

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW FEARMAN AND DANIEL VENEMA

AT HOME ON THE WATER

A new home begins with a place to park the boat



Buying your first waterfront property usually follows a standard sequence of events: buy the lot, build the home, then start looking for a boat.

For Don and Yvonne Taylor, the process was a little different.

“We’ve been docking our boat in Lagoon City for 25 years,” says Don. “We lived aboard it every summer.”

As retirement approached for the Toronto-based couple, they began thinking about moving north permanently. They saw lot for sale not far from their anchorage, and it wasn’t long before they were the owners of a gorgeous property – with plenty of space to dock their 38-foot cruiser.

It was only then that they turned any serious attention to the house they would build.

“We’d never built a house before, so we started by going to the home show,” says Yvonne.

“We talked to everyone. Then we met Erica, and we just really clicked.”

Erica Fortin is a designer with Royal Homes. She often works with people who are completely new to home construction. “There’s an incredible number of things that need to be considered, particularly when you’re building on waterfront,” she says. “The environmental restrictions alone have become much more complex over the years. But we work with them every day, so we’re quite comfortable walking people through them. Or

if they prefer – as Don and Yvonne did – we can look after everything for them.”

Before getting into permits, though, Don and Yvonne worked with Erica to craft a design.

“We had a few ideas about what we wanted,” said Yvonne, “and every time, Erica said ‘absolutely. I can design that for you.’”

A model beginning
Royal Homes has a wide range of existing designs, and model homes at locations

across the province. But there’s never an expectation that clients will simply select one model. “Just about everything we do is custom,” says Erica. “But the models and designs can provide a jumping-off point for the discussion, if that’s what the clients want.”

For Don and Yvonne, touring some of the model homes proved enormously helpful. The

couple can point to a range of features in their design that were drawn from different models, but they’re also quick to note how the final build reflects their specific needs and wants.

They worked closely with Erica to fine-tune the design: an alcove was created to fit a specific piece of furniture; a wall was angled to allow a view of the fireplace from the dining room; kitchen cabinetry was designed around their cooking style. Because most of the house is factory built under controlled conditions, the couple could quickly see how selecting one style of tile or a set of bathroom fixtures would affect the budget. “Erica did a lot of the shopping for us, presented us with options and helped us choose things that worked well together,” says Yvonne.

But non-standard items were also easily incorporated. Don

asked about Rumford fireplaces, an 18th century design that is known for its fast, smoke-free burn. “Not a lot of people know about them, but Erica said ‘oh yeah, we’ve seen those before,’” he says. She returned with a design that enhanced the Rumford style, adding a vertical sliding glass front that can be used to seal the opening when the fireplace isn’t in use.

Site-specific

While Erica worked on the design, other members of the Royal Homes team visited the site to make plans for the foundation and other on-site elements. The land around Lagoon City is peaty, so a simple cement foundation isn’t an option: instead, homes need to sit on dozens of steel pilings which are driven through the peat to the bedrock underneath.

Royal Homes’ team hired local contractors to drive the pilings and build the foundation to their exact specifications. Don planned to build a deck himself after the home was

in place, so they added extra steel pilings to serve as a superstructure beneath the house-width seating area.

While the steel and cement were being



Erica Fortin, Lead Designer of Royal Homes with Don and Yvonne Taylor

installed, and the driveway built, the house itself was being constructed in the Royal Homes factory. Don and Yvonne visited the site to see their home take shape, and to make a few last-minute decisions. “We wanted a distressed wood beam for the fireplace mantel, and when we got there they showed us a half dozen or more and asked us to pick the one we wanted,” says Don.

Installation and after-care
The house was delivered on five trucks one winter’s day, each module lifted into place by a crane. “In the morning, we had a foundation; by the end of the day, we were walking through our house,” says Yvonne. “It was incredible.”

By spring, the last few details had been finalized and the

couple moved in. That wasn’t the last they say of Royal Homes, though. “They’ve returned several times, and fixed up a few little things, including things we didn’t even notice,” says Don. “Their after-care is amazing.”

“We really couldn’t be happier with our home.” **DS**

BY ANDREW WAGNER-CHAZALON



Innisfil Design Centre
2014 Commerce Park Drive, Innisfil
1-888-739-5122

Gravenhurst Design Centre
2298 Highway 11 North, Gravenhurst
1-866-782-0033

www.RoyalHomes.com