

High-speed perfection

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS THWAITES

A year-round waterfront home, designed to fit a unique property

There's something magical about watching a new home go up. Seeing a property transform from a lot to a construction site to a completed residence is undeniably fascinating.

It's even more remarkable when the home literally comes out of the sky and the transformation takes place in a single day.

For Leslie and Elizabeth, the transformation was rapid, but the love affair with the site had been growing for a long time. Elizabeth's parents had built a cottage just down the road 40 years ago, and she knew every place on the road. "We love the area, we're used to the area, and we know the neighbours," she says.

So they also knew the constraints and opportunities on the property. The lot is dotted with mature trees – a

wonderful asset, but one that would require careful site planning and construction.

It's also narrow, with so little space between lake and road that the house could be no more than 26 feet wide. A pre-existing cottage meant the site was grandfathered, allowing the couple to build their home just 33 feet from the water's edge.

Clearly, this project would require a creative and specialized team. "We interviewed a lot of builders before deciding on Royal Homes," says Elizabeth.

Choosing prefab

This isn't the first home Leslie and Elizabeth have built – previous projects include a conventionally-framed house and a log home – but it was their first experience with prefabricated structures.

Part of the appeal was the ability to accurately cost the project, says Leslie. He gestures to a massive stone fireplace that dominates the living room, soaring from floor to the cathedral ceiling. "If you want to know what it will cost to have a feature like this, you just ask and you get an exact figure, down to the penny," he says. "There are no estimates and there are no overages. You know exactly what the home is going to cost before you start."

At the same time, there's tremendous flexibility in the design. The couple worked closely with Selena McConnell, a lead designer with Royal Homes, to come up with a home that suited all their needs.

The home had to serve as a year-round residence for the couple, and to provide a cottage-like experience for their blended family of four adult children, partners and grandchildren. Bedrooms would be modest in size, to allow a maximum amount of space for the public areas of the home. And the design would need to use the property to its advantage.

The design excels in all ways. Walkouts from the lower level bedrooms giving immediate access to the lake. Soaring windows and French doors on the main level embrace the view. Bedrooms on the upper level offer such a stunning vista that visitors have dubbed one of them "the treetop room."

Built indoors

It took just a few months to turn the vision into a reality: the couple hired Royal Homes in October, and by the end of January the modules were ready for delivery.

A local contractor was hired by Royal Homes to prepare the site and the foundation, building to their exact specifications.

"When the house modules arrived, they had a 150 ton crane that just lifted each of them up and over the trees, and placed them on the foundation," says Leslie. The allowable tolerance was just 1/16th of an inch.

"It was incredible to see," says Elizabeth. "The trucks arrived in the morning, and at 4:30 that afternoon we walked through the front door. The lights were in, the walls



Pieter Venema, Co-Owner of Royal Homes (left) with Homeowners Elizabeth and Leslie.



were painted, the cabinets were in place..."

Everything had been built in climate-controlled conditions in the Royal Homes factory. The basement still needed to be finished once the modules were in place, but all of that work was done in a house that was completely closed in and weathertight.

That fact alone made a prefabricated home an excellent choice, says

Elizabeth, particularly when undertaking a winter build. A neighbour across the bay built that same winter, and spent thousands of dollars on hydro and propane before the home was completely closed in and insulated.

Fitting the family

The house is filled with custom details, like the antique wooden door leading to the master bedroom. Elizabeth found it at an antique shop, where the label simply said it came from "Andrew Pellett's house" – a home better known as Casa Loma. Elizabeth's grandfather was a close friend of Pellett, so she couldn't resist adding the door to their own home. "We just gave the dimensions to Selena, and Royal Homes built it into the house," she says.

Nor was there any difficulty when bringing in outside consultants or materials to reflect Leslie and Elizabeth's preferences – they had the

interior décor designed by Linda Leibel, and asked Royal Homes to use Ridley windows and exterior doors.

The final result reflects Leslie and Elizabeth's desires and their personality, and

embraces the property itself. "We've been here in summer, and we've been here when it's 35 below," says Leslie. "No matter what the weather, it's just perfect here." **DS**

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