

LADY OF THE LAKE

THE FRESH AIR ISSUE



When designer Anne Hepfer built her dream getaway right on the water in Ontario's cottage country, she combined luxe minimalism with woody touches—plus eye-catching finds from her far-flung travels—to create a year-round vacation haven for family and friends.

Interior Design ANNE HEPFER Interview KATHLEEN RENDA
Photography DON FREEMAN Producer DAVID M. MURPHY



Decorator Anne Hepfer designed her family's cottage in the Muskoka Lakes region north of Toronto. In the living room, a 20-foot-high wall of windows provides sweeping vistas of Lake Joseph. The console is from Hepfer's Ah Ha! collection, and the room's bespoke upholstery includes a wing chair in a Calvin Fabrics linen. **OPPOSITE:** Hepfer had the ottoman in the foreground custom made using vintage woven mats from Borneo. Walls in Cloud White, Benjamin Moore.



Canadians! What is it about their enthusiasm for their lakeside cottages?

ANNE HEPFER: This is definitely cottage country. Every Friday night, the highways heading out of Toronto are filled with families making the pilgrimage out of town, kayaks and canoes strapped to the roofs of their cars. Cottage weekends are about escaping the hectic go-go-go of modern life. You leave the city behind and reconnect with your kids, yourself, and nature. The pace is much slower. As an American—I moved to Canada about 10 years ago, when I married my husband—I wasn't familiar with the whole phenomenon, but now I love it. There's something very meditative about the crystal-clear water, the soaring white pines, and the outcroppings of rugged gray granite.

KATHLEEN RENDA: How did you integrate that setting into the cottage's design?

I wanted a home with a deep relationship to nature. Before we started building, I studied the site, which is in Ontario's Muskoka Lakes region, about a two-hour drive north of Toronto. I took note of where the sun rose and set, the direction of the wind, and the way light dappled through the branches. Every room in the house is oriented toward the lake. In summer, there's a seamless feel between indoors and out. The breeze drifts through, the woody fragrance of pine scents the air, and you can hear the splashes of swimmers outside enjoying the water.

Did the surroundings also influence the scale of the rooms?

Balancing that feeling of vastness was crucial. The rooms are large. I chose huge, heavy reclaimed ceiling beams and wide-plank pine wallboards and floorboards. The living room has an enormous fireplace of locally quarried granite and a wall of windows stretching 20 feet high. You gaze directly out onto the swaying pines; it's almost like you're in a tree house.

There's a rustic simplicity to the interiors.

That was very purposeful. I looked to modern Belgian design for inspiration, seeking an unpretentious, luxurious minimalism. The palette is neutral and monochromatic, so as not to deflect from the beauty outside. Plus, I spend my workdays constantly looking at color and pattern, so this is a refuge from that intense visual stimulation. Travel is my passion, so I also tried to add a worldly beat, layering in meaning with a curated collection of mementos from my trips.

Like the giraffe photograph in the den?

What's funny is that my husband and I bought that Nick Brandt image years ago, before we'd ever visited Africa. The stillness of the piece intrigued me. A friend asked why I chose it rather than something more cottage-related. While I always aim for a seamless look, it doesn't mean everything has to be themed. That room also contains a hand-carved stool from Zimbabwe, a Japanese hand-chiseled teak coffee table, and walls clad in boards sourced from an Ontario barn. There is a mixing of hues and textures, along with unique pieces that have a backstory.

I've heard it can get quite cold up there in the north country. How icy is that lake, and do you really swim in it?

Actually, the water temperature can reach a respectable 78 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer—although if you plunge all the way down, I admit it can be really chilly. But we're raising hearty Canadian children—I have two sets of twins, ages 7 and 11. When we go ice fishing on the lake in winter—we come to the cottage year-round—the kids will often jump right in. We call it the polar

LEFT: Hepfer's request to leave the lichen intact on the granite for the living room's fireplace was met with skepticism by the stonemason. "He thought it would look dirty, but to me it adds character," she says. The Rumford-style fireplace is taller and shallower than traditional models, which helps radiate more heat into the space. In the adjoining dining room, a Restoration Hardware table is surrounded by wicker armchairs that Hepfer bought in Provence.

bear dip. During summer they're always in the water, diving and paddling and holding logrolling contests.

What other family activities do you enjoy at the cottage?

We try to make as many memories as possible. For example, every Sunday morning, I pull out my crepe maker and crank out sweet and savory crepes. Sometimes I'll carry the fixings for brunch out to the boathouse and prepare it alfresco. We host talent shows, lazy barbecues, and fondue parties. On rainy days, we read books en masse. And a trophy goes to the family member who catches the most trout during the season. With relatives and friends visiting almost every weekend and neighbors who are often dropping by—they just pull up to the dock in their boats—it's chaos... and the most fun you can possibly imagine.

RIGHT: In the den, pillows in an Osborne & Little horizontal stripe echo the pattern of walls paneled in planks of reclaimed barnwood. Sconces, Restoration Hardware. Chandelier, Arteriors. **BELOW:** The breakfast nook's awning windows can be cranked open to let in breezes. A pair of marble-topped tables allow easier access to the U-shaped banquette. Chairs, Vincent Sheppard.



In the sitting room, the middle and bottom windows can be lowered into the wall, transforming the space into a screened porch when the weather permits. Hepfer designed the sofa, swivel chairs, and pendant. Iroko-wood chairs, Joshua Vogel.





On the deck outside the living and dining rooms, Hepfer installed frameless glass panels instead of railings, both for safety and to shield from wind blowing off the lake. What's more: "It's the best spot to watch sunsets, since glass doesn't obscure the view."



ABOVE: Elevated on a 60-foot setback from the lake, the L-shaped cottage has black siding to help it disappear into the trees. "If you're on the water, the house vanishes against the darkness," Hepfer says. **LEFT:** In one of her sons' bedrooms, vintage cane beds she found online 10 years ago have a look that is "part sleepaway camp, part British Colonial." Curtains in a striped linen from Pindler. **BELOW:** Born in New York City, designer Anne Hepfer now calls Toronto home.





"We relocate to the dock the minute the weather turns warm," Hepfer says. To give the boathouse a cozy feel, she brought in a wall-spanning sofa with cushions in a Perennials fabric and a Schumacher chevron. Chairs and pendant, Restoration Hardware. A custom driftwood mirror "acts like a window. You see the lake even if you're facing the wall." FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES