

HOMES

# Dream home: A 'little jewel box in the woods' in the Gatineau Hills

A family explains the design of their lakefront retreat, and why they love it

By **Carola Vyhnak** Special to the Star  
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It all came down to a teenager's loft bedroom.

Called a "deal breaker for Madeleine" by her mother Anne Maheux, the second-storey space was a major feature in the design of the artistic family of three's secluded forest retreat.

As architect Paul duBellet Kariouk recalls, "what to do about the loft was a big question. We tinkered with it for several months."

The crowning achievement was a "quirky" oval-shaped pod straddling the two rectangles of ground-floor living space.



"In an unexpected way, the loft became the signature of the project," says Kariouk, principal at Ottawa-based Kariouk Architects.

Madeleine, now 29, was more than happy with her "place to escape" and its treetop views. "I love the fact that it's a raised space but I can still hear what's going on in the kitchen."

Maheux echoes their satisfaction with the all-season lakefront retreat in the Gatineau Hills, an hour north of Ottawa: "We've all been pretty happy with the layout."



After years of enjoying their hideaway, it still feels "like a little jewel box in the woods," says Maheux with a nod to their architect who became a good friend.

She and husband Greg Hill, both art conservators who plan to pass the house on to their daughter, spent long hours collaborating with Kariouk on the design. The final product was two, 15-foot-wide wings, one a 52-foot-long public space with kitchen, dining and living areas and walls of windows, the other a 34-foot-long private space housing two bedrooms, bathrooms and storage. Madeleine's elliptical loft hovers over the central foyer joining the two sections.

The family's second home, which they share with their dog Miko, is "more of a Zen space than a hyperactive social space," says Hill. The absence of cellphones and internet is "part of the special thing about the cottage," adds Maheux.



In the summer, "we basically live out there," she says of the lake-facing outdoor room enclosed by barely visible screen curtains to keep mosquitoes out.

Economical use of the 1,408 sq. ft. of living space means everything has its place and the bedrooms contain only beds, relying on closets for storage space, Maheux says.

Hill, the family cook, installed the kitchen's Ikea cabinetry in what he calls "a major undertaking (with) so many pieces."

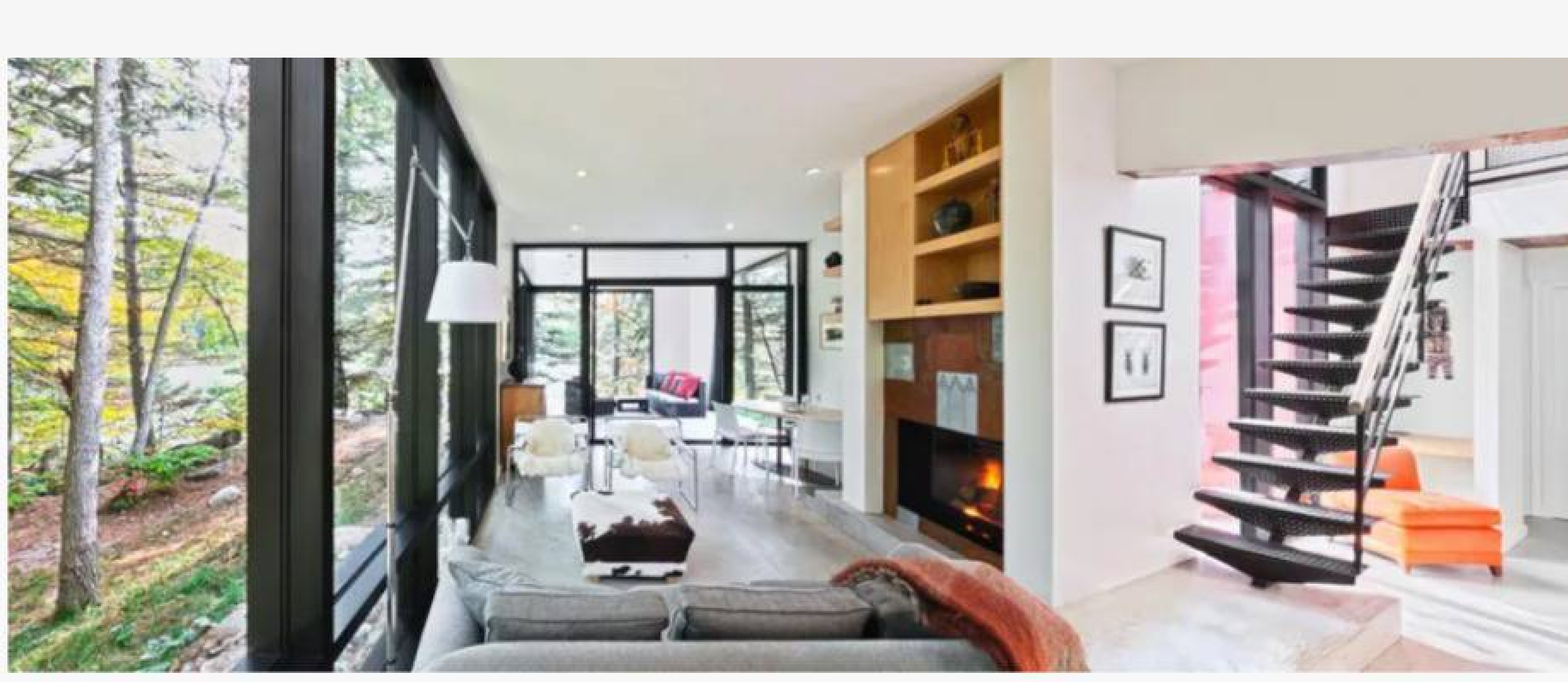
"It's a great kitchen," he points out, with lots of counter space, an island and 180-degree panorama of trees and water.



The low-maintenance exterior is clad in dark red cement-board panels cut with an abstract pattern of reeds that come to life when the sunlight hits the reflective lining.

Inside, the family's creativity shines through in the dozens of decorative metal plates forming a quilt-like cover on the underside of the loft and fireplace surround. Pieces of rusted steel are interspersed with zinc and copper printing plates, some of which were etched by the original printmaker and the Maheux-Hill family, including a young Madeleine, who's now a clinical researcher and hobby artist.

Unetched plates await visitors who their marks in a sort of metallic guestbook for the ages.



The very first house guest was its architect, Kariouk, who was invited to live there while his own home was being completed.

"It was really magical," he recalls of the three-month experience.

**CV** **Carola Vyhnak** is a Cobourg-based writer covering personal finance, home and real-estate stories. She is a contributor for the Star. Reach her via email: [cvyhnak@gmail.com](mailto:cvyhnak@gmail.com)

**The numbers**

- Size:** 1,408 square feet
- Bedrooms:** 3
- Bathrooms:** 2
- Decorative metal plates:** 100+



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