

Ideas, tips, and a tour of cottagers' backup bedrooms. Get ready for a whole new kind of cabin fever

Sooner or later, every cottage has a need for a bunkie. Having your own little box in the woods is cottaging reduced to its bare essentials: the sounds of nature, quiet contemplation, afternoon naps. But building a sleeping cabin, whether it's an annex to your overcrowded cottage or a first outpost on virgin land, involves some planning. These days, a bunkie can be a full-fledged guest house, involving an architect, a contractor, or a kit builder. Or, it can be a rustic shed built by you and your family. As for function, your cabin can be anything you want it to be: a rough-and-ready sleepover spot for your kids and their friends, a workshop, studio, or sauna – or a luxurious retreat you'll decide to save for yourself.

The sleeping cabin

There may be no better reason to build your own bunkie than Six Mile Lake cottager Gerry Gauthier's: "Because half the fun at a cottage is building something." For those who don't agree, there are kits (see "The Kit Bunkie," p. 90), builders, and architects for hire – plus, presumably, lots more time for sun and surf. But for those

Build

a better BUNKIE

MINDEN

- 16' by 18'
- Sitting area, bedroom, and loft
- With cots in the loft, two single beds in the back bedroom, and a pullout sofa, this bunkie sleeps eight.
- In the living area, a bar fridge and coffee maker are valuable amenities: When guests get up in the morning, they can serve themselves before heading down to the dock.



Research the rules and regs

When you build a bunkie, you'll need to do some careful planning. While many of the rules you'll have to follow are set by the *Ontario Building Code*, they're enforced by your local municipality, which will also have its own set of regulations. A good strategic move is to "get to know your bylaws and your building official. He's your new best friend if you're building," says Matt Cummins of Wilderness Homes. Rely on the building official to help you out and to make sure your contractor is following the rules.

who do agree, you can't beat Gerry's learn-on-the-job attitude. He and his wife, Anne T. Roberts, bought a fixer-upper island cottage in 1992 and hired a contractor to put an addition on it, but they did all the interior finishing themselves. After that came an outhouse (the famous *Cottage Life* outhouse, in fact), then a shed; he says he was "working up to a bunkie."

Gauthier, a graphic designer, is nothing if not thorough: To start, he took photos of his property in the fall of 2003, made detailed drawings of the planned 11' by 14', one-room bunkie

(which he moved around the property, on paper, to find the best site), and then built a model. The careful planning paid off in a painless permit process. In late winter, he faxed the drawings to his township, which pointed out a few minor corrections he needed to make, and "within a week of making the changes, I drove up to get the permit," Gauthier says. As soon as the ice was out that spring, they were ready to build.

Based on his experience, Gauthier offers this advice to the novice: Make sure your foundation is sound. For his bunkie, which is built on rock, this

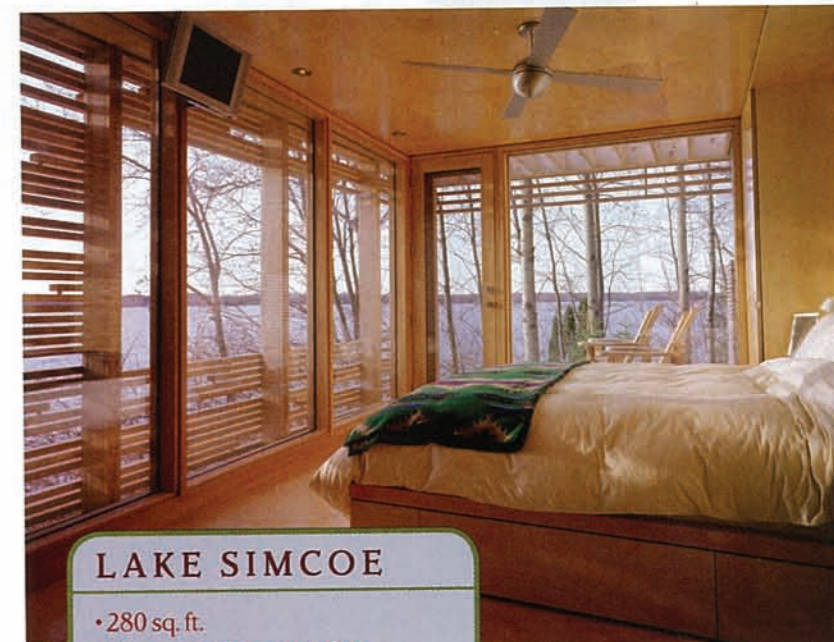
meant pouring eight footings (he borrowed a neighbour's cement mixer). As well, the couple insulated the cabin, so it can be used by guests well into the fall. Because the cottage is fairly close, there's no bathroom.

Next on the plan is the interior, currently furnished with two single beds, which Gauthier plans to finish with tongue-and-groove pine and a cork floor. One satisfying aspect of building themselves was the price tag. They spent \$12,000 on materials (including five windows), while "a contractor quoted us twenty-four thousand," Gauthier says. Still, he adds, "The biggest payback is that we look at it and think, 'We did it.'"

For the guest bunkie on their Soyers Lake property, in Haliburton, Liisa and Mark Kahkonen were inspired by the cottage culture of their native Finland to choose a log-cabin design, with sauna. They got the plans while on a trip home in the early 1990s and had the bunkie custom built here by Canadian Shield Log Homes outside Burk's Falls, Ont.; in standard log-home-building fashion, the pieces were then labelled, disassembled, and shipped to their cottage. The actual assembly took only a day and a half, although Mark recalls the builders had to return eight or nine times to finish the details and for structural adjustments, and the total cost for materials and labour came to about \$30,000. The 17' by 27' bunkie consists of a sleeping/sitting room in front, with the 10' by 10' sauna and a 7' by 10' change room behind it, accessible both from the bedroom and from outside. The Kahkonens set up the sauna to provide steam, with a stove filled with rocks heated by a fire underneath. There's

a 10-gallon water reserve, which, because there's no plumbing, is filled with lake water for throwing on the hot rocks. Lugging two five-gallon pails from the lake is worth the effort, Mark says. "Typically, we're in the sauna about twice a week, usually in the evening, after dinner. In the winter, you cut a hole in the ice in the lake, jump in for a swim, then race back to the sauna."

The bunkie has hydro, but because the cabin sits 30 metres from the main



LAKE SIMCOE

- 280 sq. ft.
- One-room sleeping cabin
- A wood-slat envelope gradually gives way to glass until the west-facing side of the bunkie offers a clear lake vista.
- Cut-outs in the cedar slats frame the views just as windows would.

Design savvy in small spaces

- + A loft sleeping area under the eaves can almost double your living space.
- + Drawers or shelves can be built into the space under beds, couches, and sloped roofs.
- + For bunkies under 10 square metres, ladders take up less actual and visual space than stairs.
- + Built-in furniture often requires less space than the free-standing variety.
- + Adding even a small window will make a space appear roomier.
- + Make use of overhead space by building cupboards and shelving right up to the ceiling.



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