



The main entrance of Steven and Laura Johnstone's timber frame cottage presents an inviting welcome. De Peuter's Decorating Centre installed the slate floor. **TOP RIGHT:** The great room, and the rest of the house, is warmed with geothermal heat from nearby Ahmic Lake. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The Johnstones love to cook and entertain.



# Lulu's Repose

BY WALTER FRANCYK  
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY  
 STYLED BY RED CANOE INTERIORS

Steven and Laura Johnstone loved building their Ahmic Lake cottage so much, they're ready to repeat.

"We'd like to make it a business," says Steven. "We'd like to build another place." Laura and Steven are busy professionals who work in Southern Ontario.

At the end of their hectic work week, a three-hour drive transports them north from their Ancaster home to their rural retreat, nestled in a hardwood forest on a quiet lake with few other cottagers or boaters. "It's nice and private," says Laura. "You walk through that door and you feel like you can relax here." *Continued on page 72*





Steven agrees. “When we go away we don’t want to be faced with a lot of noise, a lot of hustle and bustle. That’s what we’re getting away from.” Ahmic Lake is roughly half way between Hwy. 400 and Hwy. 11 – midway between Lake Nipissing and Lake Muskoka. “It’s like the land that time forgot,” says Steven. “Unless you know this area, it’s easy to pass on by.”

The Johnstones built their five-bedroom cottage near Ahmic Harbour. More than a century ago it was the western destination of steamboats that plied the 40 miles of lakes and the Magnetawan River connecting the area with Burks Falls.

Steven was first introduced to this rugged region by his father, Bob Johnstone, an employee of Bell Canada. Mr. Johnstone would bring his family along and they’d stay at rented cottages in the Parry Sound area while he worked at summer assignments. “I loved the area and wanted to be around here,” says Steven.

Laura learned to enjoy cottage life when Steven’s mother, Gail Fisher, gave the couple a gift of a holiday at a northern lodge. “They couldn’t get me inside,” Laura happily recalls. “I was on the dock the whole time. I absolutely loved it.”

It took three years of searching to find the right spot for their cottage, a 7.5-acre waterfront property, with plenty of privacy and all-season access on a municipal road.

Planning and building the 4,800 sq. ft. timber frame home took another three years. Steven and Laura designed the house. They made scrapbooks for each principal room and pasted in pictures from magazines that showed features they liked. They’d show these pictures to builders and contractors to illustrate what they wanted. “We scrapbooked for a good two years and then decided on the features we really wanted and were practical,” says Laura.

**The Great Lakes Frame Company** prepared the drawings and handcrafted and erected the white pine timbers that frame the home. Local building contractor **Ahmic Maintenance & Storage Ltd.** did much of the other construction. Steven managed the building. He and Laura visited the site every week during construction and modified the design as work progressed. “The beauty of timber frame is you can move interior walls,” says Laura.

The couple configured the home to suit their lifestyle. “We like to cook, we like to eat, we like to entertain,” Laura says. On the main floor, they made one side of the house – with the kitchen, dining area and Muskoka room – their entertainment space. The other side, containing the master bedroom and media room, is their space for quiet relaxation. With its soaring cathedral ceiling and towering windows, the great room bridges the two complementary spheres. “It really works,” says Laura. *Continued on page 75*



Eastern white pine timbers support the cathedral ceiling while a framed glass wall by All Weather Windows reveals a beautiful view of the lake. LEFT: Wrought iron balusters guard the second floor above the great room.



**LEFT:** The dining room, with a harvest table that comfortably seats 12, is a culinary hub for the kitchen, great room and Muskoka room. **TOP:** Soapstone countertops, maple cabinets and stainless steel appliances make the kitchen tempting and efficient. **ABOVE:** The island at the heart of the cookery holds two dishwashers.

At the heart of this home, the well-appointed kitchen is worthy of any gourmet. "I have a passion for cooking," says Steven. Maple cabinets by BnD Woodworking surround the cookery while Quebec soapstone countertops encircle the space and cover the kitchen island and dining bar. There is a five-burner gas range, large griddle, two ovens, a soapstone sink and an ice maker. To help keep it all clean, the Johnstones installed two dishwashers. "It's the best thing we've ever done. If you entertain a lot you've got to have two dishwashers," says Laura. "Especially in cottage country because no one wants to do dishes," Steven laughs.

The large pantry is equipped with an espresso machine, upright freezer, sink and a buffet and hutch, finished in the same maple as the kitchen. Appliances are from **Goemans Appliances**.

Brazilian teak covers the floors on the home's main level. In the great room, a Rumford fireplace, made of hand-split granite by mason **Bob Hicks**, stretches more than two storeys high. The room's eastern wall consists of floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the lake. The forced-air geothermal heating system, maintained by **Big Dog Geothermal**, taps the heat of the lake to warm the house. "I love it," Steven says of geothermal heat. "It's very economical and consistent. It's the most comfortable heat you'll ever have." *Continued on page 76*



**RIGHT:** Sumptuous leather seating helps make this bedroom the ultimate comfort zone. **BELOW:** A cosy dormer provides plenty of natural light for reading or breakfast in bed.



**ABOVE:** A sloped ceiling, intersected by pine timbers, lends intimacy to this upstairs bedroom. Red Canoe Interiors supplied all the home's bedding. **LEFT:** Finished with marble tiles, the upstairs bathroom has a shower and six-foot soaker tub with a forest view.



Upstairs floors are finished in white pine. Two comfortable bedrooms share a four-piece bathroom finished with marble tiles. At the other end of the top floor is a spacious recreation room with a nine-foot billiards table, surrounded by brown leather armchairs and couches. The walkway between the two areas has a panoramic view of the lake and great room below. On the ground-floor level are two more bedrooms and a bathroom. One has an electric fireplace and large patio doors that open to the front yard and the lake. **Kelly Hickey** of **First Choice Landscaping** built the outdoor firepit and large granite steps to the beach. "The stonework is absolutely beautiful," says Laura.

Group of Seven landscapes from **Red Canoe Interiors** adorn walls throughout the house. *Continued on page 78*



feature



Rainy days at the cottage are no problem when you have a billiards table. This large upstairs area has plenty of space for a variety of games and even a quiet corner for chess. **BELOW RIGHT:** The second-floor passageway provides a stunning view of the great room below and the lake outside.



The cottage has been a great place to gather with family and friends. "You get a chance to finish conversations," says Laura. They've named the home Lulu's Repose. Lulu is a nickname that Laura's father, Mario Giombetti, gave her. Family occasions are some of Laura's fondest memories of the home. When her mother, Miriam, became ill with cancer, the Johnstones began spending more time in the city where Laura helped care for her mother. They came north less frequently. They didn't want to give up the cottage, but to maintain a building this large, they had to do something, Steven says. "We decided to turn it into a business, create a business and start to rent it." *Continued on page 80*

**red canoe interiors**  
DECORATING SERVICES & HOME DECOR

[www.redcanoeinteriors.com](http://www.redcanoeinteriors.com) 705 746 2268  
parry sound mall

ROWE SOFAS PRATT & LAMBERT PAINTS KRAVET FABRICS STANLEY FURNITURE

Perfect Entertaining  
begins with the  
Perfect Kitchen

Let All About Kitchens help you cook up the Kitchen of your dreams!

Offering countless finishes, door styles, and storage solutions all suited to your budget

Factory & Showroom  
3 Gray Road  
Bracebridge ON

705-646-0347  
1-877-432-7776

*All About Kitchens*  
Serving Muskoka for over 35 Years

[info@allaboutkitchens.ca](mailto:info@allaboutkitchens.ca)  
[www.allaboutkitchens.ca](http://www.allaboutkitchens.ca)

# feature

With Brazilian teak on the floor and white pine on the ceiling, the master bedroom is a warm, comfortable and quiet spot to catch up on some sleep.

**BELOW:** The king-size bed offers luxurious relaxation. **BOTTOM:** The master bedroom en suite has double wash basins, a shower and six-foot Jacuzzi tub.



They transformed the cottage from a family gathering place into a getaway that other people can experience and share. "We really enjoy the process of inviting other people up as guests and doing whatever we can to make their stay as pleasurable as possible," says Steven.

They've been renting their cottage with the help of **Heather Bayer of CottageLINK Rental Management**. It's been rewarding, says Steven. The cottage is fully booked this summer and they're working to increase shoulder season and winter rentals.

"We hope to do this even more," Steven says. "I would like to expand and build a couple of other places like this." It may even become a life-changing, second career for both of them.

Planning and building a country home from the ground up was a thrilling experience. "Steven and I loved every bit of the process," says Laura. She's confident they can repeat their success and the pleasure it gave them. "I can really see us getting into some kind of work that has us building and contracting - doing something like that." **OH**