

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW FEARMAN

Home & cottage

Family space now, and retirement space in the future



It's one of the most common design challenges for cottage owners, and one of the easiest to get wrong: how to build a place that will serve as a family cottage now and a retirement home in a few years.

"It's a really tough transition for a lot of people," says Selena McConnell, a lead designer with Royal Homes. "Some people build large homes so there's a lot of room for the kids when they come back to visit. However, they can end up taking on all kinds of debt for a space that only gets used when the kids come back for the holidays."

It's not just about the amount of space: a great design takes into account the way different families will use the home.

"For the parents, the house is a retirement home. It's where they live all the time," Selena explains. "But for the kids, the new house will always be the cottage."

For Brian Davis and Denise Damrell, the solution to both problems was to separate the living spaces. Their new lakeside home has 1,600 square feet of main floor living space – a comfortable place for the couple to live, with a guest bedroom and an expansive room with a view of the lake. The lower level has a similar amount of floor space, and is laid out with bedrooms and a kitchenette for the children – and eventually, grandchildren – to enjoy.

"Separating the spaces allows you to enjoy having the kids

over, without feeling like they're taking over the space when they come to visit," Selena explains.

Those visits are a few years away for Brian and Denise. Their children are still living at home, and this is very much the family cottage. But, they explain, it made sense to design a place that would meet their future needs as well as their current ones.

"We knew that we wanted to move here when we retire," Brian explains. The couple has owned the property for 17 years – they and their children have spent many summers enjoying the original 900 square-foot cottage that stood on the site since 1924.

"We thought a lot about expanding the original cottage," says Denise. "It had so much history." But conversations with local contractors confirmed that the bones of the cottage were badly deteriorated: tearing it down was the only option.

Prefab construction

Deciding to build a prefab home was surprisingly easy, they said. Denise's brother had built a cottage on the lake a few years earlier, working with a local contractor to erect a standard framed cottage. Watching him go through the process convinced Denise and Brian that they didn't want to follow in his footsteps.

"He would come up here all the time for site meetings

and to check on the build," says Denise.

Their meetings with Selena were mainly at the Royal Homes design centre in Innisfil, a short hop up the highway from their home in the city. They began by talking about the way they wanted to use the space, their vision for how they would live in the house, as well as the constraints and opportunities of the site itself. "We try to get inside each client's head," Selena explains. "Some clients want a lot of direction. Denise is pretty visual, so sometimes I was just along for the ride!"

Pricing adjustments were made as the plans developed and finishes were chosen, ensuring that Denise and

Brian knew exactly what they were going to be spending.

Indoor and outdoor

The property has a modest slope to the lake, so they could incorporate full-height windows on the lower level, ensuring the kids' space is suffused with light.

The main floor has an expansive view of the lake, both from within the cottage and from the large deck that runs the width of the building.

The deck allows plenty of seating in the sun as well as a large shaded area that's protected by an oversized roof overhang. As people

age, they often want more protection from the sun, Denise explains. To the other side, a large, covered outdoor area – complete with fire bowl – allows the space to be used in three, or even four seasons without being bothered by rainy days or having to shovel the deck free of snow. "The

Designer Selena McConnell and Homeowner Denise Damrell

deck becomes added living space," she says.

The deck and basement were built on-site. Nearly everything else was crafted inside Royal Homes' factory in Wingham, and delivered to the property. "On January fifth, at nine a.m. the trucks pulled up," says Brian. "Three hours later, we were walking through the house with windows and walls and glass shower doors all in place."

"We just couldn't be happier with the whole thing!" **DS**

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