



Cat Luke enjoys his favourite bedroom.

Muskoka Lifestyles



Sylvia Sumner relaxes with Chanti (left). Two chairs provide a cozy spot overlooking the great room (right).





The Sumner home is busy with family and friends visiting in the summer months.

Building a new dream

Article and photographs by Heather Douglas

It was love that brought Sylvia Sumner to Muskoka, and it is a new love that keeps her here.

Nestled in her Port Carling home on Lake Muskoka, Sumner reflects on the path she followed to arrive where she is today.

“Back in the day, my husband’s father owned property on Lake Joe. Even after his family was transferred to Montreal, Gord never forgot coming to the Muskoka Lakes as a youngster,” she says of her husband.

But another love story began in a Montreal high school when Sumner dated a boy named Rudi Burgen long before falling in love with Gord, the man who became her husband.

Life went on after high school and Sumner met and married Gord. He worked in the telecommunications industry and was transferred to Toronto in 1973.

As they started a family, summer trips often meant renting a cottage in Muskoka.

“In 1974, our son Wesley was a baby and we

rented a boat on Lake Muskoka,” she says. “It was there that Gord said one day we were going to own our own cottage. I admit, I was skeptical.”

Gord’s dream did indeed become reality in 1984 when the family, now numbering five, purchased their cottage on Lake Muskoka. The cottage was a Viceroy designed by local builder Fred Haas.

“It was finished to the vapour barrier,” Sumner says. The family then completed the work on the cottage and spent a lot of time there.

“At the end of the school year, the kids and I



The new Sumner cottage has great room with lots of space for family to gather. It features a pine lined cathedral ceiling, a huge window with a expansive view and some family collectibles.



would come to the cottage,” she says. They would spend the entire summer holiday in Muskoka, with the kids eventually getting summer jobs in the area.

When Gord retired from his career, the couple discussed their options, and the one that kept coming to the forefront was moving to Muskoka full-time. However, they would have to convert the cottage into a year-round residence.

Tragically, Gord passed away in 2002 before ever being able to make the move to Muskoka.

“When he passed away everything at the cottage collapsed,” Sumner says. “My whole world changed.”

It was four years later that her world changed



Sumner's daughter Meredith and her husband Jeff chose to decorate their bedroom with a Hudson Bay theme. The wood on the back wall was salvaged from the original cottage (above). Son Wesley's room is decorated in blue and white (below).



again, all on account of a high school reunion.

Her old high school flame Burgen, who had remained in Montreal, noticed Sumner's name on the high school reunion roster and saw that Gord had passed away.

Coincidentally, his parents had moved from Montreal to Oakville, where Sumner now resided.

"I didn't know where she lived," Burgen says. But through the high school roster and his parents' move, he was able to reconnect with her.

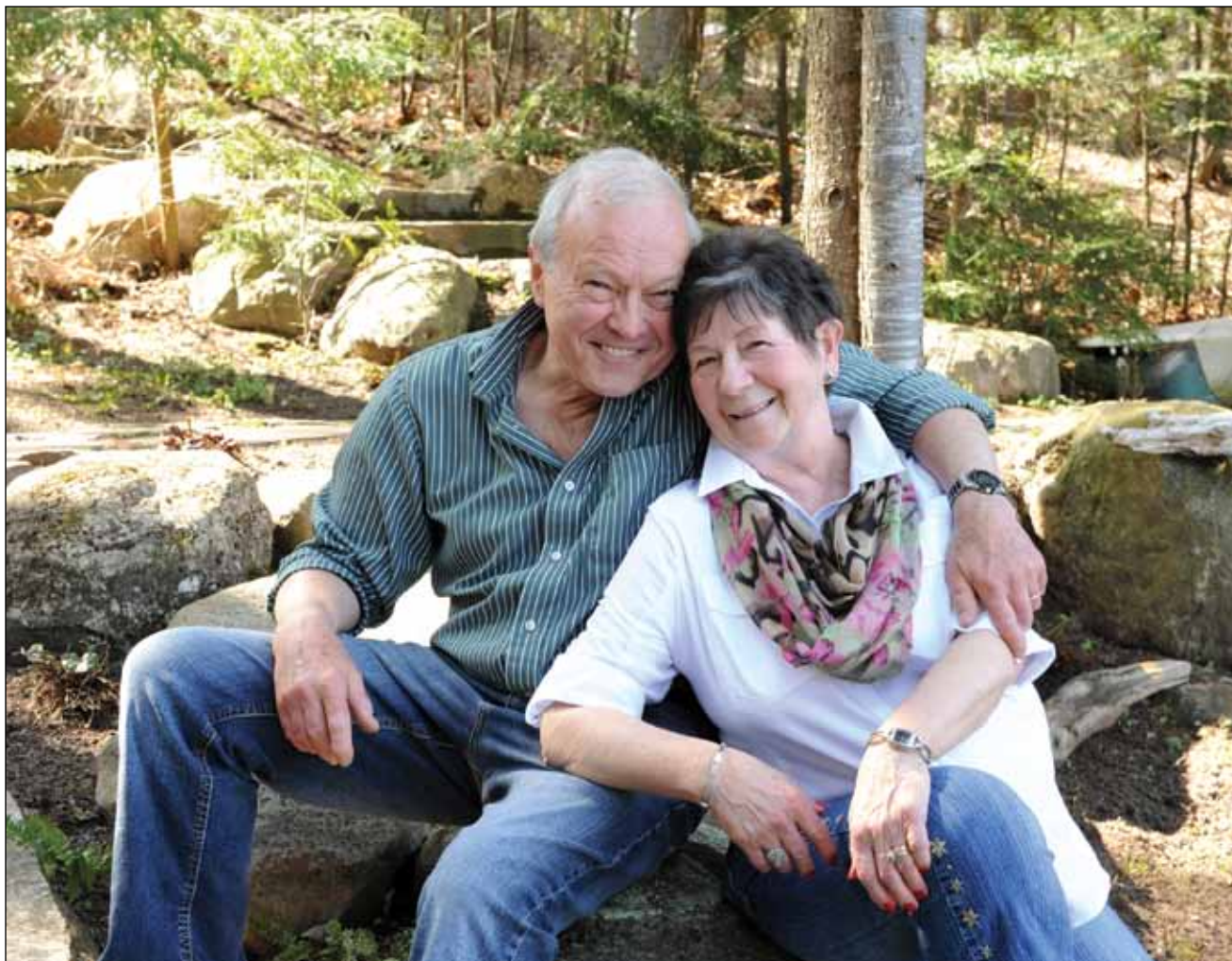
The couple began to do things together and realized the flame from high school was still there.

"You never forget the first real serious relationship," Burgen says.

They began to travel and visit Burgen's home in Montreal and Sumner's cottage in Muskoka.

"The dream of living full-time in Muskoka was reignited with Burgen," Sumner says. "He was very supportive and helpful."

So in 2009, with the consent of her children Hollie, Wes and Meredith, Sumner decided it was time to de-



Sylvia Sumner and Rudi Burgen relax on the rock steps by the Lake Muskoka cottage. They were high school sweethearts and reunited again after Sumner's husband died.

molish the original cottage and build a year-round home.

"It was difficult to make the decision to demolish," Sumner says. "But once we made it, we had to stick with it."

She adds there were many moments of doubt, wondering if they were going to like living in a secluded area year round, but they decided if they didn't like it, they could move.

Once the decision to go ahead was made, they began to look at builders. After interviewing a few, they decided upon Tech Home, which was owned by Fred Haas, the designer of the original cottage.

"Without the support of Tech Home, we never would have done it," Sumner says. "Finding them just made our decision easier."

Sumner and Burgen also visited some of the other cottages Haas had completed and were very impressed with the work.

With a wish list in hand, Sumner and Burgen sat down to discuss the new home with their builder.

"We wanted the main floor to be a complete living space," Sumner says. There are bedrooms on the upper level for when the family comes to visit.

"I wanted lots of light and a year-



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Rudi Burgen and Sylvia Sumner
relax on the large cottage deck.

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round sunroom," she adds.

The demolition began in April of 2009 and the new build was completed by June 2010.

"We spent the summer of 2009 living in the boathouse and lived in Montreal the rest of the year."

What makes Haas so special is the fact that he listens to you, says Sumner, who is thrilled with the result. "The whole Tech team helped us through every part of the build, everything from door handles to soffits."

"Fred answered all our questions the way we expected," Burgen says. "He always would strive for excellence."

Before the original cottage was demolished, Sylvia was able to save a few items. The kitchen cabinets were reused in the laundry room. Meredith and her husband Jeff designed their bedroom with a Hudson Bay theme using boards from the old cottage on one wall.

Sylvia and Burgen now reside in Muskoka full-time, with side trips to Montreal, and have been too busy to worry about the seclusion. In fact, the seclusion has become part of the allure.

"There are no street sounds here," Sumner says.

As members of the Antique and Classical Boat Society, they can often be found on the lake in one of their antique boats, either the 1922 Disappearing Propeller Boat or their 1953 Shepherd.

The cottage bustles with company as family comes to visit often, including Sumner's granddaughter Airlie.

"My daughter Hollie and her husband Chris stay in the boathouse now," Sumner says, while Wesley and Meredith have rooms in the cottage. "We have a big family reunion here at Thanksgiving."

The couple also ventures out to the Spinning Reels shows at the Northwood Theatre in Bracebridge and attends the Winter Coffee Houses at the Muskoka Place Gallery arranged by Beverlie and Charlie Robertson of Brandy Creek Productions.

"We have also joined the Wellness Group to meet people improve our health and wellness," Sumner says. "And it is working, as we have met some wonderful people and feel great."

Despite both coming from very active lives before retiring to Muskoka, Sumner and Burgen say they are very busy here.

Sumner adds, "The word bored is not in our vocabulary."

M



The family dog Chanti relaxes in the sunroom which is a favourite room for both animals and people (above). The master ensuite features a soaker tub (below).



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