

northern home & cottage

FOR THE WAY YOU LIVE UP NORTH

There are three things for me that make a house: great rugs, great art and great antiques.

-Lucy Earl, Jones-Keena & Co.



FRANKFORT FARMHOUSE REIMAGINED

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INSIDE A WATERFRONT STUNNER

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THE ANNIVERSARY COTTAGE

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▶ ONE OF THE NORTH'S MOST TALENTED DESIGN-AND-BUILD TEAMS COMPLETES A CLASSIC SHINGLE-STYLE COTTAGE ON WALLOON LAKE IN TIME FOR THE LOVELIEST OF OCCASIONS.

By ELIZABETH EDWARDS / Photos by BETH SINGER

In the late fall of 2019, Brian and Brenda McKeen bought a lot on Walloon Lake with a sweeping vista up the body of the lake. The purchase was the culmination of a long-held dream to have a cottage on that lake—a dream they'd often spoken about with Lucy Earl, of Jones-Keena & Co., the designer who'd helped them renovate their circa-1920s home in Bloomfield Hills. Given the McKeens' strong working relationship with her, they looked to Earl to guide them through the design and building process of their new cottage. It was a task Earl took on with gusto, knowing that there was a deadline: The McKeens wanted the cottage finished in time to celebrate Brian's parents' 70th wedding anniversary in the summer of 2021.

Earl launched the process by introducing the McKeens to architect Nick White of the Petoskey-based firm White & Liebler Architects. Over his three decades-plus career, White has developed a signature cottage ▶

style (particularly evident in the homes along Walloon Lake) that draws on the characteristics of early 20th-century summer homes in the Great Lakes and Northeastern Coast. That résumé jibed perfectly with the shingled exterior and lovely wrap-around porch that the McKeens envisioned for their new cottage. “We thought that Shingle style would be very fitting in Northern Michigan,” Brian says.

While White and his managing partner/principal Nick Liebler tackled the blueprint, Earl and the McKeens set off for a home-furnishing buying trip to Atlanta in January of 2020. “I tell every client that there are three things for me that make a house: great rugs, great art and great antiques—these give a house soul and a rich background,” Earl says. Among the trio’s finds on that trip was a large, four-panel fabric-covered wall piece embossed with depictions of Revolutionary War soldiers. Earl saw it at once as a thematically anchoring feature—bringing out the home’s spirit of vintage Americana as well as the shades of blue the McKeens wanted threaded throughout their home.

Even as the treasures from the Atlanta trip had been shipped North, and just before ground was to be broken for the new cottage, the Covid-19 shutdown took effect. The team, which now included contractor Richard Collie of the Harbor Springs-based Collie Construction, didn’t lose heart. Even when hammers couldn’t ring, they kept planning through a steady stream of Zoom meetings.

Despite the setback, there are many happy endings to the story of this cottage, one being the camaraderie that developed between the homeowners and the entire design-and-build team. A standout was the opportunity for Earl and White, both of whom are nearing retirement, to work together: “Working with White & Liebler was a pure joy. Nick White and I are basically the same age, so as senior architect and designer we have lots of experience,” says Earl, adding that managing partner Nick Liebler was also a big part of the project. “We had a grand time creating this house.”

The pale blue palette in the living room echoes the colors of Walloon Lake out the window. Note the millwork throughout the home drawn by White and executed by the craftspeople at Collie Construction: “Nick White is one of the best millwork architects I’ve ever worked with,” says Earl. “He understands how to do really beautiful traditional millwork packages for new construction that give a house a timeless quality.”





But by far the grand finale was the wonderful 70th anniversary party held in the cottage for Brian McKeen's parents, just 18 months after the team broke ground. While there was some finishing on the lower level to complete, the upstairs was ready to house the whole family. "We built that entire house in record time," says Earl. 🏠

The soldiers depicted in the antique wall panels set the color palette for the hearth room. Earl picked up what she calls the "Crayola yellow" in the rug which also carries out the home's blue theme; The homeowners chose an Adirondack theme for the downstairs bar area (see the photo on page 61). Note the birch bark-covered walls; Earl designed the fireplace in one of the bedrooms after the Calvin Coolidge Summer White House in South Dakota. "It's done out of all kinds of different gemstones, quartz and arrowheads and there's a big fossil on the front of the fireplace that has a little tiny stone dinosaur inside," says Earl. "The stone masons became so engaged [that they collected their own] stones to add. [When it was done] they waited for me at the top of the driveway to come and see the finish."

