

New Life for a Little Cottage

story by Steve Johnson
 “before photos” by CABIN LIFE Staff
 “after photos” by Steve Umland



I have paddled this bay countless times over the years, on days just like this one, through wisps of morning mist and water mirror-smooth. The little gray, vertical-log cottage on the curve of the shore looked like a nice enough place. It was grizzled on the edges but tidy, with an air of reluctant coziness – always there for you in spite of tiring with age.

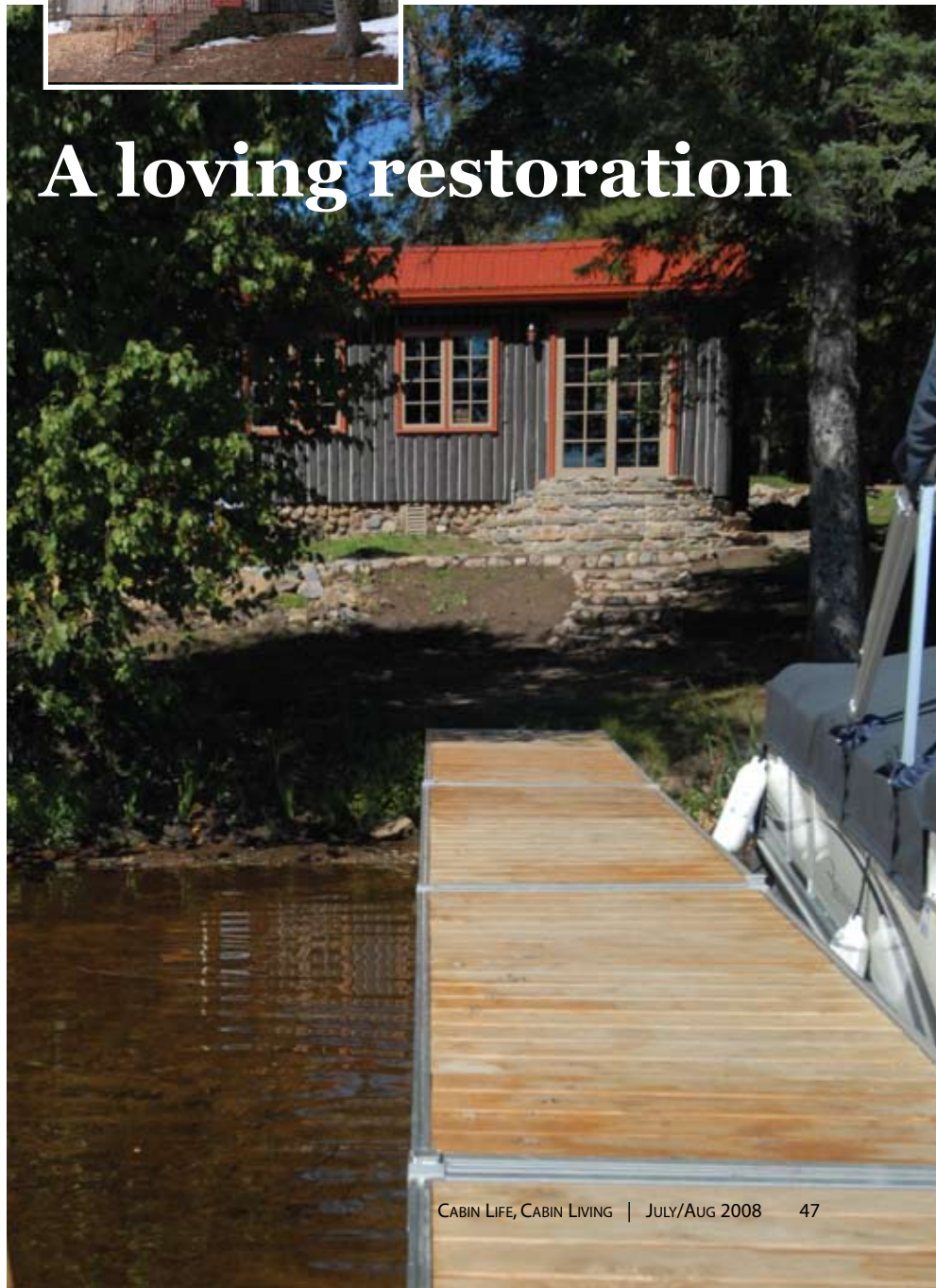
What I couldn't see were the years of stories held inside – three young kids laughing, playing, growing; a family gathered around an oversized coffee table, piecing together puzzles; frog hunts and campfires and Garrison Keillor on the radio.

When cottages or cabins like this start to show some wear, and the sags, creaks, groans and drafts overwhelm the owner, the popular custom of late is to tear them to the ground and build big – taking away both the original structure and charm. James and Mary Krook saw things differently.

Preserving History – and Memories

The Krooks moved to north-eastern Minnesota in 1974 and nine years later came across the cabin in bordering northwestern Wisconsin. They were smitten by the postcard woods and generous frontage on a

A loving restoration



Before & After



Refurbishing the living room included moving the dining room furniture into the sun porch (next page). A new log mantle graces the fireplace, while a new wood floor warms up the entire room (floor is Appalachian Shenandoah Hickory, with a wirebrushed finish).



Expanding the kitchen involved taking over laundry room space and moving the nearby bunkbeds to one end of the sunporch.

The kitchen includes new cabinetry by Woodland (Rustic Alder, Cardinal Red, with Newport-style doors); Silestone counters in Yellow Nile Leather; a sink from Franke Fireday (Two Bowl Apron Front); and Rohl Country plumbing fixtures.

small lake, part of the larger Eau Claire chain of lakes.

After decades of creating family memories at the small gray cabin, the vote for preservation easily beat out the wrecking ball. "Once it's gone, you can't replace the charm," said Mary. "We wanted to save it for the grandkids, have a place for guests to stay, and preserve the history of the cabin."

The little cottage by the lake has nearly a century of tales in its walls, like the story of its beginnings in the Wisconsin woods. The Greenhalgh boys, three brothers from Illinois, were contracted by the original owner and jumped at the chance to build a log cabin before heading off to military service in WW II. The brothers coaxed a Model T Ford and two-wheeled trailer to Bony Lake in 1937, and built a humble, 20x20-foot cabin with pine logs harvested from the 35-acre property.

A Crossroads

The Krooks, who bought the little cottage in 1983, vacationed in it until 1992, traveling from their primary home in northern Minnesota as often as possible.

In 1992, they built and moved full-time into a larger main house on the west edge of a copse of skyscraper pines only a short distance away. But the little cabin remained close to the family and still received plenty of attention, especially from the kids and their friends.

With many years behind it and its health declining, the cabin needed a helping hand lest the family be forced to pay their last respects. The Krooks decided to restore the place that had been with them for so long. With Mary's inspiration and much input from local designers and craftsmen, the renewal began in the spring of 2007.

A New Look for the Exterior

Even from a distance, the revamped cabin and northland-inspired landscaping looks its Sunday best. Massive, flat slabs of stone lead the way between the cabin and a three-walled woodshed, listing just enough toward the lake

Before & After



The sunporch facing the lake is now home to the dining area. One of Mary Krook's favorite parts of this room is the window seat (far end, above).

The new dining area includes cabinets for storage (Plato cabinetry in Distressed Pine; the door style is Sierra Inset with Beaded Panels).



Last, but not least, the restoration project drastically changed the bathroom. The previously cramped space was enlarged, the drop ceiling was removed to reveal the original vaulted ceiling and one Sheetrocked wall was stripped to reveal the original logs, which were then refurbished.

The vanity and mirror are from Owens (Java Pine). The faucet and sink are by Rohl (Country Collection).

to make it charming. A splitting axe leans against a small pile of logs stacked inside, ready to warm a winter evening.

An elegant half-circle stone staircase unfurls from the back porch. The view from the shore reveals the cabin's burnt orange roof and window trim framed by chocolate-colored logs.

Native planting and rain gardens mingle with lake-wide shoreline restoration efforts initiated by determined landowners. And the Krooks plan to turn the former fish cleaning shack by the water's edge into a kids outdoor playhouse.

Lovingly Restored – Inside

Stepping inside, the cabin greets with a warm embrace. From the smooth, hickory floor to the hand-sanded, 70-year-old pine logs on the vaulted ceiling, there is a golden softness to the place.

Other touches of nature are scattered about, like the birch bark sideboard near the curved breakfast bench; a wood plank dining table with twig-back chairs; and a stout log mantle above the fireplace.

A small kids' room sports bunk beds next to a book and game shelf, and a drawing table with a window overlooking the bay – inspiration for future daVincis.

The cabin's own special touch of artwork – framed puzzles done over the years right in this room – hangs on the walls, each one a family memory preserved under glass. And on the wall next to the fireplace, a priceless letter is posted relating the story of the three brothers from Illinois who actually built the cabin.

The cabin on the curve of the shore beams with a tasteful luster today – and retains all of its proud heritage. Best of all, it was rescued by caring guardians and will be here by the quiet bay, for the kids and their kids to come. This little gray cottage is ready for many more years of memories: family puzzle parties, frog hunts, campfires and Garrison Keillor on the radio. ~

Steve Johnson often paddles his canoe past the Krooks' cottage to admire its new look.