

# DAYS of GLORY

A roomy lakeside cottage holds within its walls the memory of a century of leisurely summer days.

BY KELVIN BROWNE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL ALBERSTAT

Off the veranda, this bay-windowed area leads to the main hall and stair. The floors are painted with traditional porch paint. The coffee table was likely made for the cottage and is typical of the Mission-style furniture created at the turn of the last century for cottages in the area.

**OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT:** The main hall is the hub of the house with living, dining opening on each side. To the left of the stairs is the dining room and kitchen. To the right is a den and powder room. Three iron gate sections turned on their ends form the base of a pine table, set on a needlepoint

carpet, that is the focal point of the hall. The light fixture, formerly gas, was wired for electricity. Iron gates, Five O Seven Home & Garden, carpet, Ellis. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** A gazebo adjacent to the dock is a sheltered locale for lounging on traditional Muskoka chairs and admiring the view.



## It's a cottage

from a different time and quite a different sensibility. While large and beautifully crafted, it is surprisingly modest. This is just what the affluent Pittsburgh family who built it in 1905 wanted, as well as a perfect fit with the taste of the current owner. Understated. Not likely a word you'd use now to describe most new cottages in Muskoka, a vacation region dotted with lakes, two hours north of Toronto.

"We're only the third family to own this cottage since it was built," the owner says of this venerable property. "It was the cottage of friends, and we'd admired it for many years when my late husband and I bought it from them in 1996."

While there is a road right to the cottage, the way to arrive is by boat. Land at the dock, and the cottage majestically rises four storeys from its granite foundations. From here you can walk up the 50 or so steps, across a garden filled with daylilies and other old-fashioned favourites such as hollyhocks and foxgloves, and up a few more steps to the sweeping veranda.

But if you want to be perplexed or happen to be carrying groceries, there is an "inclination," or funicular, as these mini-railways on steep slopes are often called, next to the dock. It takes you up the hill and into the cottage's ground floor, where you can then take a stair to the veranda or another one right into the house. Or you can be indulgent







This enclosed part of the veranda offers a snug place to sit on breezy days or during the shoulder seasons when the temperature gets a bit too refreshing. A variety of pillows was used on the cushions to produce an easy, "undecorated" feeling. Cushions, Peeks & Ratters. **OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT:** "I wanted a kitchen that

looked like it was always here," says the owner. Both carpenter-cabinetmaker Don MacLean and the owner had seen many kitchens in the older cottages in this area and instinctively knew the style — right down to the latches and pulls, wood counters, and colours — that the new kitchen should have. **BOTTOM, SECOND FROM RIGHT:** "When the families

that built these cottages summered here, they often had kitchens repainted to be fresh for their arrival," says Margot Jarrell of Peeks & Ratters, who helped with the decorating. An antique Welsh dresser displays the owner's china. Dresser, Bernard's Antiques. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** A swing is positioned for a perfect view of the lake. The iron furniture came with the cottage.



While this bathroom looks like it's original to the cottage, all the hardware and fixtures were removed, restored and then re-installed. The higher-than-usual wainscoting gives the room a cozy feel. **ABOVE:** The blue and white theme ties together the different patterns. Cushion, chair fabric, Peake & Partners



and choose the elevator that goes up to the second-floor veranda and then to the third-floor bedrooms.

If you've visited a few resale cottages, ones that are new but built to look old, you quickly realize this cottage is the real thing: everything is perfectly done, but nothing is too perfect or contrived looking. The owner hasn't renovated, she has restored. The proof is in a special visitor's perception. One of the previous owners, an 81-year-old woman, stopped by to see the restoration. "She walked through the cottage. Then she paid me the greatest compliment. She said, 'This is the way this home should always have been,'" says the owner.

During the restoration process, the connection to the past was always a factor. It led to the uncovering of some authentic details that contribute to the cottage's aged feel. "I kept 1905 in mind at all times. For example, the kitchen was 1950s — with three layers of linoleum. When we peeled it back to the hardwood below, my contractor called to tell me that there were scratches and cigarette burns and asked if I wanted to refinish. I said, no, I wanted the floor to look as if it had always been there."

The restoration, though, was extensive and began with the upgrading of the drive and septic system, followed by an electrical and plumbing retrofit. Next came repairing the stonework of the cottage's massive granite foundation floor. "We call it the dungeon," says the owner of the first level, which houses

On very warm evenings, everyone wants to spend the night in the sleeping porch. Quilts and chenille bedspreads evoke the 1900s. The flowers, always simple, are mostly from the collage's own gardens.

**OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT:** "The owner wanted a blue

and white bedroom," says Jarrott. "It brings the lake right inside." Furniture is simple and mostly painted white. The antique kerosene lamp on the dresser is one of 30 at the cottage, and part of the owner's collection of over 60 examples.

