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MUSKOKA

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

Life

POST & BEAM

Warmth

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New York DJ treasures
time at the cottage

LOOKING BACK

Christmases past
in Muskoka

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A PLACE FOR FAMILY

Porcupine Lake forested retreat part of family for more than 50 years

STORY BY KIM GOGGINS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEV MCMULLEN

Charlie Esson was just a young lad of 14 when he immigrated on his own to Canada from Scotland in the 1930s. At that young age, he found work as a farm hand as well as a lumberjack, and his love of the forest was second only in his life to his love for his wife, Mabel, and their five children.

His passion for timber became even more apparent in 1964 when he purchased 362 acres of land on Porcupine Lake from Baysville Lumber.

Although most of the land had been clear cut for the lumber business, Esson nurtured the acreage to become a healthy forest again under the name Esson Farms. His devotion to forests was even recognized by the Muskoka Conservancy, which honoured him with the creation of an annual stewardship bursary in his name, just prior to his death.





"Charlie never had any aspirations to build on the land," notes Brian Rennie, who is married to Esson's daughter, Beth. "However, he would tow a small trailer there every summer and he would spend two or three nights just admiring the forest and the lake, and then head back to the city again. It was kind of neat. He was quite a special man."

After Esson's passing, Brian, Beth and their son Michael purchased Esson Farms from the estate and continued to maintain it as a managed forest under the guidance of Peter McIlwain. However, they also wanted to enjoy the property. After their applications to the Township of Lake of Bays were approved they were able to sever three building lots and began the

process of building their dream cottage to accommodate their children, grandchildren and extended family all at the same time. Two more waterfront lots are now for sale.

The 6,000-square-foot, six-bedroom home boasts three stone fireplaces, six washrooms, and 500 feet of shoreline on Porcupine Lake. The three-car garage, attached to the home by a convenient mudroom, also features a one-bedroom, one-bath guest quarters.

Rennie chuckles when he says it sleeps 16. "Beth has made it a point to have (her siblings) there to share in it and to see what we managed to do with Charlie's great piece of property. We wanted to honour his commitment to the managed forest status so we've done that and we continue to engage Peter McIlwain with this. We're





With the first step inside the welcoming foyer, the intricate beauty of massive white pine and Douglas fir posts and beams are displayed before you.

very cognizant of the beautiful forests of Ontario and what they provide us.”

In keeping with the family’s long-standing appreciation of timber, the Rennies enlisted Normerica Authentic Timber Homes & Cottages out of Innisfil to build their post-and-beam cottage, which has become their primary residence.

With the first step inside the welcoming foyer, the intricate beauty of massive white pine and Douglas fir posts and beams are displayed before you. The beauty and tradition of mortise and tenon joinery – used and perfected by craftsmen over thousands of years – is highlighted throughout the Great Room and other principal rooms. A cathedral ceiling that accentuates large windows and sliding glass doors shows off

the bones of the structure with tongue-and-groove pine running between thick timbers, and allows for an unhindered view of the water.

Beneath a handcrafted, 11-foot-long chandelier, made from the shell of a 1950s kayak, is where many family gatherings take place on tasteful sofas and armchairs. A floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace with pale yellows, greys and oranges adds warmth to the room, literally and figuratively, with a substantial ash log as mantel, reclaimed from the forest on the property during the construction.

More retrieved ash trees from the property were used in the structure of the staircase and railing that rise to an open corridor overlooking the Great Room and



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Local craftsman Dan Gould designed and built the staircase of ash, as well as trim and doors throughout the home, including a rustic sliding barn door in the foyer that encloses a coat closet.

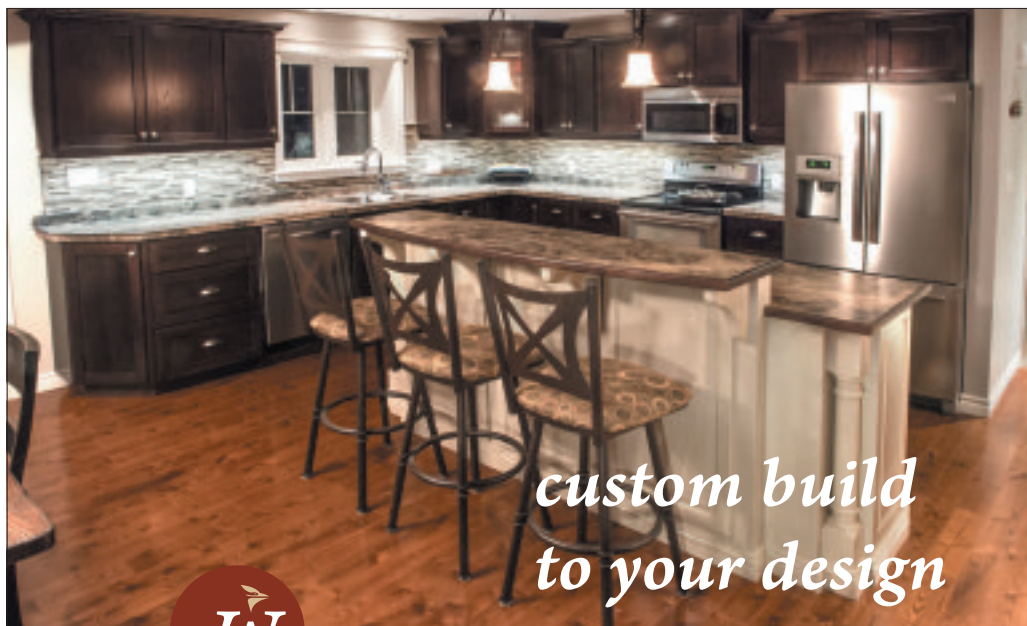
leading to three bedrooms and a washroom. Local craftsman Dan Gould designed and built all of these items of ash, as well as trim and doors throughout the home, including a rustic sliding barn door in the foyer that encloses a coat closet.

"We love the openness," says Rennie. "We were going to have an architect design something for us and when we discovered Normerica we realized that there's a builder right here that already knows great design for post and beam. So we decided not to try and design something from scratch, but to see if we could adjust and modify, ever so slightly, an existing architecture."

He credits Normerica project manager, Dave Brunne, for his close eye on the construction, making it stress-free while he and Beth were in Florida through the winter.

"We just want our clients to be 100 per cent happy with everything we do," notes Brunne, adding that Normerica has carpenters on staff but also rely on contractors that have built many Normerica cottages and know the product well.

French oak floors made of 13-inch-wide planks extend from the Great Room and



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Bluish-grey cupboards balance white with grey and black-coloured quartz countertops and Carrera Marble subway-style backsplash, and complement the stainless steel double range and other chef-grade appliances.

foyer into the rest of the home, including the well-equipped gourmet kitchen with dining area overlooking the water, designed by Lynne and Randy Pearce of Chestnut Lane Kitchens.

Here, a lower ceiling made with the same tongue-and-groove pine within beams as the Great Room creates a more intimate space where family and friends have been known to gather around a 30-square-foot island and share meals at the table that easily seats 10.

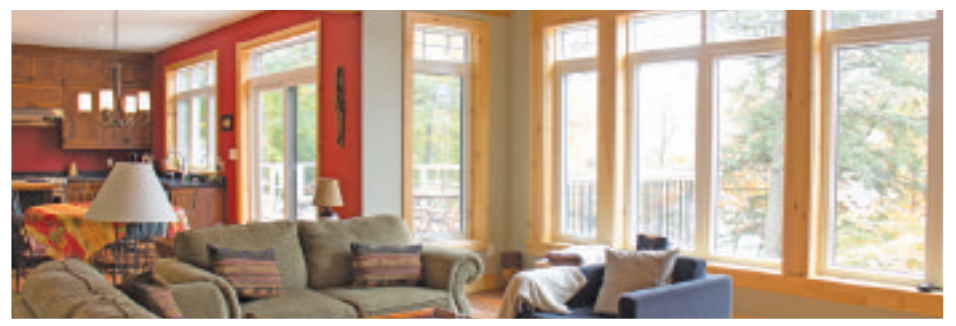
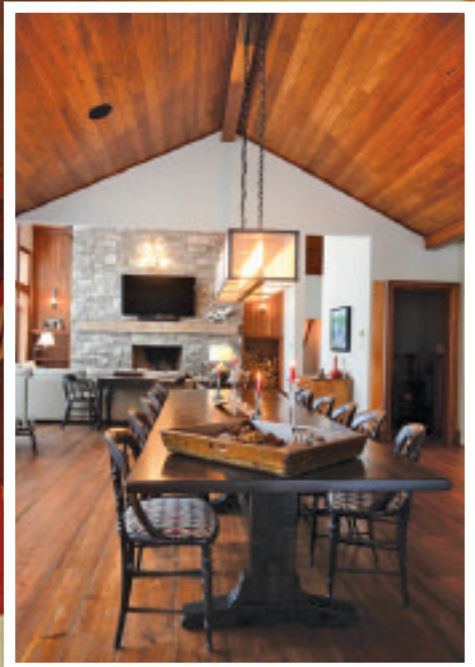
Bluish-grey cupboards balance white with grey and black-coloured quartz countertops and Carrera Marble subway-style backsplash, and complement the stainless steel double range and other chef-grade appliances. The ample island also houses a stainless, glass-front wine fridge and microwave oven. Spotlight-inspired light fixtures, under-cabinet lighting, as well as hanging lights over the island ensure workspaces are well-lit and a wrought iron chandelier over the dining table enhances the space.

A walk-in pantry provides a convenient space for a freezer and extra food.

On the other side of the kitchen from the



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At the other end of the house, behind the massive fireplace in the Great Room lies the master bedroom with master ensuite. Pale grey walls and large sliding glass doors that lead out to a private space on the deck creates a relaxing oasis where they can unwind away from everyone.

The wood-burning fireplace that extends through two timbers to the rafters is the showpiece of this room that boasts the same vaulted ceilings and post-and-beam style as the Great Room.

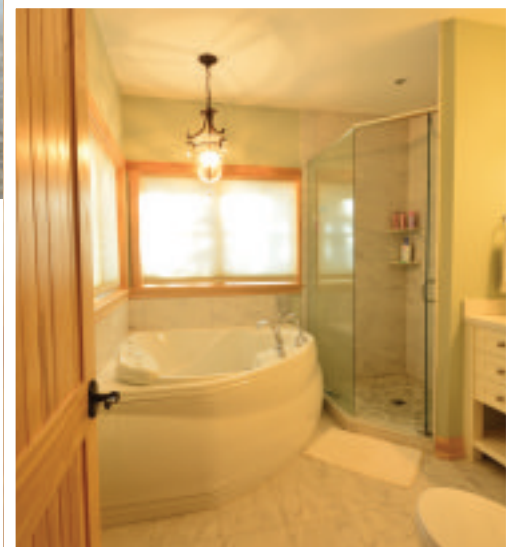
Great Room, through double sliding doors is where “all the lies are told,” Rennie says with a laugh, indicating that on cooler evenings and inclement weather days the favourite place to hang out and share stories is the Muskoka Room enclosed by a WeatherMaster screen system.

The wood-burning fireplace that extends through two timbers to the rafters is the showpiece of this room that boasts the same vaulted ceilings and post-and-beam style as the Great Room. Thick granite pieces form both the mantel and hearth and the stone colour matches the ceramic tile on the floor of the room. Only steps away, within the floor, rests a two-foot-by-two-foot hatch

to allow for a future wood elevator, which will be installed next summer.

This is the room of the house that leads to the mudroom and beyond that, the garage with ‘bunkie,’ above.

At the other end of the house, behind the massive fireplace in the Great Room lies the master bedroom with ensuite. Pale grey walls and large sliding glass doors that lead out to a private space on the deck creates a relaxing oasis where they can unwind away from everyone. In the bathroom, a large jet tub situated under two windows continues the peaceful ambiance. Nearby, a seamless glass shower with marble surround as well as ceramic tile on the heated floor gives



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INSPIRED by a love for the outdoors, natural lakefront settings and cottage living Bruce Campbell began Lakeside Landscaping over two decades ago. Today, throughout Lake of Bays and the Muskoka area Bruce and his talented team continue transforming clients' outdoor living spaces. Each project is a reflection of our passion, planning, experience and dedication. **We share in our client's pride of seeing their landscape vision realized!** If you're looking for the best choice for your property, contact us today for a complimentary consultation.



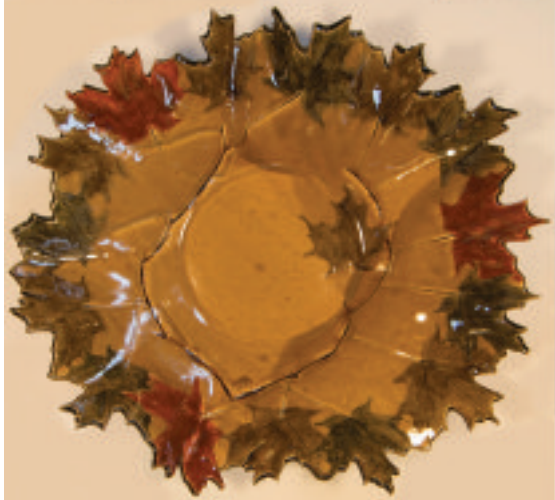
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"Charlie would be over-the-moon happy to know that through the construction of an 'extended family' cottage, family get-togethers are regular and routine."

the room a modern look and a double vanity provides convenient spaces for both occupants.

Two additional bedrooms, two ensuite washrooms and a two-piece washroom, along with a sound-proof theatre room that features seating for eight with leather La-Z-Boy sofa, chairs and loveseat, and 60-inch screen with surround sound system complete the lower level with walkout.

But the pièce de résistance is the handcrafted wine cellar tucked under the staircase, created by Gould who used excess ash timber from the property to create display shelves, a bar ledge and enough racks to hold about 185 bottles of wine. A special wine refrigeration unit keeps wine at 57 degrees Fahrenheit.

It's the perfect feature for this family compound that hosts many get togethers.

In keeping with Charlie Esson's love of the outdoors, Bruce Campbell and his crew at Lakeside Landscaping were also brought in to professionally sculpt the waterfront and create flagstone paths as well as extensive gardens on the property.

There's no doubt that Esson would approve.

"(Charlie's) devotion to his family was beyond imagination," says Rennie. "Charlie would be over-the-moon happy to know that through the construction of an 'extended family' cottage, family get-togethers are regular and routine." 🐾