

Sunset Cabin



PROJECT DETAILS

TITLE Sunset Cabin
TYPE Single family dwelling
LOCATION Lake Simcoe, Ontario, Canada
CLIENT Private
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN Taylor Smyth Architects
PARTNER IN CHARGE Michael Taylor
DESIGN TEAM Michael Lafreniere
INTERIOR DESIGN Taylor Smyth Architects
STRUCTURAL DESIGN Taylor Smyth Architects
MAIN CONTRACTOR The Brothers Dressler with Yaan Poldaa
SUB CONTRACTORS
 GROW (Landscape)
 Roofscapes Inc and GROW (Green Roof)
 The Brothers Dressler with Yaan Poldaa (Interiors)
PHOTOGRAPHY Ben Rahn/A-Frame Inc./Taylor Smyth Architects

PROJECT TIMELINE

DESIGN 28 weeks
CONSTRUCTION 40 days

PROJECT FACTS

SITE AREA 5 acres (20,230 sq. metres)
BUILT-UP AREA 275 sq. ft (26 sq. metres)
BUDGET N/a
STATUS Complete

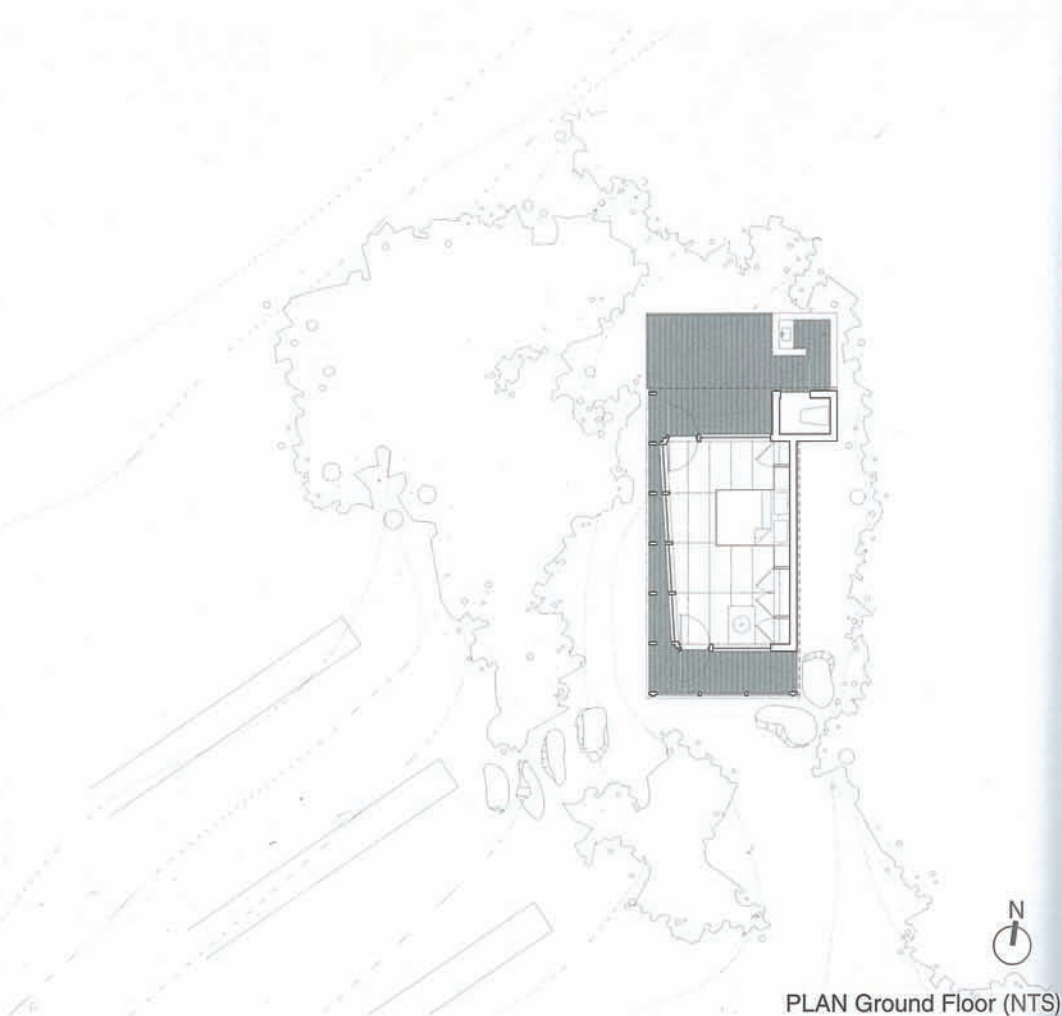
After 25 years of entertaining up to 15 overnight guests at time and with the children grown up, the owners of the family cottage in Lake Simcoe, Ontario, Canada decided on building a private retreat for their personal use.

Nestled into a slope on the southern shore of Lake Simcoe in Ontario, this one room sleeping cabin design by Taylor Smyth Architects is a simple but sophisticated Canadian 'Bunkie', evoking the 'primitive hut' of branches constructed in the wilderness, as romanticised by both architectural theorists Vitruvius and Marc-Antoine Laugier. With the aim of enhancing their enjoyment of the surrounding landscape all year around, the owners chose to build on a location previously used to enjoy the sunsets. The site offers a spectacular view of the lake and a forest of natural vegetation that alters with the seasons.

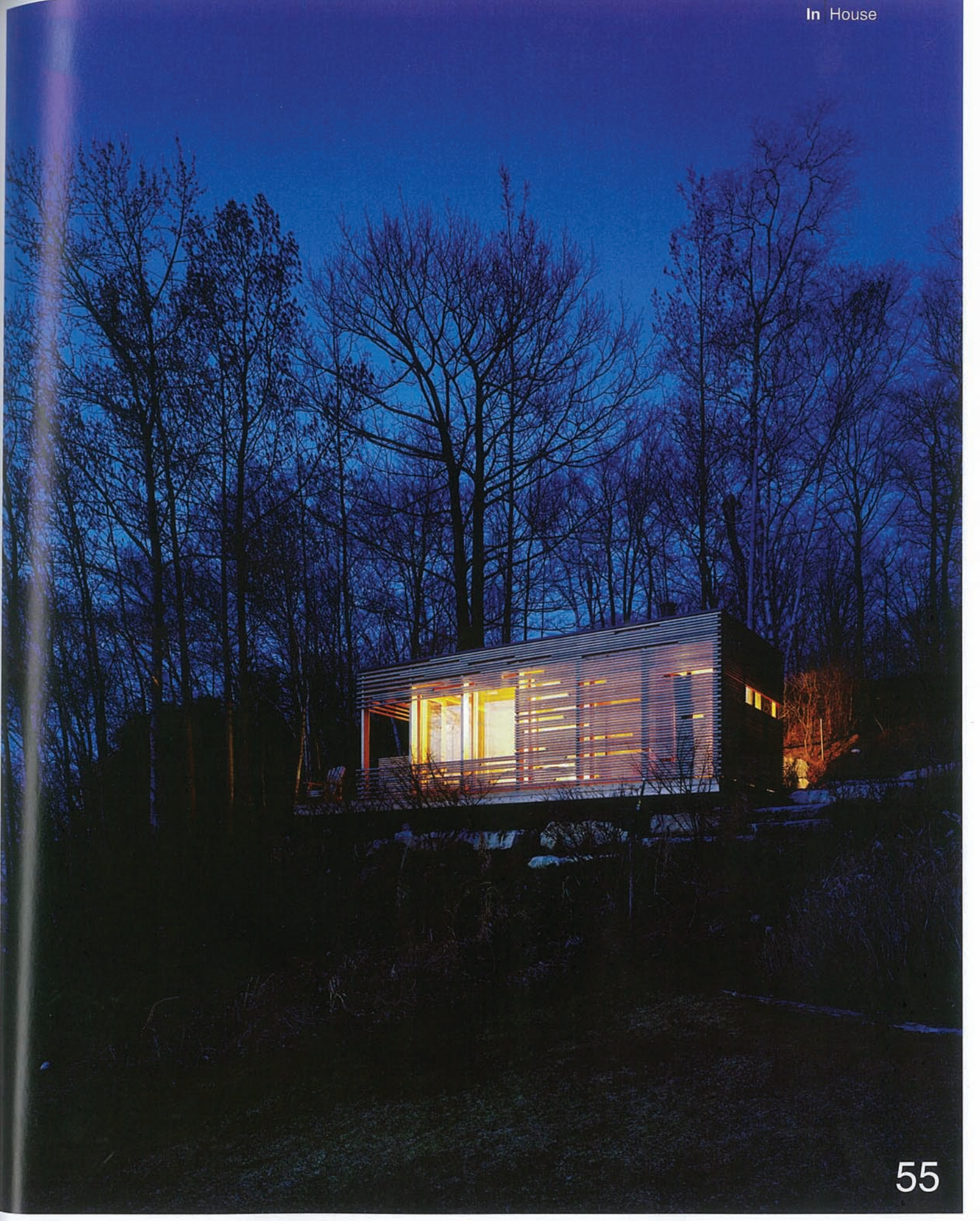
A conflict in requirements for maximum views and openness but for privacy from the main cottage which is located further up the slope results in a fully insulated cabin consisting of a glass box encased on three sides by a screen made of 25-millimetre by 75-millimetre cedar slats. Thus, from the main cottage, it appears as a screen of slats that masks the interior from view. On closer

approach, a narrow horizontal slot in the screen is strategically left open and offers a tantalising glimpse right through the cabin to the scenery beyond. Along the western face, the wood screen begins to fragment, randomly eroding towards the northern end that frames an unobstructed view of the sunset over the lake that can be enjoyed from the bed. The gaps frame snapshots of random, seemingly abstract compositions of vegetation, lake and sky.

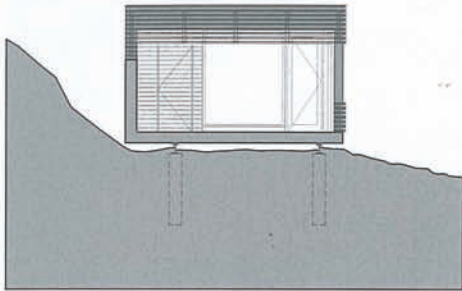
Supported on two steel beams resting on four concrete caissons, the cabin is allowed to rest lightly on the site, with minimal interference to the surrounding vegetation. With a view to further minimise disruption to the mature landscape, the client felt strongly that everything be built correctly the first time, making prefabrication the preferred method of construction. According to the architects, prefabrication proved beneficial: by decreasing construction time and simplifying the difficulties of working at a remote, sloping site, labour costs were reduced by an estimated 30 percent. The cabin was prefabricated in a car park in Toronto in 4 weeks by a group of craftsmen specialised in furniture. Components were numbered, disassembled and reconstructed on site in 10 days. >>



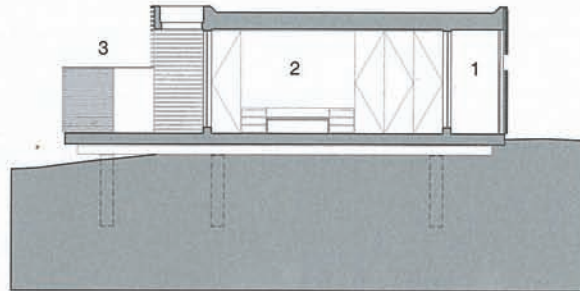
PLAN Ground Floor (NTS)



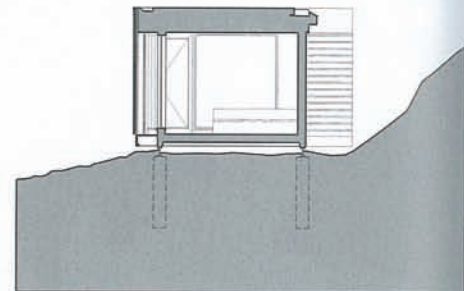
KEY
 1. Porch
 2. Bedroom
 3. Outdoor Shower



NORTH ELEVATION



LONGITUDINAL SECTION



CROSS SECTION

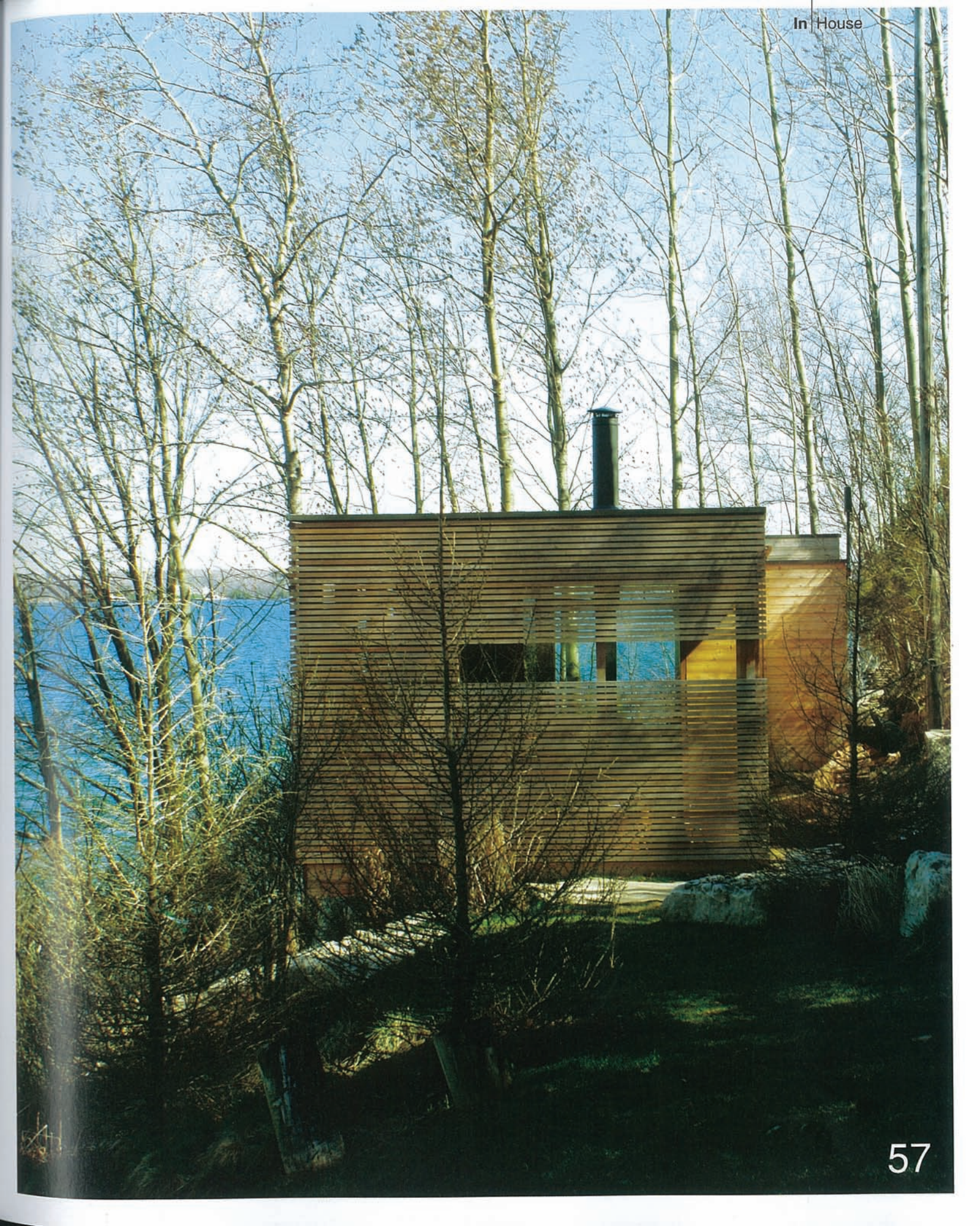


A modern 'Primitive Hut'

The sensation of being at one with nature is stimulated by the warm sheltering provided by the cedar screen and the interior wood surfaces that enclose the floor-to-ceiling glass walls. The cabin has a direct appeal to all who come into contact with it. The single self contained room has a subliminal appeal that evokes the original "Primitive Hut" built of tree trunks and branches, described by Laugier in the 18th century, combined with precise modern detailing that calls to mind Mies van der Rohe.

The cedar - also used for windowframes, doors and cladding - is untreated, gradually turning silver and blending the structure into the landscape. The interior furnishing is reduced to a minimum: a built-in bed with drawers below, a wall of storage cabinets and a wood-burning stove. All interior surfaces, including floor and ceiling, are fabricated of birch veneer plywood including the floors, back wall and ceiling and storage, so no repainting is required. A single chair, designed by Scot Laughton, provides a comfortable place to sit and a splash of colour within the monochromatic wood palette. A large photograph by Laurie Newdick is the only featured artwork: a blown up image of a fishing lure, it alludes to the lake beyond, while its soft blue green palette reflects the sky and water outside.

The existing mature landscape is augmented with further planting around the cabin; the structure blends into the lush landscape. Meanwhile, a green-roof with low-maintenance Sedums and herb plants helps to dissolve the structure into its natural surroundings, especially when viewed from the original cottage; at the same time, the thermal coefficient of the roof is increased. Other energy conserving measures include the use of the exterior cedar screen for sun shading, while doors at each end capitalise on lake breezes for cross-ventilation. Windows are thermally broken insulated units with Low E coating and the floors, ceiling and solid walls are all insulated. >>





Natural daylight is integral to the design of the cabin and to its orientation, particularly in the way sunlight permeates the double wall throughout the day. The cabin was carefully located on the site to orient it westward towards where the sun sets in the middle of summer. Thus, during the day, artificial light is unnecessary, due to the amount of natural daylight.

By day, the interior experience is a play between light and shadow as sunlight filters through the screen, projecting ever-changing patterns on to the floor. After dusk, the effect is reversed; cloaked in darkness, the cabin evokes a lantern like quality, radiating golden electric light from between the slats.

The architects' approach to the selection and location of the light fixtures is simple: a single row of MR 16 pot lights runs the length of the cabin close to the glass wall to create an even wash of light, supplemented by clip-on Tolomeo fixtures that brighten up the recess at the head of the built-in bed.

The changes in both season and time of day continuously transform the cabin's presence and dynamics with the landscape. With trees in full leaf, the cabin recedes into the vegetation, integrating architecture with landscape. In winter, with ground and lake unified under a blanket of white, the horizontal lines of the slats are distinguished against the vertical rhythm of bare tree trunks.

The cabin was designed to be primarily occupied in the summer months as the owners had not anticipated occupying it during the winter months. However, they enjoy the experience so much that the cabin is often used throughout the year. Just adequate to provide minimal heat, a wood burning stove, augmented by an electric heater provides warmth for cooler nights in spring and autumn.

Natural entertainment

Since occupying the cabin, the owner's claim increased enjoyment of their time at the cottage. "The view is our entertainment rather than the rarely used built-in flat screen TV", they say. And this is illustrated by their pattern of occupancy of the cabin: they keenly follow the change of seasons and have extended the duration of stay well into December, several months more than in previous years. As temperatures during the cold Canadian winters can plummet to -25 degrees C, in hindsight, gas heating would have been preferable in the cabin.

The Sunset Cabin's humble and romantic presence quietly refutes the ostentatious new constructions that nowadays line many of Ontario's lakes. Distinguished by a sustainable consciousness and rustic elegance, it makes an ecological and artistic statement relevant to the symbiotic relationship between architecture and landscape. -Text: Michael Taylor. Images: ©Ben Rahn/A-Frame Inc./Taylor Smyth Architects. Ed.: Architecture Plus.