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A Pointe in Time

Built more than a century ago in a Thumb-area historic community, this cottage underwent a stylish renovation that stayed true to its roots

By Megan Swoyer
Photos by Beth Singer



STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN *This page:* The “lake” beds (top) from Hickory Chair are quintessential cottage. The master bedroom (bottom) is serene with soft-colored pieces, including the Chelsea Textiles nightstands, from the Swedish collection. *Opposite page:* The homeowner cherishes the stairwell’s arch window and the original light fixture. The former owner left the antlers, and the new owners made an antler collage with their favorites.

“Cliff Lodge,” an aging 1901 beauty sitting on the shores of Lake Huron just east of Port Austin, seemed to be yearning for transformation — one that would take it to its storied past, but also move it smartly into the future.

Situated in the historic Pointe aux Barques community, the cottage would, in fact, soon be inhabited by a fun-loving family who’d embrace its antiquated charms and also update it for modern-day living.

When a Bloomfield couple and their two teen-aged children first eyed the getaway home about four years ago, they could envision lots of possibilities. The allure of splendid Lake Huron below was one thing, but add to that several mature trees, wildlife aplenty, a stone exterior, and quaint bead board walls, and the family saw a charming slice of quintessential cottage life.

“That first summer after we bought it, we lived there as it was,” recalls the homeowner. “We wanted to get a feel for it.”

Named “Cliff Lodge” when it was built because it’s perched along the top of a cliff, the cottage and its historic elements impressed the family. They cherished appointments such as the arch window in the stairwell, the stone fireplace, eclectic light fixtures, and aging wood floors. But it was time for an update.

Early guests included the family’s good friend and interior designer Lucy Earl, of Birmingham-based Jones-Keena & Co., and Joseph Mosey, of Joseph Mosey Architecture in Northville. “We all spent a long time working out the goals for a cottage renovation,” Earl recalls. “They were big goals — the whole back room was a mess; it had a tree growing through it!”

Some of the priorities for the four-bedroom home were to insulate and winterize it, and reconfigure the layout to make it more family- and view-friendly, so one could take in the extraordinary lake vistas from many perspectives. “The home was added on to in 1994 and although the homeowners were well-intentioned, it wasn’t really in sync with what it would have been in 1901,” the homeowner explains. “We hoped to bring it back to its former glory, while opening it up to the lake.”

Adds Earl: “We wanted to maintain a cottage feeling, so, for instance, the living room still has the old bead board, but it’s now all insulated — that was a huge undertaking.” (In some areas, the bead board had to be replaced.) They also kept the original floors wherever possible, along with the floor color.



EASY LIVING *This page:* The bar cart is from Betty Mason Classic Country Antiques in Birmingham. A shell divina was created by a sculptor from Brazil. The stone fireplace welcomes, as does the three-season porch (below). *Opposite page:* Four blue easy chairs in the sitting room are from the Chicago Merchandise Mart. "You just sink into them," designer Lucy Earl says.







IN GOOD TASTE

This page: Zinc and marble countertops evoke a 1920s feel in the kitchen. *Opposite page:* The banquette area features an antique marble-topped French schoolhouse table with carvings of words and names, all in French. Above the table hang two hand-blown-glass light fixtures, copies of old Swedish lights. "They're not exactly the same, which is why they're great," the homeowner says. The dining room painting is by Bill Bradley. It's of Turnip Rock, in the nearby waters of Lake Huron.



There was an impractical side deck porch, so that space was enclosed, making it a three-season room. The team (including a builder from nearby Bad Axe) added between 200-300 feet to the footprint.

Before beginning the exterior work, the team looked at original pictures of the cottage. They replaced logs with shingles, staying true to the materials used when the home was built.

Some of the appointments that were in the home when the family moved in include the light fixture (original to the home) in the stairwell and several sets of antlers on the wall. "The former owner left the antlers, and we picked the best ones and made a collage out of them," the homeowner says.

An old chair near the fireplace, which was given a new cushion, and a small black octagon table are also original pieces that were there when the homeowners moved in. Original beams now share space with new beams that were added for support. The mahogany-stained ceilings and freshly painted beams evoke a design reminiscent of a boat hull.

Earl and the homeowner enjoyed many shopping trips together and found several items that add pops of cottage appeal.

"Our client is a big cook and loves to entertain; doing the kitchen was fun," Earl says.





QUAINT COLLECTIONS

Above: A collection of vintage bisque wedding cake toppers adds a touch of whimsy. It's displayed atop a piece of furniture original to the home. Left: In the son's bedroom, mid-century chairs blend well with cottage-style décor.

"She wanted a 1920s cottage-style kitchen, so we selected a zinc countertop for the island and honed marble countertops." A driftwood chandelier over the dining table on the porch is from Low Country Originals and adds rusticity. A snazzy bar cart, discovered at Betty Mason Classic Country Antiques in Birmingham, fits in the space perfectly.

As for the palette, "we love blue," says the homeowner, "and wanted to bring the lake in, so it's a seamless transition from lake to house."

A mix of light blue walls, bright blue ceilings, soft blue chairs, and blue-striped drapery adorn the peaceful getaway, and all of the bedroom floors were painted a gray-blue hue. The blue wood chairs in the kitchen were original to the cottage and round out this house of blues. "Their flaking paint is just perfect," the homeowner says. Altogether, the cottage gives off a tranquil, lived-in aura, and it's ready at the drop of a jigsaw puzzle piece for fun-loving visitors and weekend guests.

"When you're sitting at the banquette, looking out, you see hummingbirds and wildlife, with the lake in the background," the homeowner says. "It's just so much fun. I would think that if the first owners saw this cottage today, they'd be thrilled." They'd also surely be happy that it's retained its original charm. ■



About Pointe aux Barques

WHEN FRENCH PRIEST Claude Allouez arrived at the tip of Michigan's Thumb area in 1665, he called the point of land "Pointe aux Barques" because of the rocky shoreline that resembled the prows of ships. Fast forward a couple of centuries, and the land was lumbered of thousands of white pine trees. The lumber was milled and shipped by rail and barge to help build Saginaw, Detroit, and other cities.

A railroad president opened Pointe aux Barques resort in 1896. Today, many of the same cottages, including the one featured in this story, at left, are still there, and the land remains wild and beautiful. The private Pointe aux Barques community of 66 cottages is located in Huron County. For more information on the area, or to see if cottages are for sale, visit pointeauxbarques.com.