

RUSTIC REDEFINED

A Vision of Home Moves From its American West Roots to a Rural Plot in Ontario, Canada

Architecture by Locati Architects | Interior Design by Locati Interiors | Text by Penelope Rowlands | Photography by Roger Wade

VIEW SLIDESHOW

The house—

expansive, rustic—feels

quintessentially western, while its surroundings, in

leafy southeastern Canada, distinctly

do not. Which accounts for the cars that slow down

as they drive by and the strangers who

lean out to take pictures. “It’s the

only Montana house in all of

Ontario,” one of the owners points out,

explaining how the residence she

shares with her family has

unexpectedly

become a tourist attraction. “It’s put our town on the map.”



Which isn’t to say that this house, located 30 miles from Toronto, is at odds with its surroundings. It’s just that it takes another approach. And while it is large—the main house is 10,000 square feet—it’s not oppressively so. Its architects, Jerry Locati and Kyle Tague, of the Montana firm Locati Architects, used multiple forms and textures to reduce its apparent

mass. “We didn’t want the exterior to be imposing and monolithic, but more inviting and interesting,” Tage, the project architect, explains.

Constructed of Oklahoma fieldstone and reclaimed timber, barn wood and logs and other materials that, Tage says, “work together and kind of speak of the place,” the compound, which includes a guest cabin, a barn and other structures, resembles a hamlet, one so integrated with its setting that it seems to be at one with the trees.

The main house, in particular, is exceptionally transparent. Its copious windows—some are as tall as 12 feet—“pull in the views and make it feel a part of the natural setting,” Tage notes. And this exchange works both ways: At night the house glows like an outsize lantern. Light spills from it like molten gold. The couple’s westward aesthetic tilt began on a ski trip to the United States, where both the wife and her husband, a businessman, felt a strong affinity with the prevailing mountain style. A later sojourn in Arizona also “had an impact,” she avers. By the time they bought their property in Ontario, “we were looking for a post-and-beam log cabin,” the husband says. “We were looking for rustic elegance.” They found the Locati firm after seeing its work in a magazine.

A cabin on the couple’s property, while in desperately bad repair, summed up the look they were after. “It was dilapidated and falling down,” the husband recalls. “Forty percent of the logs were rotted, and the roof had caved in. What looked like a pile of logs was actually a test, which was, ‘Can you design something like it?’ ”

For the architects, the original cabin became a touchstone; they used it “as a model for scale and proportion” for the main house, Tage reports. It also inspired them to incorporate a cabin of similar vintage into the design of the house’s master suite. This second cabin “ties the two structures together and keeps the property holistic,” he says.

It also adds to a sense of mystery. “An architect shouldn’t give himself away at the front door,” says Locati, paraphrasing Frank Lloyd Wright. “A house should have a sense of discovery.” This one does. The low-ceilinged, rectangular entrance hall barely hints at how the interior volumes expand, radically and intriguingly, in the rooms ahead. Some of these, such as the family and dining areas, feel so open as to seem barely contained. “As you move through the rooms, you get a sense of space and light,” says Locati. “The ceiling starts to open up. The floor steps away. The rooms widen.” The interior space reaches its apex in the great room, with a vaulted ceiling that rises to 24 feet. Strong horizontal elements, including a hefty mantelpiece that cantilevers from the fireplace of Oklahoma stone, offset the room’s upward thrust, making it feel “open but still cozy,” says the wife.

When it came to the interior design, the clients “were so in love with the architecture they didn’t want anything to hinder, hide or dress it up,” reports Robin Pfeifferberger, then a

designer on the Locati staff. She used area rugs—most of them have traditional Persian styling—as a point of departure for her design. “We sprang it up from there,” she says. The earth tones and relatively simple patterns the clients favored set the tone for the rest of the house.

All of the furnishings, with the exception of the wife’s childhood upright piano, are new. “Our furniture was so different” from the style of the new house, she says, “it would have looked odd.” In this domain, too, the couple looked West for inspiration, purchasing almost everything on shopping trips with Pfeiffenberger to Colorado.

As the great room demonstrates, Pfeiffenberger, working with assistant designer Teresa Kessler, took a low-key approach. She chose a neutral palette “that would allow us great freedom,” she says, while also showing the room’s luxuriant finishes, including Venetian plaster walls, to advantage.

Most of the room’s furnishings, the designer says, are “low enough to allow your vision to go across” to the configuration of windows that, rising to the height of the ceiling, dominates the far wall. Which seems only fitting. For in this nature-centric residence, where everything circles back to the outdoors, the leafy view the windows frame—“a little wonderland”—is the point.

This article was published in the April 2009 issue.

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