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REAL ESTATE

They wanted to replace cabin on their Lake Muskoka property. They did something completely different

Swedish architects helped. Prefab was easier than having the little cottage built. “It was brought in by boat, lifted onto the property,” says owner.

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By Georgie Binks Special to the Star

When Jodi Cohen Bjorck and her husband wanted to replace a sleeping cabin on their Lake Muskoka property, they decided to go with something different.

“We wanted a little bit old, but new ... quite modern, but hidden into the ground so we had privacy,” says Bjorck.

“It’s a simple design, quite open, lots of windows looking out onto the lake.”

Cohen Bjorck contacted [Graham Smith, managing principal, at Altius](#), Toronto, who creates prefab cabins, to come up with the design. Swedish architects were involved.

Smith says there were certain standard features with the prefab, but also some unique design elements.

“This one was unique, in that the client (Cohen Bjorck’s husband), who is Swiss, was looking for something really modern, outside of the box, for a box.

“The nice thing about this is we used structural glass, which makes it unique.

“There’s a real connection to nature there.”



Structural glass has been used to provide maximum views. Each door has a screen.

Greg van Riel Photography

Cohen Bjorck agrees. “It’s so soothing and warm down there with the sound of the water.”

The 480-square-foot cabin consists of two bedrooms, a small living space, a small kitchenette, a bathroom and a terrace.

Cohen Bjorck says prefab was much easier than having the little cottage built on-site. “It was brought in by boat, lifted onto the property. We didn’t have to worry about having the trucks down there and getting down there because it’s on a hill. The whole construction part was, ‘let’s see if we can get something that is already designed and just put onto the sewage system.’ ”

Smith, the architect, takes up the story of [Modern Muskoka Prefab, which was completed in 2019.](#)



Because the enclosed space is only 480 square feet, bunkbeds make efficient use of the space. Sleeping cabins can be no more than 600 sq. ft.

Greg van Riel Photography

How do these cabins work? In Muskoka they're just called sleeping cabins because that's all they permit. They can't be larger than 600 square feet. They're a real treat to be able to do, but they're also a bit of a rarity. If you wanted to buy a piece of land and build one, you can't; you have to build a primary residence first. Everybody's tiny-house dream of buying a little piece of land and putting one of these on it ... good luck!



Owner Jodi Cohen Bjorck says she loves the cabin because of the way it is built into the landscape, offering privacy.

Greg van Riel Photography

It seems like there are many advantages to this form of construction? Prefab is very difficult to do and do well. You have to imagine bringing something bigger than a tractor trailer, that also happens to be a wide load. You have to navigate it all the way from wherever the highway is to wherever it's going. Georgian Bay has the benefit that the rocks come pretty smoothly out of the water, so we can bring barges up and literally drive these things onto islands.



The owners wanted a sleek modern design with a Swedish touch to replace an older cabin.

Greg van Riel Photography

They don't disturb the environment as much, do they? You're right in (that) you don't have the typical construction site where they're doing a lot of damage over eight or nine months. However, prefab projects, bigger ones can do a tremendous amount of destruction, because they have to bring in really big cranes. The advantage of prefab construction is, because you are building it indoors, you don't follow the path of regular construction. Because you are in an enclosed ... environment, you can martial all your stuff alongside where it's being built. Crews don't have to set up and take down their tools all day.

How long does it take to build these residences? They can go really quickly. We've done (some) in under three months. All of your site work, foundations or water connections, electrical, landscaping can be happening concurrently. I can be building these all winter long, so in spring they are ready to go.

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