



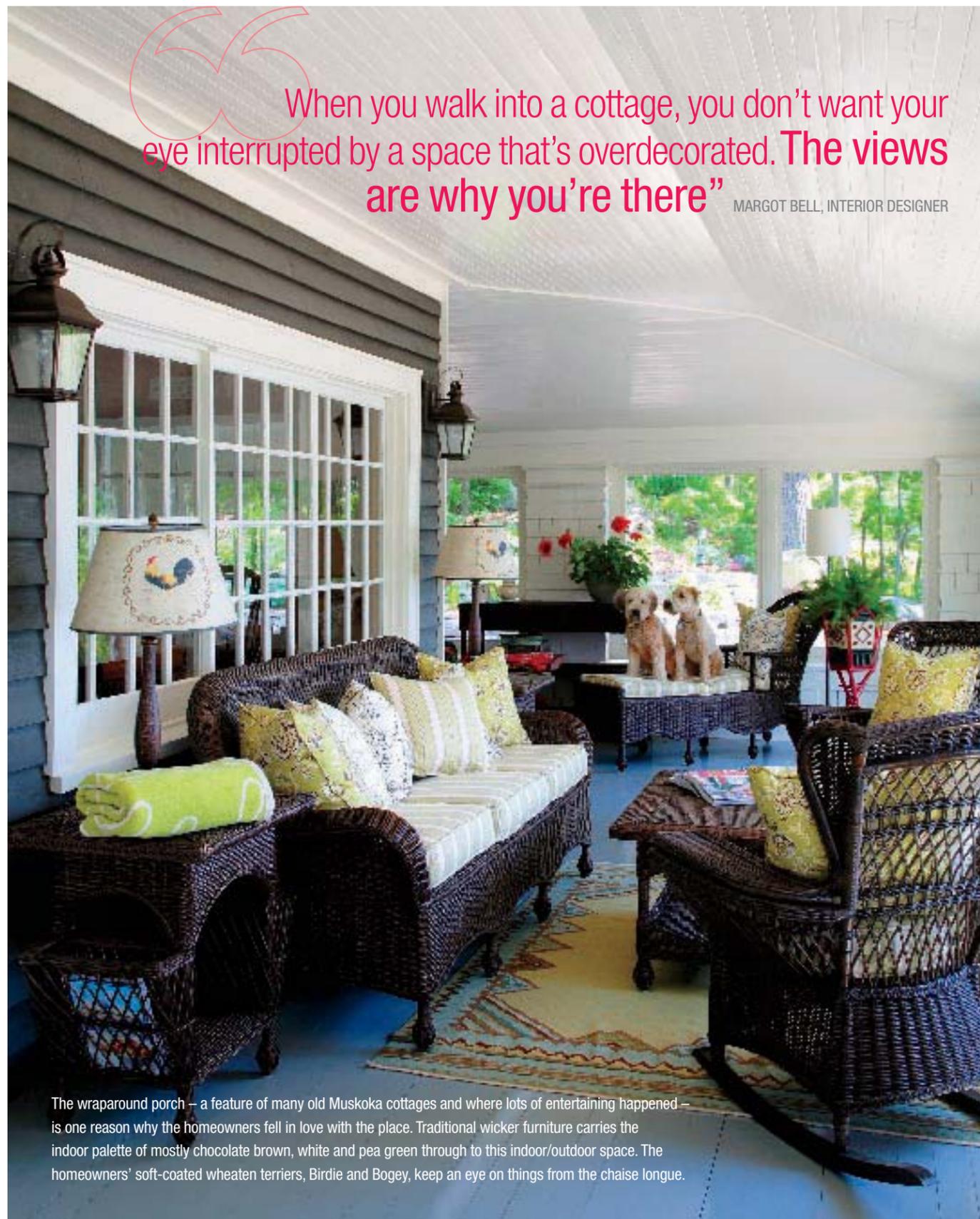
# rebuilding history

It took a whole team to bring this cottage in Ontario's Muskoka region back to its former glory.  
Written by Kathleen Dore | Photography by Robin Stubbert

Windswept pines perched on solid granite, and changeable lakes, smooth and calm one day, then churned up and choppy the next – these things are distinctly Muskoka. The Ontario region has been a summer destination for city dwellers for more than 100 years, and the century-old architecture left behind as a legacy is as much a part of the landscape as the natural elements that surround it. For the new owners of this lakeside getaway, preserving that history was paramount. “We didn’t want to demolish the place and plunk down a cookie-cutter cottage,” says the husband. “We wanted something that looks as if it’s always been here.” Together with interior designer Margot Bell, architect Gus Ricci and contractor Wayne Judges, the couple undertook a painstaking restoration of the cottage, for which they also crafted a seamless addition. The redo (which included redoing the guest cottage and boathouse) took three years, but their mission to stay true to the architecture has given the owners a four-season retreat they relish sharing with family and friends. “The history of it, the feel of it, the stairs with their creaks,” says the husband. “That’s what I love.” ▶

“Old cottages have the best lots,” says the husband. “We love this property because it’s private – you can’t see any neighbours.” Rick Wright of Brackenrig Landscaping in Port Carling, Ont., surrounded the cottage with woodland plantings and stone pathways and stairs.

When you walk into a cottage, you don't want your eye interrupted by a space that's overdecorated. **The views are why you're there**" MARGOT BELL, INTERIOR DESIGNER



The wraparound porch – a feature of many old Muskoka cottages and where lots of entertaining happened – is one reason why the homeowners fell in love with the place. Traditional wicker furniture carries the indoor palette of mostly chocolate brown, white and pea green through to this indoor/outdoor space. The homeowners' soft-coated wheaten terriers, Birdie and Bogey, keep an eye on things from the chaise longue.

Part of the new addition, the outdoor dining room "feels as if it hangs over the water," says the husband. "We love to entertain here." The couple have seated up to 22 for dinner on the screened porch. The antique table and rustic benches suit interior designer Margot Bell's philosophy on cottage-style decorating: "The pattern comes from the view," says the owner of Peaks and Rafters in Port Carling and Collingwood, Ont. "You don't need to overfurnish; fabric and pattern can take a back seat." >

*we love this because...*

This is the ultimate cottage dining space – bug-free, breezy and a bit like summer camp for grown-ups.



**elements of muskoka cottage style**

Get the look with these key ingredients.

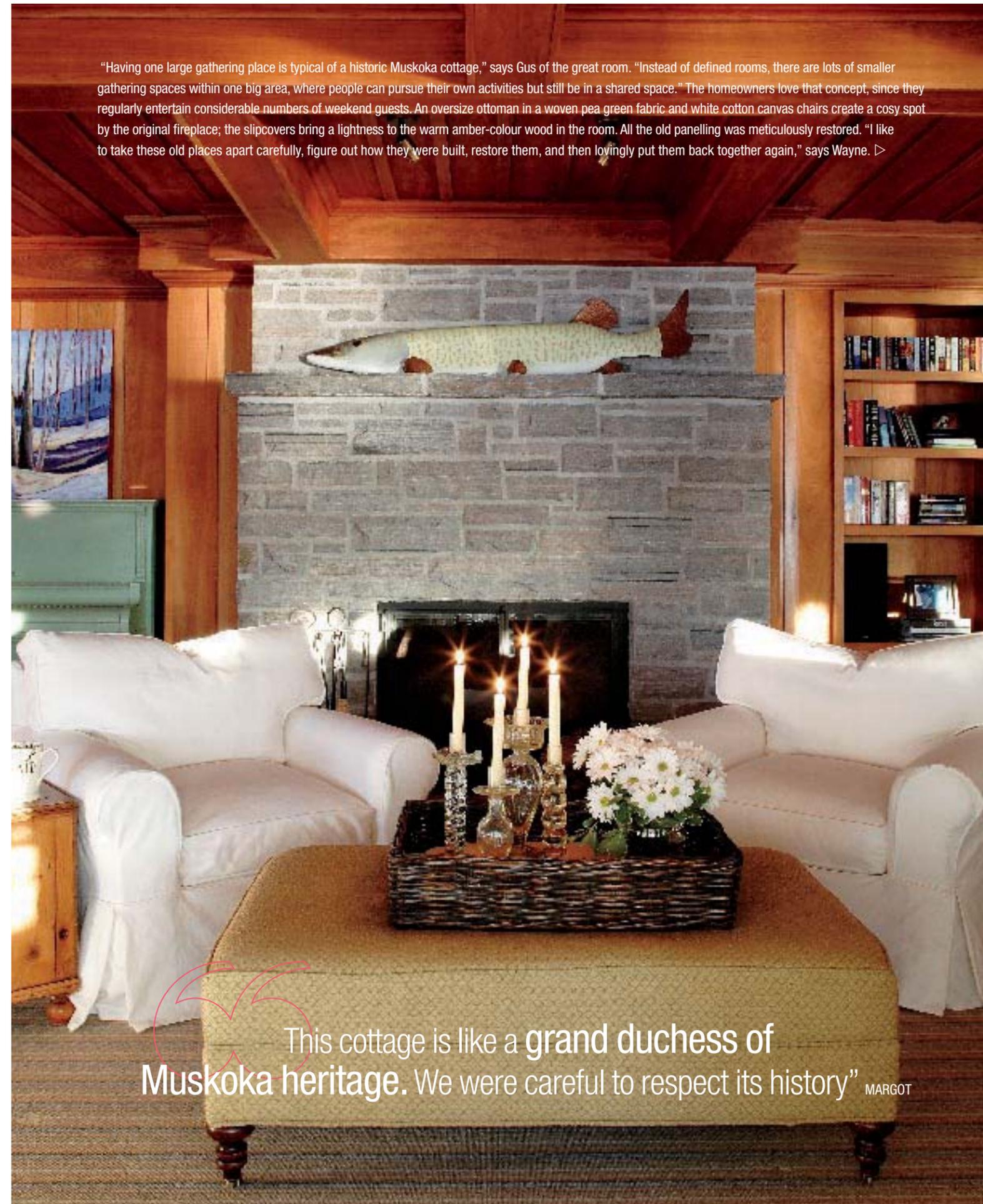
- \* screened porch
- \* stone fireplace
- \* wood panelling
- \* wicker furniture
- \* cosy sink-into sofas and chairs
- \* subtle use of cottage-country accessories: mounted fish, decorative sailboats, landscape paintings



**ABOVE LEFT** It's impossible to tell that the kitchen is part of the addition. New cedar was aged and stained to match the ceiling panelling in the original cottage. "It was a bit of an art for our painter to match the stain," says Wayne Judges of Judges Contracting in Muskoka. Known for his expertise in restoring old Muskoka cottages, Wayne understood that his clients wanted "modern features but didn't want them to look that way." Equally important was how the space functioned. "We spent about a year planning the kitchen," says the wife, who's a professionally trained chef. "I knew where I wanted every drawer and cupboard, and how I was going to use the space." Must-haves included two ovens, dishwashers and sinks, and a large island that provides guests with room to chat close by while she cooks.

**ABOVE** A granite-top charcoal-colour island contrasts with the white cabinetry, which was "hand-painted with a brush for a timeless look," says Margot. She credits cabinetmaker John Barlow for helping create "a beautiful, functional space." **LEFT** Architect Gus Ricci suggested adding a double-sided fireplace that opens to the new dining room on one side and the main entranceway on the other. Great pains were taken to match the stonework to the original fireplace in the great room. As in the kitchen, the new cedar panelling was matched to the original woodwork. The tabletop was fashioned from antique lumber and can seat 12 comfortably; an antique Persian area rug provides warmth and rich colour underfoot.

"Having one large gathering place is typical of a historic Muskoka cottage," says Gus of the great room. "Instead of defined rooms, there are lots of smaller gathering spaces within one big area, where people can pursue their own activities but still be in a shared space." The homeowners love that concept, since they regularly entertain considerable numbers of weekend guests. An oversize ottoman in a woven pea green fabric and white cotton canvas chairs create a cosy spot by the original fireplace; the slipcovers bring a lightness to the warm amber-colour wood in the room. All the old panelling was meticulously restored. "I like to take these old places apart carefully, figure out how they were built, restore them, and then lovingly put them back together again," says Wayne. ▷



This cottage is like a grand duchess of Muskoka heritage. We were careful to respect its history" MARGOT

When we're not here, we're saying to each other,  
'When are we going up again?'"

HOMEOWNER



**OPPOSITE** Creature comforts weren't overlooked. The custom furniture in the elegant master bedroom (which is over the kitchen in the new addition) only looks antique – well hidden in the footboard of the bed is a TV that rises up on a hydraulic lift when the system is turned on. **ABOVE** A black double vanity in the master bath resembles an Old English sideboard, yet the contemporary square basin sinks aren't out of place. Contributing to the timeless mix are the traditionally styled Windsor bench and the clean-lined freestanding bath (complete with lake view). **ABOVE RIGHT** Upstairs in a guest room, green and white are fresh and summery against the wood panelling. The reproduction iron bed strikes a sweet nostalgic note; the bed linens and drapery add to the breezy feel. **RIGHT** Margot custom-designed a reproduction dry sink and fitted it with a vessel sink to bring character to the bathroom. Built into a nook under the eaves is a small linen closet fitted with doors made from one of the cottage's old windows.

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