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Green and Simple

Prefab panels allow for the quick assembly of this modestly sized cottage in the Gatineau Hills

BY SARAH BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTIAN LALONDE - PHOTOLUXSTUDIO.COM

Every once in a while, great things are accomplished through serendipity. This is one of those times. A few years ago, Mike Mulvagh was in a bind. Carpenter ants had taken their toll on his rustic family cottage in the Gatineau Hills, and the white clap-board structure was slowly sinking into the ground. Mulvagh knew the rickety cottage needed replacing sooner rather than later, but he was conflicted. Built in the 1940s on remote Lac Me-cham, this was his childhood haunt, and he was resolute that its replacement must respect what came before.

That’s when Mulvagh began to search for an architect who would share his and his partner Chip Crosby’s love of modernism while understanding the need to retain the soul of the original cottage. It seemed like destiny, then, when he called Paul Kariouk and immediately felt a kinship with the owner of Kariouk Associates. Though originally from Ottawa, Mulvagh had chosen to make a life in New York City. Kariouk had done the opposite, leaving Manhattan to establish a career in Ottawa. They couldn’t believe it when they discovered that Mulvagh and Crosby’s New York apartment and Kariouk’s pied-à-terre were literally across the street from each other. “We are all dog lovers too,” says Kariouk with a laugh. “That sealed it. There were so many points of connection between us that it felt like this partnership was meant to be.”

In a nod to the past, Kariouk matched the footprint of the 1,000-square-foot original cottage and retained the side terrace, beloved for its views and breeziness. Mulvagh’s childhood getaway had also boasted windows along the front and sides; these Kariouk reimagined as floor-to-ceiling glass, creating truly spectacular views. Inside, a maze of rooms was replaced by an open-concept floor plan that



The development in recent years of more efficient window technology means cottage owners no longer have to sacrifice warmth to enjoy stunning **floor-to-ceiling views**

Cross-laminated panels made from black spruce make up the floor, walls, and ceiling. The decision to use **prefabricated panels**, some as large as 60 feet by 10 feet, allowed the contractor to assemble the cottage on-site in just two days

The owners love to cook, and this **36-inch-deep counter** means lots of space for prep (and for under-the-counter storage)

Except for a light sealant on the floor, the **wood is untreated**, adding to the rustic vibe

The owners opted for casual mid-century-modern furnishings. The tables and chairs are quite light, allowing them to be moved outside to the terrace on sunny days

Kariouk raised the cottage to improve **the view**. Because the shoreline is not visible, the owners can relish the sensation that they’re floating above the water



Sliding patio doors let the owners turn the cottage and its terrace into a unified space

Dark pine siding allows the modestly sized cottage to blend in with its surroundings



A wood stove warms the open-concept living and kitchen area in the shoulder seasons

allowed for two bedrooms while emphasizing the open kitchen, living room, and dining room with its modern furnishings and cozy fireplace. And yet for all the beauty of the finished cottage, Kariouk is most enthusiastic about how the project provided him the opportunity to try out a completely new construction method. The floors, walls, and ceiling were made from prefabricated panels, some as large as 60 feet by 10 feet, which the contractor assembled on-site in just two days. Kariouk designed a computer rendering of each crosslaminated panel, which was then fabricated in northern Quebec. “It snaps together like Lego — total precision,” he explains. “There’s no painting, no drywall. There’s also no room for error, so everything had to be exactly right.” The main living area sits above a raised foundation, the “basement” providing handy storage space for wood, canoes, and all the other gear that goes with having a summer home.



While the rest of the cottage has a rustic character, the bathroom is all about luxury



The contractor built the **master-bedroom wardrobe** from spruce to match the walls and ceiling

When Mulvagh and Crosby made their first journey to see the newly framed cottage, Kariouk remembers all three of them breathing a sigh of relief. “This is a cottage for the rest of their lives, so it was great to exhale and say, ‘We got this exactly right.’” It’s a getaway that Mulvagh’s mother can also enjoy, connected to the place she knew and loved for so many decades but now infinitely more comfortable.



Though vegetarians, the owners couldn’t part with “**Bucky**,” who graced the walls of the previous cottage for decades



The exposed sections of **cross-laminated timber** — five-ply and just over seven inches thick — showcase the structure of the cottage