

ISLAND HOUSE IN RUGGED CANADIAN ARCHIPELAGO

The house has been built on a private island in a rugged archipelago in Georgian Bay, a three-hour drive north from the Canadian city of Toronto. Beneath the clear skies and sitting on Precambrian rock, the stage director Molly Thom (widow of the Canadian architect Ron Thom) commissioned a 'nature house'.

It was designed by her son Adam and daughter-in-law Katja Aga Sachse Thom, who together established the architectural studio, Agathom, in Toronto. They derived their inspiration from the assorted cottages on the banks of Lake Muskoka, but also from Denmark and Norway, and from slave cabins in the American South.



Above: the family cabin that Molly Thom had designed by her son and daughter-in-law is located on an island in an isolated archipelago in Georgian Bay north of Toronto.

Adjoining: the designers Adam Thom and Katja Aga Sachse Thom, who together set up the Toronto-based architectural practice, Agathom. **Below left:** a scene portraying the isolation and rugged natural setting of the cottage that was built in homage to its natural surroundings.

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The scenery - particularly on a clear day - is breathtaking. Ancient rocks form natural islands in an almost limitless bay. This is where, some eight miles from the nearest marina, Molly Thom had her son and daughter-in-law design a holiday retreat for the family. The design was to balance comfort with the bare necessities, and thus enable its inhabitants to engage fully with the surroundings.

Life in the cottages along the bays and lakes in this region is extremely pleasant and is enjoyed to the full by many people from Toronto and other towns in the area.

OBJEKT©International has featured numerous reports on the cottages at Lake Muskoka, and the prevailing interior style. Invariably the quilt style of decorating predominates, with sailboats moored at the jetty - unlike this cottage, the interior of which is quite basic.

The house is anchored firmly on the rocks and comprises a living room with library nook, a bedroom and a dining room/kitchen. A small loft serves as a sitting area and studio, playroom and extra bedroom. Although the main house is open-plan, its L-shape provides for privacy as well as interaction between the various spaces. The interior extends outdoors by way of wooden decks and outdoor spaces inspired by the vernacular architecture of the islands.

It forms a bridge across the rocks, partially shielded from the wind by a large boulder and a small pine wood and other natural vegetation. The roof seems to span the interior like a tent. Large windows following the contours of the roof afford multiple views as far as the horizon. The roof - in fact the entire cabin - is held in place by a colossal Rumford fireplace built of local stone. The timber used to build the

cottage was recovered from old barns, farmhouses and cottages in the surroundings. The property is completely isolated from the outside world which meant that all the materials had to be transported across the water and assembled on site - making the whole undertaking very demanding. In addition, the weather here can change in a trice, from a pleasant summer's day to a raging storm. No wonder it was demanding!

Adam and Katja planned a modern but absolutely basic design, enhancing the bare necessities with the right degree of comfort. They aimed for energy efficiency, not only for environmental reasons, but also because the nearest possible source of power was miles away from the cabin and only accessible by boat or seaplane. Solar panels provide electricity and water is drawn from the bay and purified on the spot. On cold nights the beds are heated by rocks warmed beside the open fire. The kitchen is supplied by propane gas and lamps use lamp oil. The outhouse toilet facilities are rudimentary.

Adam and Katja are partners in the architectural studio, Agathom, in Toronto. They founded the firm after they had graduated from Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles and embarked on an 'artistic journey' in pursuit of top-quality craftsmanship.

Adam's father, Ron Thom, was a celebrated modern architect in central and western Canada. He won acclaim with his public buildings and university campuses with an innovative kind of organisation and applying materials and light in a modern way.



Right: the cottage windows are almost all floor-to-ceiling. The roof unfolds like a tent over the house.

Below left and right: the cabin's interior has been made from recycled timber sourced from old barns and cottages from within a 200-mile radius. All the wooden elements were prepared for construction on the site.

The L-shape of the open-plan interior provides privacy. The huge stone Rumford fireplace is literally the anchor of the house and the whole structure is firmly embedded in the island's ancient bedrock.

