



# A for Effort

## A RECREATIONAL CABIN GETS NEW LIFE AFTER A CAREFUL RENOVATION

BY Carolyn Heiman PHOTOS BY John Yanyshyn

**L**ike most people who renovate, Myrna and Rodney Brownlees had a wish-list. Top of the list: Straight walls to hang pictures on. The somewhat unusual requirement stemmed from the original design of their recreational cabin, which was a steep-sided A-frame with a mansard roof. It was a practical design for a quick and inexpensive recreation property when it was built 35 years ago. But, it left much to be desired as a full-time residence.

The list didn't stop there. There were other items that needed changing or updating in the dark, almost windowless ocean-front home. A black, sooty fireplace pipe dominated the middle of the living room. There was no practical entrance to the home so





#### LEFT

A portion of the original roof was retained to keep some of the feeling of the original cabin, while a wrap around cedar deck seamlessly integrates the inside with the outdoors.

#### TOP RIGHT

A modest cedar-clad addition permitted the owners to use the existing setback rules for the former recreational cabin while providing amenities desired for full-time residency.

#### RIGHT & FAR RIGHT

The wrap around composite deck will last a lifetime with minimal maintenance. Picture-frame installation and hidden fasteners keep the surface smooth and the clean.





### Camping On Site

For seven months the Brownlees camped in a small pop-up trailer on the lot, all the while remaining cheerful and serving tradespeople coffee and treats. Staying on site meant they were able to contribute a lot of sweat equity such as pulling nails, re-planing and staining the cedar boards.

guests went to the patio doors facing the ocean and knocked on the glass to announce their arrival. A treacherous ladder accessed the loft bedroom, which made the cabin of questionable suitability for the retirees looking to live there full time. The home, on a poor foundation, was sagging several inches from back to front. In fact, the list of negatives was longer than the list of positives. There were compelling reasons to start fresh on the property.

### *The list of negatives was longer than the list of positives*

But, one reason stood out in favour of rebuilding on the existing footprint. Any new construction would have required the home to be set back much further from the water and their spectacular southwest views would have been significantly diminished. So, the

couple moved ahead with the idea of renovating the 1,400-square-foot cabin to suit their full-time needs.

Today the home is a warm and functional retreat that respects its historic roots as a recreational A-frame while incorporating the functionality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It now has closets and storage spaces. The kitchen has a much-desired pantry. Windows on several sides bring natural light into the main floor living area that is lined with glorious first-cut cedar siding that has been re-planed and stained to a lustrous sheen. Its foundation has been shored up and waterproofed to ensure that groundwater won't cause it to shift again.

They credit the success of the project – and their new West Coast lifestyle – to a bit of divine intervention. When they were still living in Winnipeg, the recently-retired Rodney announced to Myrna that he wanted to attend bible school along with other 20-year-olds.





#### TOP LEFT

The original gloomy cabin had few windows and a fireplace with a sooty pipe right in the middle of the living room.

#### TOP MIDDLE

A treacherous ladder leading to the loft bedroom in the main house was not practical or safe for the retirees' permanent residence.

#### TOP RIGHT

Myrna and Rodney Brownlee find peace in their ocean side home.

#### BOTTOM

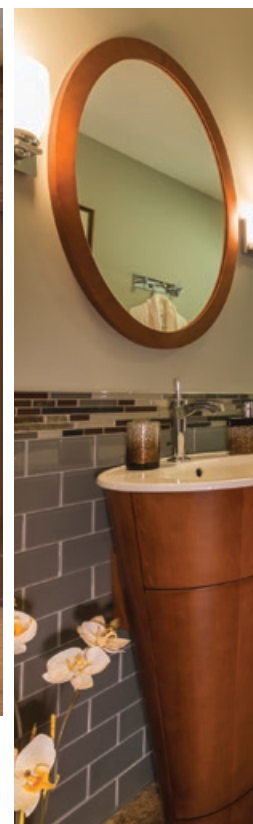
A new stone fireplace takes the place of pride in the livingroom. Flanking it are two custom cupboards tapered to fit the sloping wall. The one on the right is designed to open from both inside and outside so firewood can be brought into the house easily.

"I couldn't believe it," Myrna says, when she first learned of his interest.

Hesitant at first, she agreed to join him and they rented the gloomy cabin on Thetis Island, one of the southern gulf Islands off Vancouver Island, intending to stay there for the school term during which they joined in doing campus chores with their younger counterparts. In addition to learning more about scriptures, they also learned they loved the island. Even the cabin – or more specifically its prime ocean front location – grew on them and they were delighted when the owner agreed to sell.

Next came the task of figuring out how to change it to make it work for the long term. On their way to a home show on B.C.'s mainland they stopped in to see Tamlin International Homes in Aldergrove. The company specializes in West Coast design in remote locations where logistics around getting materials to the site in a cost-effective manner is important. Tamlin mapped out renovation ideas and shipped many of the required materials to the island on one tractor trailer piled with vacuum sealed packages numbered for every stage of construction.

The designer at Tamlin looked at their wish list and encouraged the Brownlees to save a third of the A-frame facing the ocean, ➔





**TOP LEFT**

A dropped counter creates an inviting writing space that overlooks the water. A heater warms the granite in cooler months, ensuring year-round comfort.

**TOP RIGHT**

No opportunity to add storage space was missed, including the building of a mattress platform to replace the boxspring. There are now cupboards under the bed.

**BOTTOM LEFT**

Windows were a top priority when changing the original A-frame home.

**BOTTOM RIGHT**

The guest bathroom is bright and space-efficient.



thereby keeping the cedar-lined ceiling in the public space and the cabin-y look when viewed by passing boats. A new two-story addition behind the A-frame permitted a welcoming side entryway with a proper porch, along with a better kitchen layout and the addition of windows.

Steven Fitzpatrick of Made To Last Building & Renovations says, "We are quality builders with vision for the big, picture. Along with my skilled crew, I saw the construction of this beautiful home through from start to finish. The project goal was to keep some of the feel of the original cabin while implementing some of the new things Rodney and Myrna need to live in the place full time."

"Everybody – from the owners, interior designer, contractor to cabinetmaker - was very concerned about the surroundings and ensuring that any alterations blended into them," says Sheri Peterson, who guided the interior design.

The home was extended by about four feet and this addition was more conventional in form, permitting better use of space. Inside, Fitzpatrick employed a little ingenuity to create the look of continuous interior timbers.

"Only half of the beams are structural. But

you can't tell what is structural and what is not. It all flows with the home."

The nature of the lot prohibited getting a crane to the site so it required a lot of planning and all hands on deck to stand the heavy timbers, particularly the king post and large timber beams.

They also rose to the challenge of using every available space for additional storage, something that was in extremely short supply in the home that was modestly expanded to 1,600 square feet. The box spring in the bedroom was discarded and in its place a platform with cupboards was built.

Small pencil drawers in the drop-down eating nook are perfect for place mats, calendars and notebooks. Rather than leaving a hollow space at the end of a kitchen island, a narrow shelf is deployed for spices. The laundry room and entryway was measured to the last inch so there was a space for the hot water tank and an ironing board. Cupboards under the stairwell hold footwear and other items that aren't used on a regular basis.

Just like the couples, life which feels so much larger now that they are on a spiritual path, the care taken to use the space effectively has made the home feel so much bigger. **HC**