

Annual Buyer's Guide

2012
EDITION

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Tree House

A contemporary timber home on Vancouver Island's Pacific side reflects the nearby rain forest.

STORY BY NANCY E. BERRY | PHOTOS BY VINCE KLASSEN

This contemporary-but-cozy home embraces the rain forest outside and serves as a staging area for family surfers, because it is near the "surf capital of Canada." Bluestone is used as the fireplace material. A simple Douglas fir mantel mimics the structural beams.



ABOVE: The back of the house curves to accommodate an ancient cedar tree that is 10 feet in diameter.

OPPOSITE: A wall of horizontal cedar boards echos the cedar courses on the exterior of the house.

“**M**Y WIFE IS A TREE HUGGER,” jokes Don Chan. He and his wife, Vivienne, purchased a plot of land in Tofino on Vancouver Island’s Pacific side to build a getaway cottage. Adjacent to the beach, the site nestles into an old growth rain forest with many ancient cedar trees—some measuring 10 feet in diameter. Treading lightly on the site was a high priority for the couple when it was time to actually build. “We wanted to leave as many old trees as possible,” says Don, who hired the architectural firm Helliwell + Smith Blue Sky Ar-

chitecture to design the house. The firm, noted for its ecological consciousness and organic modernism, is also known for its hybrid Arts and Crafts style.

We were drawn to more contemporary timber frame designs,” says Don. The architects, in Don’s words, “nailed it.” The house blends perfectly with its woodland setting. “Tofino is a beautiful part of the world,” notes Don. “We wanted a place where our children and grandchildren would want to come back to over and over.” Tofino is not only known for its mixed growth forest, but it is also called the surf capital of Canada.





The kitchen is compact. A center island topped with a granite countertop separates the kitchen and dining area. Cabinetry is made of maple.



The architects incorporated an outdoor porch on the back of the house. A six-paneled skylight lets dappled sunlight into the space.

“It is a place where the sea meets rain forest,” says Don. “Our extended family enjoys surfing, kayaking, beachcombing, and biking, and the house accommodates active guests nicely.”

The greatest challenge in the house design was working with the large cedars on the property. Instead of taking down trees, we designed around them,” says Kim Smith, principal of Helliwell + Smith. The 2,400 square foot house literally embraces an old cedar with a 10-foot diameter by curving around the tree. “By accommodating the natural environ-

ment, the house really takes on a modern organic form,” Smith says. Although one north facing exterior wall is curved, it is essentially a simple design — a one-and-a-half story, shed-roof, timber-framed structure with a shed dormer. “The shed roof reaches up to the tree canopy,” Smith says.

The house is an extension of its environment in both form and materials. Clad in cedar shingles and cedar siding, the building reflects the materials found in nature,” notes builder Troy Freeborn of Coastal Construction. “Cedar has natural resins that are rot resistant.” It’s the

perfect material for this area, which can get over 125 inches of rainfall annually. Coastal Construction worked with Canadian Timber Frames, which designed the timber framing off site. “It was like putting a puzzle together once the timber arrived,” says Freeborn. “The walls went up first and the timber frame had to fit perfectly within those walls. There was a lot of back and forth between the timber framers and the builders to get the dimensions perfect.” And they did. The framing fit into the wall like fingers in a glove.

The couple wanted there to be trans-



The design incorporates deep overhangs (the roofing material is metal) to protect outdoor spaces during rain storms. The front of the home has a large courtyard for additional parking.

parency between the interiors and exteriors. A wall of sliding glass doors opens the house to the woodlands, while two sets of skylights on the north and south sides of the house open outdoor rooms to the forest canopy. Because this is a wet environment, Helliwell + Smith designed covered outdoor spaces to protect the family from the rain. To further the connection between the inside and outside, the design team included clearstory windows on the southern side of the house.

Another must in the design scheme was to have an open floor plan so guests

could feel connected to one another. The kitchen flows into the dining and living spaces. For continuity in the design, the same materials are used throughout the public spaces. Pennsylvania bluestone floors are found on the interiors as well as the terraces. The fireplace is also Pennsylvania bluestone.

Canadian Timberframes used Douglas fir for the home's timber structure, while some interior walls were finished in red cedar boards to reflect the home's exterior materials. The rooms are kept clean and simple with built-in maple cab-

inetry. Just off the living room is the master bedroom. On the opposite side of the house, a staircase leads to two bedrooms and a playroom for the grandchildren.

One truly unique feature is the surf room. A screened wall conceals an outdoor shower area complete with a drying rack for wet suits. A door leads into a mudroom where surfboards can be stored, and beyond the mudroom is a full bath. Outside, landscaping was filled in with indigenous plants. "We really love the house," Don says, "and feel that it respects the rain forest setting." ■



A shed dormer on top of the shed roof allows additional light into the home.



UPPER LEVEL



MAIN LEVEL

home details

SQUARE FOOTAGE
2,088

ARCHITECT
Helliwell + Smith Blue Sky Architecture

BUILDER
Coastal Construction

TIMBER PROVIDER
Canadian Timberframes Ltd.

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