

# MUSKOKA

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018

# *Life*

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ON THE  
TRAIL OF

GREAT

C A N A D I A N

Cottages





Architect Vanessa Fong's family cottage is toured in *Great Canadian Cottages*, now airing on Cottage Life Television. (Photo by Dan MacAskill for Cottage Life)

Rather than renovating cottages this time, the dynamic décor duo Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan will take viewers to outstandingly beautiful and architecturally eclectic cottages in their new television series *Great Canadian Cottages*.

BY PATTI VIPOND



Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan have tracked down some very interesting cottages for their newest TV series. (Jeremy Kohm/Cottage Life)





(Photo © Vanessa Fong Architects)

**“Cottages** are as different as the people who live in them,” says Colin McAllister, by way of explaining the splendidly diverse selection of cottages he and Justin Ryan will offer viewers in their new docuseries, *Great Canadian Cottages*. The Scottish designer duo, already renowned for such programs as *Cabin Pressure* and *Game of Homes*, debuted their new eight episode series on Oct. 18 on Cottage Life Television. Every show features three captivating cottages and their equally engaging owners.

“Filming the show has been amazing,” says McAllister. “Seeing so many great Canadian cottages was an excellent way to spend the summer. We are working with the team that we had on *Cabin Pressure*, so it felt like camp to be with all of these people.”

So far, the trail to amazing cottages has led Colin and Justin to Ontario’s cottage country including Muskoka, Haliburton, Georgian Bay and Burleigh Falls, near Peterborough. After the heavy lifting needed for their popular cottage and home renovation shows, the duo appreciates touring fully finished retreats and speaking with the owners and architects.

“It’s great to be doing a show that’s purely about the pleasure of other people and their homes,” says Justin Ryan. “It’s a refreshing thing for Colin and me not to be with a camera in a pit of mud, knowing this is going to be on television.”

Methods for finding the cottages were, like the subjects, varied. Some were recommended while others were found via the designers’ social media networks. The new show’s intrepid researchers were tasked with finding cottages that while totally different were not necessarily expensive.

“We really wanted the idea of the program not to be a look at very expensive homes and talk about how much money was spent on them,” says McAllister. “We wanted homes that were purely based on pleasure and personality. Consequently, we have a cottage at Burleigh Falls near Peterborough entirely made of glass and steel. It looks like an alien cube has landed, like War of the Worlds-chic.”

In Muskoka, viewers will get a peek into two extraordinary cottages.

One is the chic contemporary cottage Vanessa Fong designed for her family on Lake Joseph. Fong is an architect and owner of Vanessa Fong Architect in Toronto. Guests arriving at the cottage walk between the house and a sunroom/storage space beneath a single roof. Traversing the tunnel brings a sudden reveal of the magnificent lakefront.

“Vanessa built the covered area with the idea of a journey, that you were actually travelling to that beautiful view,” says McAllister. “The cottage is all about light and the connection to the great outdoors. Vanessa wanted to feel more aware of the changing seasons. It’s about that great sense of connection.”

“We love the overhang of the roof,” adds Ryan. “The pitch and size of it is exactly what you need to keep the sun off and keep you cool in summer. It’s an incredible feature. We had an overhang in ‘Plan B,’ the last cabin we renovated, but this one is even bigger. It kind of looks like a small, modern, regional airport – it has that kind of structure to it.”





**Extensive interior use of light-toned wooden shiplap walls, doors and ceilings is punctuated with lots of tall black-framed windows and glass doors that bring the outdoors inside.**



Architect Vanessa Fong's provides a tour of her Lake Joseph cottage to design duo Justin Ryan and Colin McAllister for their new TV series.  
(Photos by Dan MacAskill for Cottage Life)





(Photo © Vanessa Fong Architects)



***Vanessa Fong's cottage was chosen for Great Canadian Cottages for both its architecture and the story of a young female architect designing the first cabin for her family.***

Extensive interior use of light-toned wooden shiplap walls, doors and ceilings is punctuated with lots of tall black-framed windows and glass doors that bring the outdoors inside.

"The cottage is basically bleached blonde," says McAllister. "Maybe blondes do have more fun. Their house is a statuesque blonde."

Interior décor is a happy mix of contemporary furniture and traditional cottage icons like '60s water skis, spindle back chairs and an antique sleigh with a second life as a couch. Product designer Ryan Tremblay, Fong's partner, created the cluster of globe-shaped lights suspended from the ceiling.

Outside, varied colours of wood siding define areas of the house.

"Siding may be the same timber or the same pattern, but you can change the colour and tell a different architectural story," says McAllister. "You can see the elements in Vanessa's cottage because they have been

given breathing space, like in an art gallery. I think we miss that a bit in our homes. We love this and that and collect things, but sometime we have to weed out the rubbish. If your granny gives you a sofa, it's fine for the first few years but you don't have to live with it forever."

Vanessa Fong's cottage was chosen for Great Canadian Cottages for both its architecture and the story of a young female architect designing the first cabin for her family.

"It was lovely to see something based on her own interpretation of what a cottage should be," says Ryan. "It feels young and modern, but at the same time there's a beautiful blend with the environment. It really sits well on the land."

Though the cottage blends into the landscape by day, at night its lights reach out through the windows like a beacon on shore.

"It has a warmth at night, like lighthouse," says McAllister. "There's a



safety and a security in looking at it. We just loved it because we loved her. She was very humble about her abilities. Family is important to them and the grandparents will be there. It's one of those houses that's all about bringing people together."

While filming *Great Canadian Cottages*, the designers met great Canadians as well. One of those Canadians is hockey legend and former Maple Leafs captain Wendel Clark. Clark's Lake Rosseau cottage had the features one would expect at a hockey star's hideaway plus some surprises.

Though the cottage was built in traditional style, it is modified by comfortable modern touches. Large stacked stone fireplaces are surrounded by contemporary furniture for cosy evenings by the fire.

"It's an eye-opener," says McAllister. "I think the cottage and Wendel are going to take people by surprise. He was a bit of a bruiser, a big lad and that was part of his success. But he's such a lovely man. He knew everything about his house. He was involved in the design, the construction, furniture selection and talked about transitional pieces. Wendel spoke in such a passionate way about the space with his wife, Denise. We thought if a hockey legend can become an interior designer, maybe an interior designer can become a hockey legend? Maybe it's not too late for us."

While viewing the rooms, the designers noticed a number of taps on the walls. Turned out the faucets are all linked to a plumbing system that instantly brings draft beer to the thirsty throughout the house.

"It's the Canadian dream," laughs Ryan. "There's a refrigerated beer room that seems to feed the pipes to all of the taps. You could go to the sunroom and have draft beer from the wall. You'd think that with beer everywhere and big TVs, that's got to be the hockey house. There is beer and big TVs, but there's also an amazing sophistication and beautiful home values."

The decorators were impressed by the couple's humble gratitude for everything life has given them.

"It's lovely to see a couple that are in perfect harmony," says Ryan. "We want stories like that on *Great Canadian Cottages*.

It's really about great Canadians telling us their life stories."

With *Great Canadian Cottages* now on Cottage Life Television, the timing for the docuseries is perfect. As fall gives way to winter, every Canadian appreciates watching something that keeps memories of last summer alive.

"Anything we can do to hold onto a bit of that wonderful summertime escapism has to be a good thing," says McAllister

with a smile. "We lucked out with the weather. It was beautiful for every house that we shot. We had amazing crew who basically created property porn because it is so beautiful to watch. There's so much sunshine in this show, you're going to get a tan watching it."

Colin and Justin's new docuseries, *Great Canadian Cottages*, debuted on Oct. 18 and runs for eight episodes on Cottage Life Television. ↩



On popular Drag Lake, a gorgeous contemporary cottage with a hawk's eye view sits on a promontory far above the lake. It is featured in *Great Canadian Cottages* along with other distinctive cottages. (Photo courtesy STAMP Architecture)



Viewers Of *Great Canadian Cottages* will also visit a modern masterpiece on Monument Channel in Georgian Bay. The home of Charles Gane, principal of Core Architects in Toronto, the structure is a Douglas fir post and beam extravaganza that blends into the rugged landscape to become an environmentally friendly hideaway.

(Paul Orenstein Photography)