

Wooded bliss:



design inspired by nature

BARBARA EDIE

PHOTOS: TOM THOMSON

Known affectionately as “The Birchdale,” Peggy and Peter Whiteway’s lakeside property lives up to a name that implies sophistication and style, combined with the natural warmth and beauty of wood.



Built in 1952 by Peggy Whiteway's father, Cecil Rilkoﬀ, the Falcon Lake residence is imbued not only with family traditions but a particular architectural style. "My dad was a builder, and had an interest in forward-looking architecture," says Whiteway. The original cottage is done in Frank Lloyd Wright style, contemporary with clean lines that suit the topography and surrounding elements, she adds. Clear cedar on the ex-

terior and knotty pine on the interior, the sprawling bungalow blends seamlessly into the woods and lake environment in typical Wright fashion. Low, horizontal lines and shallow, overhanging roofs are two of Wright's hallmarks in his "prairie houses," that, and his deep respect for the earth and its natural beauty. "His designs never destroyed the landscape for the building," Whiteway adds. "It's not a rustic log cabin,"

Whiteway notes, "but rather a sophisticated use of natural elements."

In keeping with the cottage's modern design, her father added a boathouse to the property in 1967, created by the same architect who designed the Canadian Pavilion at Expo '67.

When the Whiteways decided to expand the cottage and add to the boathouse, they wanted the renovations to remain true to the



original style and architectural integrity of the buildings. “The bones were always there, we just wanted to expand on that,” adds Whiteway. “We valued what we started with ... and wanted more of the same – the same style and design, only bigger.” With the newest additions, the space has grown to about 3100 square feet, including the boathouse.

The desire for more room and a more spacious living area was largely due to growing

families and guests arriving from the south during the summer, says Whiteway. She and her husband spend winters in Arizona, and stay at Falcon Lake for about five months of the year. Many friends come north in July and August to escape the heat of the Southwest and enjoy the Manitoba climate.

The renovations extended the living room facing the lake, increased the size of the master bedroom, and created a completely

new addition for guests. A new breezeway at the back of the cottage was built to connect the old with the new.

The integrity of the original design was maintained both inside and out. The interior’s low, horizontal planes continue without interrupting sight lines and broad views of the lake. In addition, all renovations were made to match the original wood, which became particularly challenging in the living room.





The far end of the room has the original pine; however, the lumber for the other two walls had to be custom-milled to fit both the style and pre-metric measurements of the “old” wood. All the windows also had to be redone, Whiteway notes. “It was like a retro-refit, with extra attention to every detail and measurement ... very tricky.”

The fifties-era pine kitchen cabinets were also left intact as an ode to both family traditions and classic design. “They’re beautiful ... perfectly fine and look great,” says Whiteway. The cabinets and other features of the cottage reflect a time when things were built with a certain quality and longevity, she adds.

Throughout the cottage, neutral colors, solid furniture and modern décor reflect a sophisticated yet natural habitat. Contemporary light fixtures, also in Frank Lloyd Wright style, complete the look.

As well as remodeling the cottage, changes to the boathouse added a spot for another boat on the lower level and created a large upper deck. Stunning views of Falcon Lake can be enjoyed from inside or out of what feels like an elegant, floating living room.



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The property's landscape design accentuates the architectural style and flow. "I have a 'Butchart Garden vein' in my body," says Whiteway, whose love of nature and art is reflected in her garden. A 12-foot metal sculpture by architect Paulo Soleri of Arizona, a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright, hangs in the backyard. In the front (lakeside), two concrete sculptures of Japanese women sit facing each other in prayer position, modeled after similar artworks in Midway Garden in Chicago.

While The Birchdale honours the work and artistic inspiration of many, Whiteway's late father still has an influence. He gave the property its name, after the large stand of birch trees on the original lot, and the buildings' designs were his vision. As a former president of the Canadian Construction Association, he valued quality workmanship and materials and always did things right, Whiteway says. "He would have absolutely loved the new renovation.

"We had respect for the forward-thinking design. That suited us," she adds. "When making decisions about the cottage we always finish with: 'Dad would love this. He would approve.'"

Whiteway says she and her husband found that same commitment to quality and workmanship in Ritchie Construction, who built the new extensions and oversaw the renovation. "We've been working with Terry and Barry Ritchie, on various projects, for over 20 years," she says. "We trusted them with our treasure and were never disappointed."

Summers in the Whiteshell offer a relaxing contrast to winters in Arizona says Whiteway. "It's our Golden Pond experience, compared to our urban life in Scottsdale.

"As a kid I remember people stopping on the lake in their boats and looking at the cottage, they still do that," Whiteway adds. "My husband and I appreciate the timelessness of it ... it has a look all its own. I liked it as a kid and love it now." 



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RITCHIE CONSTRUCTION

