



Above: The Grahams said they wanted plenty of lake-facing windows and Tech Home Ltd. came through with floor-to ceiling windows on the main floor and large windows in the lower level main space and office.  
Left: This was the original cottage that Susan Graham's family once rented then purchased.

# *A family's place to Gather*

Sparrow Lake home reminiscent of century-old cottage that once sat there

STORY BY KIM GOGGINS | PHOTOS: CODY STORM COOPER PHOTOGRAPHY





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*"It was always family oriented with my parents.  
We had great family dinners on that porch."*

It was an old cottage that had perhaps seen better days. Small and weathered, with an aging infrastructure, the 110-year-old building that sat on the north shore of Sparrow Lake in a cosy little cubby known as McLean Bay wasn't perfect by any means. But it was a piece of history for one family, decades before they even purchased it.

Susan Graham was just a wee girl of five when her parents first rented the cottage in 1957 and then again when she was eight. During those brief times in the summer, she and her two brothers spent hours down by the lake - swimming, fishing, chasing frogs - doing things that make great memories although you don't realize it as kids.

"My mom always loved it because it had four bedrooms and a fireplace and it was on the water and my dad loved to fish," recalls Susan.

Most importantly, the old cottage had a screened-in porch that spanned the front

of the cottage at about 40 feet long. With a dining and living room space, and a woodpile, it wasn't fancy by any means but this is where Susan remembers the most fun, with many family dinners and games around the dining table over the years, before and after her parents purchased it in 1978.

"It was always family oriented with my parents," notes Susan. "We had great family dinners on that porch."

When she and her husband Bryan and their three children came to visit, they all shared a 'family bedroom' that accommodated an army bunkbed, army cot, an iron-framed double bed and a dresser.

One brother, his wife and children shared another room, and her other brother and his wife slept on couches. Little did they know at the time that the floors were being held up by rotting pine stumps.

The sleeping arrangements didn't matter



Susan and Bryan Graham put a lot of thought into their dream home that sits on the shore of Sparrow Lake, where her family's cottage once did. The home was built to accommodate friends and family.

Dark taupe siding and bright white trim is a refreshing curb change to the 110-year-old bungalow that stood there before it. The flagstone walkway leads to a welcoming covered deck and main door. Note the perennial gardens cleverly tucked into Muskoka stone.







Top: The covered deck is a great way to stay out of the sun while watching the kids swim and use the non-motorized boats. The original boathouse (beside the covered deck) was re-clad and re-roofed by Bryan and Susan's brothers. Above: No matter how nice the cottage is, being down by the water is where it's at. Right: Grandchildren are certainly welcomed and spoiled here. The two eldest grand daughters are spending at least five weeks here this summer!



as much as the time spent together, notes Susan, and it's this philosophy that she and Bryan have carried forward in their new waterfront home on the same spot.

"There weren't too many parts we were able to incorporate into this new (build) but accommodating family we can," says Bryan.

"It's still the family cottage to (my brothers) and they know they can come up when they want to," adds Susan.

As her parents aged, Bryan and Susan kept the cottage going so it only made sense that they purchase it from them once they retired. Even before that time came, the couple started researching builders and designs in 2002, and first approached Fred Haas and his son Stephen of Tech Home Ltd., a custom home builder on Highway 11, just south of Gravenhurst.

"On occasion, Susan's parents wondered aloud, 'we haven't left yet, we haven't sold it to you and you're looking for builders,'" recalls Bryan with a chuckle. "We hadn't got to the tearing down part at that point yet but we were looking at all the options."

Over the next seven years, they looked at other designs and went to cottage shows and toured cottages. They even thought about purchasing another property for their dream home, but they always came back to Tech Home.

They made it clear to Fred and Stephen that the new design had to incorporate the ambiance of the screened-in porch. They wanted an open concept design so



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*They wanted an open concept design so they could entertain and a large enough dining area to accommodate 20 or more people.*

Above: The welcoming and spacious foyer features a painting of sunflowers by 'Carlo' that the Graham's children abhor. It was a purchase for \$100 about 45 years ago and Susan and Bryan refuse to part with it. "We love it because it's a memory. Poor Carlo has seen some pretty rough times in the cottage but I must say he's done exceptionally well," laughs Bryan. "He deserved a good spot."

Susan and Bryan wanted their formal dining area to be spacious so they could bring in another dining table from the sunroom if more than 12 were dining. This refurbished table that belonged to Bryan's parents is approximately 150 years old.

they could entertain, and a large enough dining area to accommodate 20 or more people when necessary. Most importantly, they wanted windows, windows and more windows.

"We wanted the 'wow' factor when you walked in and this is it, all opened up and you can see the water and the gardens," notes Bryan.

From that very spot in the spacious foyer, 18-inch tiles, evocative of the Muskoka stone around them, gives a rustic edge to the modern design of the home. The inviting area features stairs going down to

the walkout level on the right and a hallway to guest quarters and washroom to the left.

"It's like driving from Bracebridge over to Port Carling and you're driving through that rock cut," explains Bryan. "That's what it reminded us of."

Wide-planked engineered hardwood begins from that point and flows throughout the home.

Straight ahead, a wall of right-angled windows with large glass garden doors lead out to an ample deck surrounded by tempered glass for an unimpeded view of the lake. The craftsman-style windows



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The owners wanted a 'wow' factor when people walked into their home and they achieved this with a wall of windows beneath a vaulted ceiling. Although this room has a modern feel with an integrated fireplace and pale walls, the vintage elements give it a warm, charming feel. The large coffee table was a gift from a friend who took the dining table from the old cottage and recreated it to be a centrepiece of the living room.

The open-concept kitchen features a large island for entertaining and gourmet-quality appliances, perfect for feeding large crowds.

*The gourmet kitchen is highlighted by a stainless dishwasher, gas range and refrigerator with ice maker, water dispenser and double freezer drawers.*

above offer further views and draw light into the large living room that is emphasized by a cathedral ceiling.

Here, a built-in Napoleon gas fireplace with sleek black marble surround contrasts nicely with the elegant muslin colour that highlights all of the walls in the house. The room is warmly appointed with modern furnishings as well as cherished antiques from the couple's families, including artwork on the walls above and beside the fireplace, acquired from Bryan's parents' den.

The large and unique wooden coffee table in the middle of the room was a gift from a friend who rescued the dining table from the old cottage and cut it down to suit its new purpose.

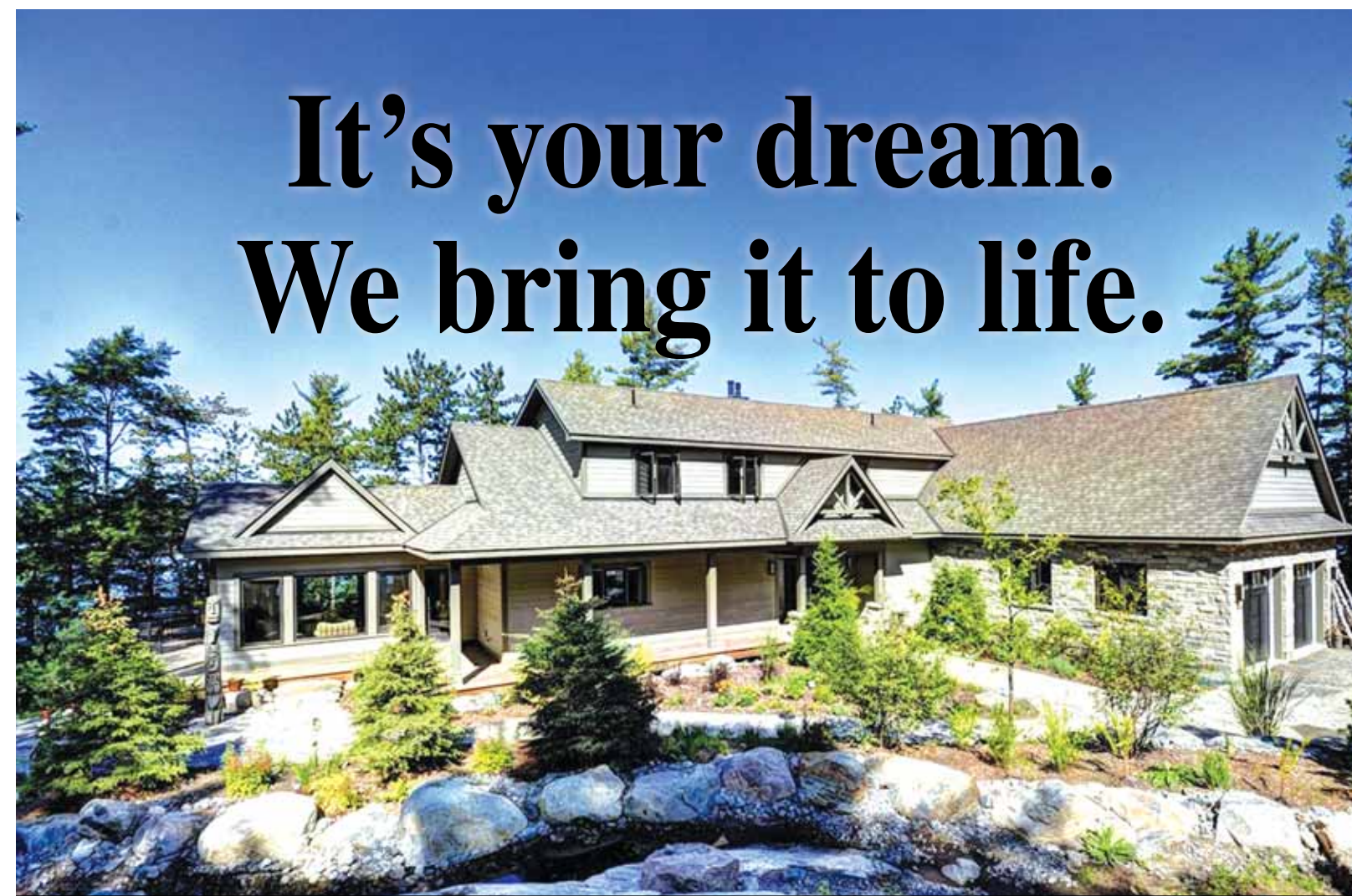
Along the floor of this and every room are the clean lines of custom six-inch white trim designed by Fred and cut with blades he created. The attention to detail shows



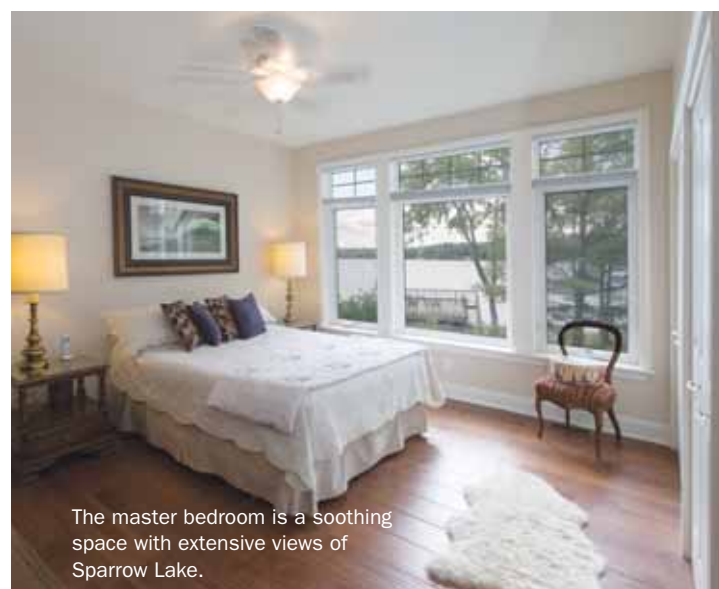


*Off the kitchen is the pièce de résistance of the entire home: a 260-square-foot sunroom.*

This sunroom off the kitchen is purposely reminiscent of the screened-in porch of the former 110-year-old cottage. This is where the family gathers whenever they are home and where owners Susan and Bryan like to spend quiet time.



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The master bedroom is a soothing space with extensive views of Sparrow Lake.



Susan's elderly mother, Ruth, loved the new cottage and was lucky enough to have the only bedroom with a vaulted ceiling.

pride of workmanship that is evident throughout.

"We can't say enough about our builders," says Susan. "We have never built like this before and they made it easy for us. They were wonderful. We told (Fred) what our idea was and he went with it and we love it."

Steps away, the ceiling lowers to create a more intimate dining area and showcases a refurbished antique wooden table – as old as Canada – that came from Bryan's parents' home. Stretched out with two leaves, the vintage set can accommodate a dozen people and when the holidays come around and more are home, the spacious

area is fitted with a second dining table.

"We love formal dinners," says Susan. "The table seats 10 comfortably but we've had as many as 12. Some would have their legs on either side of a table leg but it's better. We love it that way."

And when family and friends are over, the open-concept kitchen with six-by-four-foot island allows for people to gather for drinks and appetizers before the more formal meal takes place.

The dark mocha base of the island balances the bright white of the handcrafted maple cabinetry and showcases the even pattern of the taupe granite counter with flecks of browns and golds. Pendant lights

hung by black metal rods complements the contemporary look of the black metal stools with gold seats.

The gourmet kitchen is highlighted by a stainless dishwasher, gas range and refrigerator with ice maker, water dispenser and double freezer drawers. It will be the perfect place for cookies and crafts when their four grandchildren visit over the summer, two of whom will visit them for several weeks, this summer.

Off the kitchen is the pièce de résistance of the entire home: a 260-square-foot sunroom, surrounded by windows and swathed in tongue-and-groove cedar on the walls and ceiling to celebrate memories of

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The master bath is a relaxing retreat.

the cottage they knew and loved. The sign 'Pate's Place,' made by Bryan for his father in law, was taken from the former cottage and hangs proudly over the centre window in this room.

Thick double insulated sliding glass doors framed in grey are used to keep the cold from the unheated room in the winter from wafting through the house, but they are rarely used.

"We don't close the doors at night. When we first moved in on Jan. 19, 2015 we did and in the morning it was chilly," recalls Susan. "But now we don't because it's so well insulated. It's great. If it's a little chilly we'll just flick on the little heater we have in there for a short time."

Having the morning and afternoon sun streaming through the windows helps to heat the space but also offers abundant light for reading and knitting, as well as the many games played at the table behind the sofa.

This very well could be the most used room in the 1,835 square feet of finished space on the main level.

Well ... almost.

The serene master suite that offers its own wall of craftsman-style windows overlooking the water is a roomy space with his and her double closets, tasteful furnishings and a spa-like ensuite that invites relaxation. The corner soaker tub is surrounded by lengthened subtle grey tile with a tinge of teal that is picked up in the

*The attention to  
detail shows pride of  
workmanship that is  
evident throughout.*

towels that are laid out in a woven basket on the rim, as well as two paintings on the wall created by Susan's late mother, Ruth. This same tile is carried into the stand-alone shower with glass enclosure. Chrome fixtures including a toe tester bring some sparkle to the neutral palette of this fully-enjoyed oasis.

Guests have their own main-floor quarters with two spacious bedrooms and a bathroom down a hallway off the foyer. Ruth enjoyed the spacious bedroom with vaulted ceiling facing the landscaped road side of the home until her final days. Her prized paintings and handmade quilts are joined by other family heirlooms in this room and throughout the home.

Across the hall, a three-piece washroom with corner shower and vanity with granite counter, similar to the vanity in the ensuite, provides ample space and privacy. The floor tile in here is the same as the foyer except smaller, 12-by-12-inch pieces. The guest room in between is large enough for a bunkbed with a queen mattress on the bottom and single on top.



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To honour their family, a pine tree has always been planted for each child born. These trees represent the four grandchildren, while their children's much larger pine trees are on the other side of the yard.

In the 1,785-square-foot lower level, a family space that can easily accommodate their three adult children and grandchildren is in the works with a cosy family room and gas fireplace. Nine-foot ceilings with doors stretching eight feet ensure that no one will feel like they are in a basement. This level is also highlighted by extra storage space.

This level brings the gardens and waterfront within reach and the Grahams have been taking advantage of their covered flagstone and small stone terrace to give them the same view and feeling they had at the former cottage.

The walkout gives them easy access to the extensive perennial gardens they have worked on for about 30 years and include Lily of the Valley and Evening Primrose from Bryan's parents' gardens in Port Credit, as well as plants from Susan's family.

"These flowers down here are called Solomon's Seal and Jacob's Ladder and they came from Sue's grandfather from a bulb that was probably about a hundred years old at the time we got it," says Bryan, pointing to a garden tucked beside a granite outcropping.

Further towards the water, a wooden playset attracts the young grandchildren, while the adults still love hanging out on the covered deck by the original boathouse after all these years.

It's the perfect blend of new experiences and old memories. ↵

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