

woman's best friend

No, it's not diamonds or a dog; it's the dazzling views
and pared-back decor of something she's always wanted:
a family cottage.

TEXT JENNIFER HUGHES | PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL GRAYDON

STYLING ANN MARIE FAVOT & JESSICA WAKS

It's hard to believe that this newly renovated family room, which offers panoramic views of the forest and Ontario's Lake Joseph, was formerly a simple screened-in porch.

DESIGN, Tara Fingold Interiors, tara-fingold.com; **CONTRACTING**, Storburn Construction; **WALL PAINT** (throughout), Benjamin Moore; **SOFA, SIDECHAIRS, TOSS CUSHIONS, RUG**, Elte.

OPPOSITE "I never thought I'd want a cottage high up above the lake," says one of the homeowners, "but this view is incredible."





“My

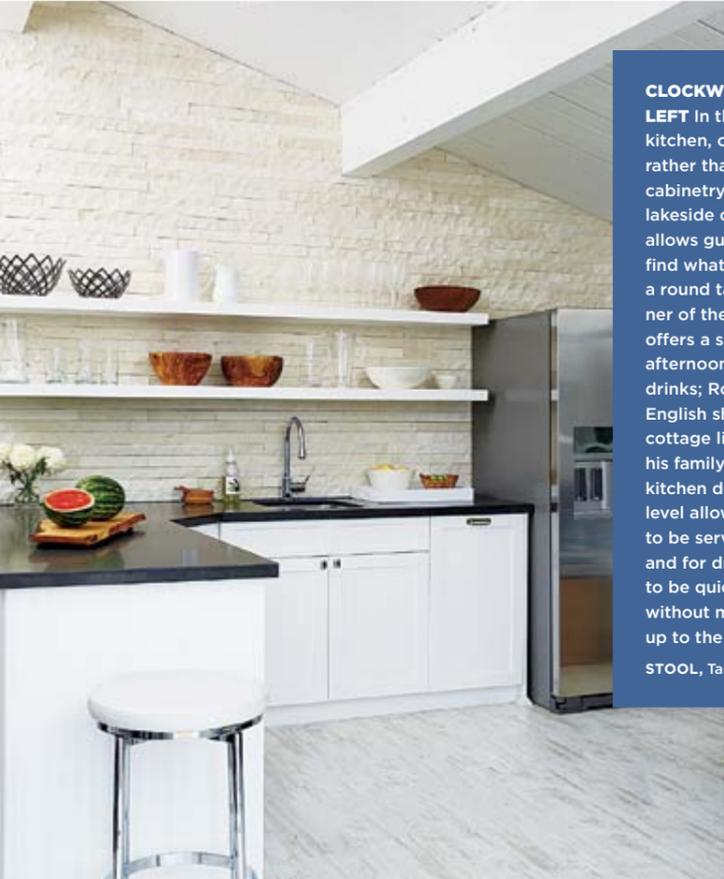
wife has never wanted diamonds or anything like that. All she’s ever wanted is a cottage,”

says the owner of this refreshingly low-key vacation spot on Lake Joseph in Ontario’s Muskoka region. Clearly she got her wish, but not without striking a deal with her husband first. He explains, “I wanted a new puppy, but she wasn’t on board. A few weeks later, I surprised her with a cottage-shopping expedition (she thought we were looking at ones to lease), and she immediately fell for this one (where she happily discovered a For Sale sign).” So a deal was made: If they bought the cottage, he could get his dog. Sold! Now, two years later, both the dog and the cottage are integral parts of their lives.

As the parents of four children in their 20s, the couple wanted a place where the entire family could gather on summer weekends but that was low maintenance enough to actually enjoy. This cottage was the first one they looked at. “It was a sickening dump,” the wife says, “but as soon as I saw the view, I said, ‘This is it.’” The rundown and dated cottage was less than inspiring, but its perch high above the lake – the highest elevation in the entire region – afforded stunning panoramic views. Composed of five bedrooms and a kitchen, den and

The dining area needed to be able to accommodate a crowd, so the table seats 12 people. For even bigger gatherings, card tables can be moved in from neighbouring rooms. Designer Tara Fingold chose the acrylic chairs not only for their uncluttered look, but also for their indestructible quality.

DINING CHAIRS, Kitchen Stuff Plus; **HANGING LANTERNS** (similar), Elte.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the boathouse kitchen, open shelving, rather than closed upper cabinetry, maintains a lakeside casual look and allows guests to easily find what they need; a round table in the corner of the family room offers a spot for late-afternoon games and drinks; Rocco the Old English sheepdog enjoys cottage life as much as his family does; the new kitchen down at water level allows for lunches to be served dockside and for drinks and snacks to be quickly accessed without making the trek up to the main cottage. **STOOL**, Tara Fingold Interiors.



Previously decorated in dark wood, the Muskoka room was transformed with coats of white paint on the wood-paneled walls and ceiling. The cream sectional offers a cozy spot to curl up on rainy afternoons or play card games at night. "There is nothing fragile or precious in the cottage," says Tara. "You can sit on anything while wearing a wet bathing suit!"

SECTIONAL, RUG, Elte; Dark Side of the Moon ARTWORK by Alastair Magnaldo, YellowKorner Art Gallery.

screened-in porch atop a steep hill, plus a sizable boathouse at lake level, the cottage offered plenty of space (and privacy) to make it work.

With the purchase made, the family was itching to start their cottage life, but first a major spruce-up was in order. They sought the help of designer Tara Fingold to give the cottage a much-needed upgrade. The winter months were spent in deep planning mode, with designs laid out and finishes and furnishings selected and lying in wait. Due to the cottage's high elevation, the lake proved a better access channel than the road, so the renovations had to wait until the ice melted in March and supplies could be brought over on a barge. That left a tight three-month window for all the work to be done before the family could start using the finished cottage in mid-June. "Every stick of furniture was bought and stored over the winter," says Tara. "We had everything planned and were just waiting so that things would move quickly once we could get there."

A flurry of renovations included turning the screened-in porch off the kitchen into a proper family room with new floors, walls and windows; laying down wood-look vinyl flooring throughout; painting the cabinetry in the main kitchen; installing a mini-kitchen in the boathouse; and adding multiple coats of white paint to both interiors. The new fresh, neutral palette is summery and easy to maintain, with durable finishes and fabrics used everywhere. The crisp navy and white exterior palette is also a huge improvement over the previous dingy brown-siding.

Now, the kids and their friends join their parents at the Lake Joseph cottage nearly every summer weekend. In fact, the wife loves the place so much, she moved right in for two months last summer – and plans to do the same this year as well.

So...was it a fair deal? "It was definitely the most expensive dog ever," her husband says with a laugh, "but totally worth it."

FOR SOURCES, SEE OUR WORKBOOK



“There’s nothing fragile or precious in the cottage. You can sit on anything while wearing a wet bathing suit!”

TARA FINGOLD, DESIGNER



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Backgammon games unfold alongside sweeping views and lake breezes; grey chenille slipcovered sofas, cowhide chairs and a patchwork rug are extremely durable, allowing for relaxed family living (“The dog sleeps on the sofa all the time,” one of the homeowners admits with a laugh); windows in the master bedroom look out over the lake on one side and a treed cliff on the other; surprisingly, the master bedroom isn’t in the main cottage but down at lake level in the boathouse, so the homeowners can escape the crowds at night.

CEILING FAN, Universal Lamp; BED FRAME, NIGHT-STAND, West Elm.

