

# Sunset views from a getaway cabin



*An architect-designed retreat by the lake brings its owners closer to Nature*

**F**rom the time we are children, when a few blankets over a table create a sense of private space, we are attracted to the notion of a simple enclosure, says architect/partner Michael Taylor of Taylor Smyth Architects.

The contemporary one-room Sunset Cabin evokes that sense of privacy and simplicity for its occupants, he says.

The owners are, indeed, private people, who do not want their names included in this story. They have owned their Lake Sim-

coe property for at least 20 years. They have a growing family and entertain a lot; the main house accommodates 15 overnight guests. With all this activity, they decided to build a private getaway for two.

The perfect site was a level piece of ground close to the water, where they used to set up chairs and watch the sunset.

All they wanted, Taylor says, was a place where they could lie in bed and watch the sunset — a simple one-room space with an outdoor shower.

“Based on that mandate, I went away and thought about it, intrigued with the notion of a structure that would blend with the environment.”

Although Taylor has never done a one-room bunkie before, he describes the Sunset Cabin as “the most satisfying project because it is so pure.”

This purity was saluted in 2004, when *Canadian Interiors* magazine named Sunset Cabin the Best of Show (residential) in its Best of Canada Design Competition.

The plan for the project came together easily, Taylor says: “I came up with options, presented them to the clients, who got it immediately. There was very little back and forth. The elements are pure and simple. I understood what they wanted.”

Taylor’s concept was to build a box with one solid wall, three walls of glass and a green roof. The green roof, planted with sedums and herbs, would serve as an insulator, and it would camouflage the building from the view of the main house and that of the neighbours.

The plan also included a wood screen that would act as a sunshade. One big cutout gives a view of the water and sunset. Other pieces cut out of the screen in a random way provide “snapshots of views that are almost abstract,” Taylor says.

The screen also creates a pattern of sunlight that moves along the floor during the day. From outside at night, the cabin is lantern-like.

A gap between the glass box and screens allows for easy cleaning of the windows.

Taylor says he has always had an interest in screens as architectural elements and sun shades, and has used them in a number of projects.



Award-winning Sunset Cabin provides a secluded, all-season retreat that blends with its Lake Simcoe environment.



The cabin is 275 square feet but appears larger because of an open breezeway porch and a covered portion where there is space to store wood and leave boots. The other side has a deck where you can sit and contemplate nature, Taylor says.

The cabin is fully insulated and has thermal glass, a woodburning stove and an electric heater for supplementary heat. In the summertime, doors at each end of the cabin let in cool breezes off the lake.

Everything is built-in to create as much storage and leave as little clutter as possible. The bed, with drawers underneath, closets and night tables are against the solid wall.

Birch veneer plywood was used throughout, for floors, ceiling, walls and built-ins. “It’s very woody,” Taylor says.

The exterior screens and all windows and door frames are custom-fabricated clear cedar with no knots. The cedar is starting to silver, blending more with the environment.

There is an outdoor shower with a sink and a self-contained water closet with a chemical toilet.

During the building process, the owners didn’t want to disturb the landscape or remove trees. “It was a challenge, but the husband came up with the idea to build off-site,” Taylor says.

The cabin was constructed in a Toronto parking lot, outside the shop of the custom millworkers who built it.

This gave everyone a chance to work out all the details carefully, Taylor says. It took about a month to build the cabin. Then it was numbered, disassembled and erected in about 10 days, with little disruption to the site.

Site work included putting in four con-

crete caissons and two steel beams on which to erect the cabin.

Construction costs for the cabin were about \$80,000, but it’s hard to put a price tag on the additional value for its owners.

“The owners of Sunset Cabin told me that having that much openness has made them appreciate the environment and site on the lake in a totally new way,” Taylor says. “They are far more in tune with the environment.”

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