

SILENCE & EASE

A rural retreat designed to delight

Many people think a recreational retreat isn't complete unless you have a lake outside the door.

But Mary-Ellen Anderson and her partner were seeking something much more fragile and precious: they wanted silence.

"You go to some cottages and your neighbours are right there beside you," says Mary-Ellen. "Having the water at the cottage is awesome, but you're not really getting away from it all."

For their rural retreat, the couple chose a parcel of forest and disused farmland, 50 acres of meadows, wildlife and solitude. There's a riffling trout stream nearby, but the nearest lake is a few kilometres away.

It's an idyllic retreat. The bigger question was what to do with it.

"We had been through a renovation in the city, and I said, 'I'm not going to deal with contractors,'" Mary-Ellen says. Even though their contractors were great, she explains, every large construction project seems to involve an incredible amount

of back-and-forth and on-site meetings. Trying to do that while juggling two busy professional careers, and living two hours away from the build site, would be impossible.

A friend suggested they consider building a prefab home. Mary-Ellen rejected the idea immediately, picturing something that was little more than a trailer. "I said 'have you seen prefab?'" she says with a chuckle.

Then they toured the Royal Homes model home in Innisfil, and they realized they hadn't understood what prefab really means.

The Royal Homes buildings were gorgeous and modern, built with all the amenities and style you'd expect to see in a new home. But because prefab buildings are built in a factory and then delivered to the site, the couple could sidestep nearly all the on-site deliberation they wanted to avoid.

Best of all, everything about the home is fully customizable. "I loved the fact that we could design what we wanted," says Mary-Ellen.

They could have started their design from scratch, but the Catalina model, a three-bedroom bungalow, ticked a lot of their boxes in terms of size and features. But while they wanted most of the living space

to be on the ground floor, they also recognized that a two-storey home would cut costs, with a smaller foundation and less roof for the same amount of square footage.

"We basically took a wing off the model, and put it upstairs."

They teamed up with Selena McConnell, a senior designer with Royal Homes, and began discussing the features that were important to them. They talked about accessibility – Mary-Ellen's 91-year-old mother spends a lot of time at the home, and they wanted to be sure she could enter and exit with ease. They talked about where they wanted to stand while cooking, and how they envisioned entertaining. And they talked about the silence they wanted to preserve.

Then Selena set to work, designing the home they wanted.

The accessible features include extra-wide doorways, and a barrier-free entry from the garage. "The shower in the main floor ensuite has a sloped floor so there's no

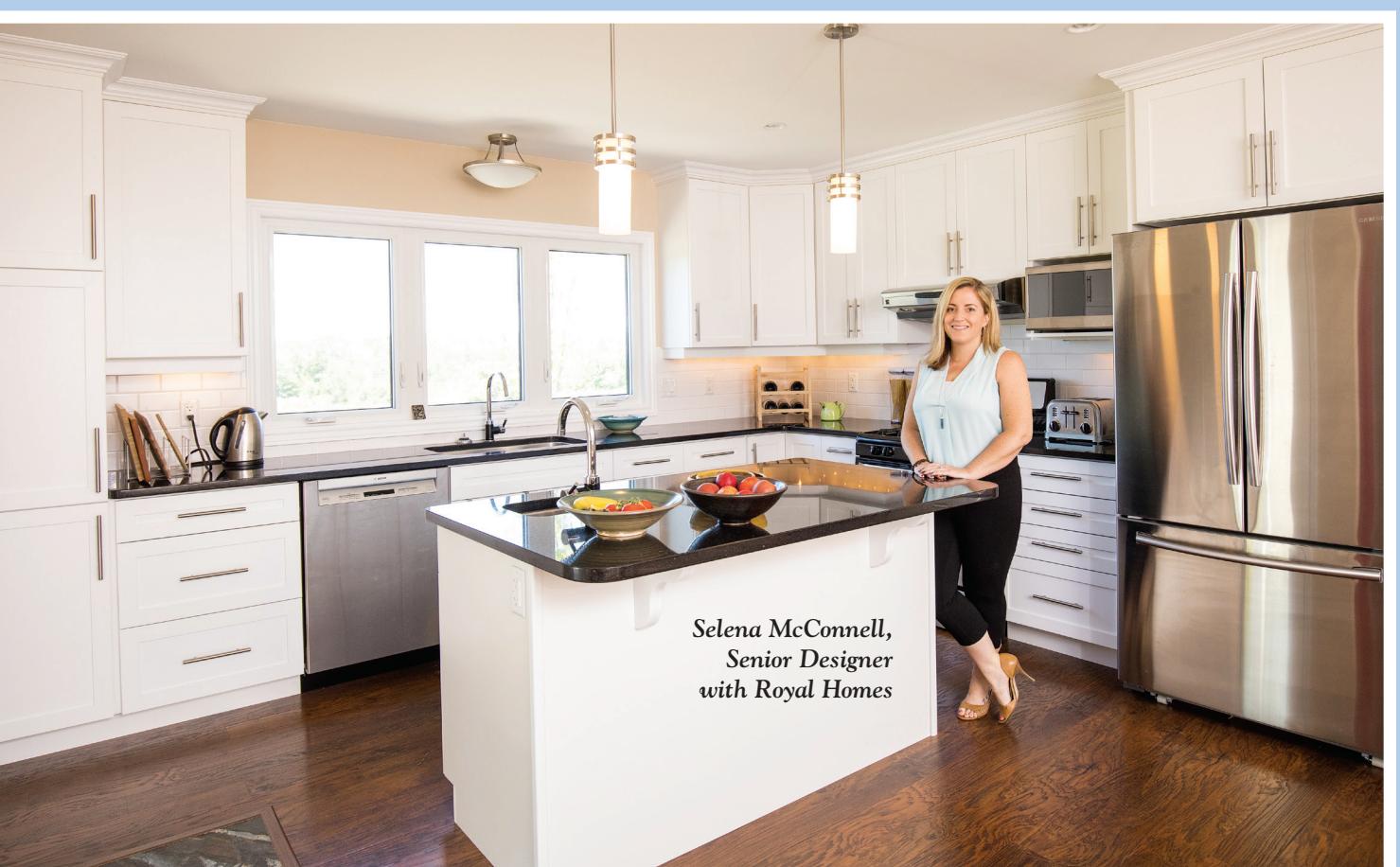
need for a curb along the edge, making it extremely accessible," Selena explains.

The design lets Mary-Ellen's mother live entirely on the main floor, and will also allow the couple to live there in future years, if mobility becomes an issue for them.

A master bedroom located upstairs enjoys sweeping views of the fields from front and rear. Instead of two bedrooms, there is a single master with a walk-in closet. An open loft area at the top of the stairs can function as both an office space and a casual sleeping area for visiting nieces and nephews.

Fixtures and fittings – from the tiles in the bathroom to the hardwood floors to the white shaker-style kitchen cabinets – were selected at meetings in the city, with Selena joining them at their downtown home or their offices.

"I had one fixed rule: no natural wood on the exterior," says Mary-Ellen. "We have wooden steps outside our home in the city. They're gorgeous, but I'm



**Selena McConnell,
Senior Designer
with Royal Homes**

out there staining them every two years."

the local contractors," says Mary-Ellen. He suggested a sinuous drive that would allow the view to unfold as visitors arrive (the original idea had been a straight line from the road), and oversaw everything from hydro to septic to the well.

With the home delivered and placed on its foundation, it took just three months for the Royal Homes crews to complete the final details and for the home to be ready to move in.

Before long the couple were

enjoying weekends at their rural home, star-gazing at night, catching glimpses of deer in the front yard, and listening to nothing louder than coyotes and crickets. **DS**

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