

REST

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FOR A TORONTO COUPLE WHO LIKE TO SHARE THEIR WEEKEND HOME ON LAKE SIMCOE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, ARCHITECT MICHAEL TAYLOR HAS CREATED A SLEEK PRIVATE RETREAT

"THEY JUST HAD A COUPLE OF REQUIREMENTS," MICHAEL TAYLOR RECALLS OF HIS CLIENTS. "ONE WAS 'WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO LIE IN BED AND WATCH THE SUNSET.'" THE CABIN – WHICH WRAPS A BOX WITH THREE GLASS SIDES IN A LARGER VOLUME OF CEDAR LOUVRES – PRESENTS LONG LAKE VIEWS TO THE WEST.

Designing vacation homes is good work for North American architects these days. Middle-aged clients, confident in their aesthetics and their finances, are commissioning high-design showpieces. But the unpretentious southern shore of Lake Simcoe, just an hour north of Toronto, calls for something more modest; it's lined with simple wooden homes.

Lake Simcoe is a long-time haven of one Toronto couple, a social pair who like to spend lakeside weekends with their extended family and friends. When they commissioned a new sleeping cabin by Toronto architect Michael

Taylor, they got a subtle jewel: a layered structure that balances aesthetics, comfort and the physical demands of the site while deferring to its natural surroundings. Taylor recalls that the building – which recently won an honourable mention for architectural excellence from the Ontario Association of Architects – began with a simple brief. "They just had a couple of requirements, and one was 'We want to be able to lie in bed and watch the sunset,'" he recalls. Yet the building had to be a private retreat for the couple, shielded from the guests – including Taylor – who often fill the main house and two other outbuildings.

Taylor met these challenges with a careful composition that plays on the idea of transparency. His rectangular cabin, just 26 square metres, wraps a box – three sides of which are glass – in a larger volume of cedar louvres. It straddles a wooded hillside, presenting long lake vistas to the west and a narrow view of the main house above and to the south. The cedar screen, conceived by Taylor and built by furniture designers the Brothers Dressler, is a variation on a device that has appeared in several of his previous projects. "What's always fascinated me about the screen is that it's

both a solid and a void," he says. In this case, it frames small, seemingly random perspectives on the landscape – particularly compelling, the architect says, in a pristine lakeside setting.


The screen has an added significance in relation to the site and the clients' conflicting needs for views and privacy. Taylor originally imagined it gradually fading away from the main house, from an extreme of privacy on the landward side to an open view over the water. But the visual imperative dictated a more dramatic break in the pattern; gaps of varying length give way to a large rectangular cut-out, which welcomes the sunset.

As the clients requested, that view is best seen from the birch-framed bed built into the cabin's east wall. The interior is uniformly clad with birch veneer plywood, which wraps a simple configuration of closets and nightstands. A chair by Canadian designer Scot Laughton and a sleek wood stove by Danish manufacturer Rais & Wittus complete the interior: a room perfectly fitted for its purpose as a refuge.

The inner glass is angled away from the outer structure, a move that creates a fascinating play of light on the glass. But Taylor says that decision was partly a practical one. From the

enclosed porch on one end of the building, the screen turns the corner well beyond the inner structure, allowing for easy cleaning of the glass.

On the other end, a small deck reaches into the wooded hillside. A little bench by the Dresslers sits next to an outdoor shower, and a separate door hides a self-contained chemical toilet. These utilities have a minimal environmental footprint and fit the low-key nature of the program. Likewise, a green roof, planted with thyme and sedum, camouflages the building from a neighbouring cottage just visible through the trees.




BUILT INTO THE SLEEPING CABIN'S EAST WALL IS A BIRCH-FRAMED BED, SEEN HERE FROM THE DECK. THE INTERIOR IS UNIFORMLY CLAD WITH BIRCH VENEER PLYWOOD, WHICH WRAPS A SIMPLE CONFIGURATION OF CLOSETS AND NIGHTSTANDS. THE WOOD STOVE IS BY DANISH MANUFACTURER RAIS & WITTUS.


Though the cabin is constructed of top-grade cedar, its carefully detailed framing evokes the precision of the Miesian, steel-framed glass box. "Even building in wood, this is still an exercise in how you turn the corners," Taylor acknowledges. And achieving the necessary precision would have been difficult, and more costly, on this hilly and inconvenient site.

With that in mind, clients and architect developed a novel construction plan. "The husband is the kind of person who only wants to see something built right the first time," Taylor says. Their ingenious solution was to use the insights of prefabrication. While the cabin was custom-

crafted for its site, much of the work took place at the Toronto shop of fabricator Yaan Poldaaas. "The client subcontracted a lot of the work himself," Taylor says. "He really enjoyed the whole process."

Working to an ambitious schedule, Poldaaas and the Dresslers erected the cabin in a Toronto parking lot, pre-finishing the interior plywood and the two steel structural beams. These materials were then numbered, disassembled and moved north to the site. "From there, it was very easy to build," Taylor recalls. "We knew everything would fit, because it had before. It was like a puzzle."

Unlike mass-produced structures, the cabin was hardly a bargain; the green features and custom detailing stretched the undisclosed budget. But the serene space, created through painstaking work, has proved to be a favourite with the clients. "I think what's appealing about this cabin is that it takes us back to our childhoods and that notion of our own little private space," Taylor says. Indeed, the cabin has some of the intimacy of a childhood fort, with all the sophistication of a trophy house. 



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