

Habitat

THE COUNTRY'S MOST CREATIVE LIVING SPACES





TREETOP RETREAT

High off the ground,
this cantilevered cabin towers
over lush Quebec land
By Isabel B. Slone

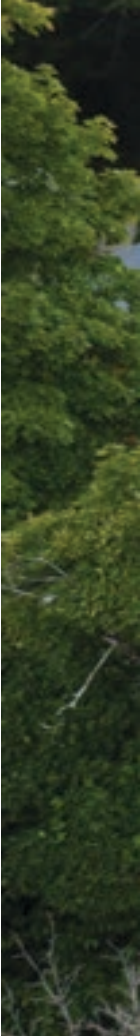
IN 2007, ARCHITECT PAUL KARIOUK set out to build a remote weekend getaway home. He and his husband, Antonio Gioventu, executive director of a nonprofit, lived in a loft-style studio apartment in Ottawa. They wanted their new home to be nearby, preferably somewhere quiet, so they acquired a 17-acre lakeside lot in La Pêche, Quebec. “In a world where everything is buzzing, beeping, humming and ringing, silence is the ultimate luxury,” Kariouk says.

He immediately began mapping out a compact, three-bedroom, 900-square-foot residence that could serve as both a refuge and calling card to show clients what he could do with a limited budget. “I wanted to demonstrate that they could have something spectacular with a smaller footprint,” he says. To design his home, he looked upward, envisioning a stark, cantilevered cabin six storeys above the ground. Its towering height would fulfill the couple’s desire for solitude and allow their cabin to be built closer to Lac du Brochet. Kariouk also wanted to keep the home’s eco-footprint as low as possible, so his plans minimized any disturbance to the forest floor below it. Solar panels attached to the roof would generate almost all the energy needed, and the cabin would be heated by a high-efficiency wood stove.

The project hit a stumbling block during the 2008 financial crisis, when new architectural work dried up at Kariouk’s firm, and he was forced to put his dream cabin on hold. When he could finally start construction in 2014, he took his time, sorting

LOOKING UP Kariouk and Gioventu spent more than a decade planning and building their modernist treehouse

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BRIGHT IDEAS Flourishes of blue and yellow accent the home's interior, providing a striking contrast to the surrounding nature



GREEN HOUSE Kariouk designed the cabin with eco-friendly fixtures, including bat pods and rooftop solar panels

out the permits and site-clearing bit by bit over the years. The structure uses cross-laminated timber, which are large planks of wood that have been milled to exact specifications to avoid the typical waste a construction site would generate. “Every single screw, fastener and length of wood had to be modelled in computer software,” Kariouk explains. “It all fits together as precisely as dental work.” The house was finally ready to be assembled in 2019, and the interior work wrapped up two years later.

Sitting flush with the treetops, the cabin rests atop a steel mast that juts out from a 12-foot-long foundation, roughly the size of a small car. The mast itself is home to several bat pods, which provide safe lodgings for the endangered brown bat population in the region. The home’s narrow design is a practical consideration—a wider structure would require more than a single support beam—and an architectural marvel, executed by engineer Daniel Bonardi. Kariouk describes the structure

like a piece of paper—filmy when flat, but sturdier when folded in half. Two panels in a V-shape make up the cabin’s underside, and a horizontal panel sits on top, providing a level walking surface.

Kariouk designed the interior to be indestructible, made up of the same wooden planks as the cabin’s shell and finished with durable linoleum floors. The couple also filled the place with colour; the kitchen is a vibrant blue, and their couch has been reupholstered with a yellow water- and mud-resistant material to accommodate their 160-pound dog, a Leonberger named Jethro, who loves to flop down after a long day of swimming.

The rooms are packed with old heirlooms inherited from parents and grandparents, including a Catholic bishop’s chair that once belonged to Gioventu’s relative, and a treadle table Singer sewing machine from his grandmother. One bedroom is filled floor to ceiling with family photos and artwork by Kariouk’s amateur painter father. Even the name of the

place itself, *m.o.r.e Cabin*, is an homage to family history: an acronym consisting of the first initial of each of Kariouk and Gioventu’s grandmothers: Marie, Olga, Rose and Elisabeth.

The couple spends every weekend at the cabin, an hour-long drive from their Ottawa apartment. Five kilometres off municipal Quebec roads, it’s totally off-grid, and when the streets aren’t plowed, they snowshoe up to their front door. They spent a year on a waiting list to install internet, but when they realized that their evenings were better spent playing cards and reading together, they immediately cancelled the order.

According to Kariouk, living so high off the ground has its perks. “The sunsets and moonrises are happening at your feet,” he says. “You see their reflection in the water.” Visits from acquaintances who are afraid of heights pose a challenge, but the couple has a simple solution. “If we have people like that over,” Kariouk says, “we seat them facing away from the view.” ■