



Recipe for a Gourmet Cottage

Written by Dorothea Helms Photography by Mike Dunphy Architect: Richard Wengle Designer: Kailee Mecklinger

WHEN BEST-SELLING COOKBOOK AUTHOR ELISE MECKLINGER MENTIONED TO HER HUSBAND ALAN THAT IT WOULD BE NICE IF SHE HAD A kitchen she could really work in to test recipes, she set in motion a series of events that would result in a spectacular cottage renovation and expansion. “I kept telling her that for a cottage, the kitchen would suffice,” Alan says, “but we decided to go ahead and expand it. Then the might-as-wells happened, and the project exploded into a grand country home.”



The indoor/outdoor room that connects the two cottage wings is a favourite spot for the entire Mecklinger family.

The fabulous frame home, which fronts onto Lake Simcoe, sports an exterior of Muskoka granite skirting that serves as an anchor for striking wood siding. Measuring in at just shy of 8,000 square feet, the cottage design incorporates two wings, one for Alan and Elise and one for their family, connected by an indoor/outdoor room that is well used by everyone.

The Mecklingers have owned the property for 30 years, and in that time the cottage has gone through several transformations. "It started as a frame structure," Alan says, "and about 25 years ago we leveled that and built a nice winterized cottage. Then last year we decided while we were redoing the kitchen, we might as well expand so we'd have a spot for our grown children to congregate as well."

Elise and Alan, who is in real estate, development and building, have four children: Shawn and his wife Kailee, Jordy and Dave. The cottage renovation was completed by Kilbarry Hill Developments and Design/Build, which is a partnership involving Shawn and Jordy, plus Ed Ross, his brother Rob and Rob's son Jerrod. "They formed the company over two years ago," Alan says, "but the Ross and Mecklinger families have a history of building that goes back four decades."

The reno took seven months to complete. Ed Ross, who also owns Ross General Contracting, says, "The cottage is so incredible that I'm afraid to take my wife there! There are a lot of windows with beautiful views of the lake, and the granite chimneys go through the roofline. The kitchen is now 20 by 30 feet in size, and is really decked out. Everything in there is custom built, including the teak and cherry dark-stained cabinets and the stone feature walls. The flooring is 24-inch green slate tiles. There are black granite countertops and elaborate Viking appliances including a combo fridge/freezer that is 6 by 7 feet, a 60-inch-wide gas range, a couple wall ovens and more. Elise can sit 14 at the table in the kitchen. The entire cottage design works really well."



Elise Mecklinger is a best-selling cookbook author whose creativity soars in her fabulous new cottage kitchen.



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According to everyone on the team, a lot of the credit for that goes to Richard Wengle Architect, who served as the architect on the team. “Alan and Elise had a vision,” Ed says, “and Richard did an excellent job of translating that onto paper. He put his whole heart and soul in this project, and created a design that makes the most of this home’s exceptional location.”

Alan agrees. “Richard was brilliant. He hit the nail on the head with the design, and we had no back-and-forth indecisiveness. He listened to what we wanted and came up with a design that fulfilled everyone’s wishes. The kitchen is Elise’s dream. She chose the appliances, cabinetry and counters along with Richard and Shawn’s wife, Kailee.” Their daughter-in-law owns K-Squared Design and was the interior designer on the project.

“Both Ed and Richard were great to work with,” Kailee says. “We all shared the vision, and Richard and I understood each other. That’s why the result is so cohesive. It’s absolutely beautiful.” Her approach to the interior design was to work with space and light, clean lines and natural materials. “Originally my mother-in-law thought she’d like a really modern cottage with frosted glass and stainless steel. I suggested a more contemporary look with clean lines, using more natural materials like teak and stone, and she agreed. It’s gorgeous, but it’s still a comfortable cottage in the country.”



“As magnificent as it all is, the home is still a cottage. You can walk in wearing your bathing suit and lounge on the sofa. It’s contemporary with a rustic touch. It’s luxurious and livable.”

Space and light were critical elements in Kailee’s interpretation of the design. “Richard incorporated a lot of large windows, and we left many of them with no window treatments in order to invite the outdoors in. Where we did use window coverings for privacy, we installed dark wood blinds. The theme of wood grain helps to bring together the modern and rustic elements of the design.” She used the theme of green throughout as well, as it’s a colour Elise particularly likes. “This is yet another way to create an outdoors feeling inside,” Kailee says. “Combined with the extensive use of granite and wood, it reflects the natural surroundings that are so much a part of life on the lake.”

Inside the cottage, the granite theme is repeated in the two great rooms in three-storey fireplaces enhanced by panoramic windows, dramatic beams and high ceilings. The stone fireplace in Alan and Elise’s side of the cottage was saved from the initial cottage. The fireplace on the other side is more contemporary. In all, the cottage encompasses eight bedrooms and eight bathrooms.

“We created a unique ambience in every room according to who would be using that space,” Kailee says. “Some bathrooms have marble, some

granite and some slate. Two of the baths have a freestanding tub that sits on a wood floor imbedded with river rock. It gives the feeling of sitting outside on a Muskoka dock. The granites are different colours in every room, but we kept consistency by keeping the cabinets in the kitchens and baths all in a dark natural wood finish.” From the front entrance, slate floors run back through the kitchen, and the rest of the cottage features rich hardwood flooring.

According to Kailee, the walls are neutral colours that are accented by green in Alan and Elise’s wing. “Everything blends well together. As magnificent as it all is, the home is still a cottage. You can walk in wearing your bathing suit and lounge on the sofa. It’s contemporary with a rustic touch. It’s luxurious and livable.”

A favourite spot for everyone involved is the indoor/outdoor room, which Kailee furnished with exterior furniture created to look like it belongs inside. “This area also includes a bar sink, barbecue, fireplace and large space for lounging. The entire family can gather out here for meals, game-playing and socializing. It’s definitely a focal point for the cottage for much of the year.”



“During the nice months of the year, we spend most of time in this room, which overlooks the lake,” Alan says. “We can cook, dine and live there.” The Mecklingers have loved the cottage for decades, and spend their summers here. The design accommodates both togetherness and privacy, with several dining areas and sitting areas.

“We’re really happy with the result of the renovation and expansion,” Alan says. “It truly is a dream-come-true for Elise to have this kitchen. She’s working on her seventh cookbook right now. The last one was for Princess Margaret Hospital to provide recipes that help cancer patients develop and maintain good nutrition. The current one is in conjunction with Mount Sinai Hospital. Cooking in the new kitchen is wonderful. In fact, the whole cottage is wonderful.”

The entire team shares the vision and the enthusiasm for the end product. “I’ve been involved in building for over 30 years,” Alan says, “and I’m truly proud of the team effort that went into this project.”

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