bennett's mother spent every summer there, and her

parents built their own cottage on the lake in 1957. "My family ended up moving to Huntsville in 1969 and my dad sold both of the cottages in 1974. So [owning this property] really pulls on the heart strings."

After tearing down the old cottages on the property, the Bennetts had Matt Davidson, owner of Davidson Log and Timber Artisans, build a quaint Hansel and Gretel-style cabin – a cosy getaway for the couple as they await the main house to be built.

They discovered Davidson at a cottage show in Toronto. "We had lined up about six builders on the first day, but on the second day we just went straight to Matt. His work was so unique and we knew we had found our builder."






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Based out of Washago, Ont., Davidson has been handcrafting log and timber homes for 20 years. At his logging yard, they get all their logs raw, with the bark still on them, split them and pre-build the houses. He and his team pre-cut the openings, do all the electrical, and then label everything, take it apart and re-erect it on the customer's property.

For the cabin, which features a small living area and kitchen, a bedroom, bathroom and a loft, Davidson says, "They left the design up to us. I knew they wanted something whimsical. And the nice thing about little projects is that you can get a lot more creative and not blow the budget." But the subtle details involved in this design, inside and out, are incredible. The cabin is built with board and batten, hand-hewed log pieces, and features animal heads on the cantilevers, a Davidson trademark that adds a Norwegian feel to it.

A red curved beam, on the side of the cabin, stretches from the ground up to a

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Inside the cabin, the décor is vintage and antique, or “granny’s old cabin-ish,” as Bennett describes.

diamond-shaped window. “I had to find a special piece for that,” he laughs. “We didn’t have the wood picked out before we drew it. I just wanted to make it funky.”

Even the handle on the front door has a story. “Matt is such a master craftsman ... he was even carrying materials down (from the driveway) on his shoulders,” beams Bennett. “To make a makeshift door handle, he went into the bush and cut a piece of wood. I said, ‘Don’t even think about taking that off. I love it.’”

Inside the cabin, the décor is vintage and antique, or “granny’s old cabin-ish,” as Bennett describes. The kitchen was custom-built by Davidson’s wife, who’s

a cabinetmaker. Edison light bulbs in the lighting fixtures give off a warm glow, and the ladder-like stairs to the loft area are accented with birch handrails. And at the top of the stairs there are tiny acorns carved into the wood.

Out at Davidson’s log yard, the Bennetts’ 2,200-square-foot Norwegian Dovetail home is currently being built. “It’s mainly a bungalow with one bedroom on the main floor and extra rooms in the basement,” explains Davidson. The foundation for the walkout basement is already finished and awaiting the upper floor, which will be erected by Davidson’s team in March.

Walking around the partially built

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A red curved beam, on the side of the cabin, stretches from the ground up to a diamond-shaped window.

house, Davidson explains the design and the art behind what he does. "This is how they built their log homes 800 years ago in Norway. This is called a full-scribe dovetail," he says. "Most handcrafted log homes are chinked, meaning white mortar is between the logs. This is chinkless. There are no nails used and the notches are scribed, which gives it a nice tight fit. And when we assemble it, the corner pins will be pinned into the hardwood with dowel."

And there's a lot of embellishment on the cantilever ends. The animal heads are roughed out with a chainsaw and finished by hand with an axe and dry knife.

"The Bennetts' house has a lot of little

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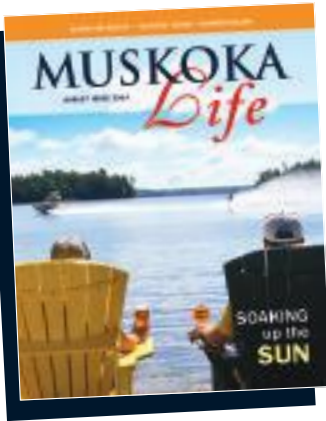
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Photo by Noelle Stapinsky

"This is how they built their log home 800 years ago in Norway," says builder Matt Davidson.

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juts and corners to give it some interest because we kept it fairly narrow due to the steepness of the lot."

The process has been fantastic for the Bennetts as they get to reconnect with the community they once called home. And they have a lot of family in the Huntsville area.

Bennett has done copious amounts of research and collected documentation of her grandfather's cottage property. She has a postcard of cows that once roamed the farm there, a painting her grandfather



did of the natural landscape along the lake, which is almost identical to the view they have from the cabin. Her family certainly has strong ties to the area – Bennett’s mother even co-authored a book about Ravenscliffe, which was sold through the Ravenscliffe Anglican Church.

“It’s just going to get better,” says Bennett, when thinking of the main house and all the landscaping they have in store for the property. “We’ve always wanted to spend more time here, but now, for us, it’s like coming home.” ↵

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