



## FAVOURITE ROOM

# Realizing a dream

The design of this Muskoka cottage honours a family member and the local community

Set in the spectacular landscape of Central Ontario's Muskoka region, the charred wood cottage was a labour of love for architect Vanessa Fong and her husband, industrial designer Ryan Taylor. His parents had purchased the property more than a decade ago, but after his father, Tony, fell ill and passed away, his mother, Caley, decided to go ahead with the project. Fong says, "she wanted to finish off Tony's dream."

Mother-in-law as client might run the gamut from tricky to tough, but Fong's experience was neither. "Caley was wonderful in the way that she's a very creative person

herself and she actually pushed us further out, beyond the boundaries," says Fong, who heads a Toronto-based, eponymously named practice. For example, locally sourced materials were a must for the build, Fong says. A client that challenges you to do more and better is ideal, but "a client that totally trusts you, too," she says, "that doesn't come about very often."

As an architect, Fong's calling card is her attention to detail – "It comes with the territory, for better or worse," she says – but also her sensitivity to context. In placing the cottage and cantilevering the deck, she followed the natural

contours of the landscape to preserve as many trees and their root systems, as possible. The roof's 10-foot overhang keeps the interior cool in the summer, but it also offers shelter so the family can spend time outdoors, even on rainy days.

"The result is that the cottage is very spacious and open, but when you look at it from the water, it's actually very hidden and blends with the landscape."

In the open interior, with a kitchen that overlooks a sunken living area, natural materials reign. That was one of Caley's explicit requirements: no drywall. For the walls, Fong

went with a whitewashed pine from a mill in nearby Parry Sound, Ont. "You see a lot of cabins with panelling or wood surfaces, but then it becomes a really dark space. We asked, 'How could we make it more contemporary?'" Fong says. The textured tile and maple-veneer cabinets in the kitchen add to the lightness and are set off with contrasting touches, including the porcelain tile counter with chamfered edge, dock cleats cum drawer pulls, steel rail and bar stools from EQ3.

The 12-foot-long kitchen island is a godsend for multiple reasons. The counter material is nonporous, heat and scratch resistant, which is great for the self-professed "super clumsy," Fong says.

"It's an amazing product for me because I can't damage it," she says. And its length, which Fong intentionally kept sink and faucet-free, means multiple family members can be cooking and prepping at once, "which happens all the time, all day" she says. For big dinners, such as the Thanksgiving meal they hosted for 20 friends and family, it served as a buffet.

The light fixtures, by Taylor and his studio Object/Interface, are all dual purpose. The Well Light is both a hanging light and planter, a delightfully unexpected combination of uses that might prompt some to hesitate as they're watering their electric light fixture (not to worry, it's certified and safe). The brass wall sconces with hooks are both for illuminating and hanging things. Like most well-loved and long-inhabited cottages, everything here has its place and purpose. Even the antique ladder has a function: It's used to open up the clerestory windows for passive ventilation.

The sole exception might be the painted wood bird carvings by local artists Walt and Beth Ruch that perch on a nearby wall, a "Caley contribution" Fong says, which are purely joyful.

— KRISTINA LJUBANOVIC

Special to The Globe and Mail

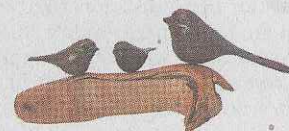
## GET THE LOOK



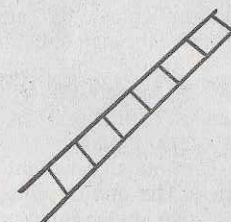
Well planter light, \$345 at Object/Interface ([objectinterface.ca](http://objectinterface.ca)).



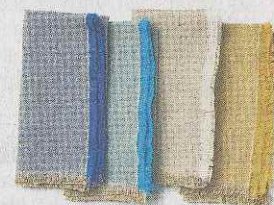
Lyla side counter stool, \$199 at EQ3 ([eq3.com](http://eq3.com)).



Bird family wood carving, \$113.70 at Northwoods Carvings ([etsy.com](http://etsy.com)).



19th-century apple picking ladder, \$631.71 at 1stdibs ([1stdibs.com](http://1stdibs.com)).



Chalk napkins (set of two), US\$56 at Heath Ceramics ([heathceramics.com](http://heathceramics.com)).