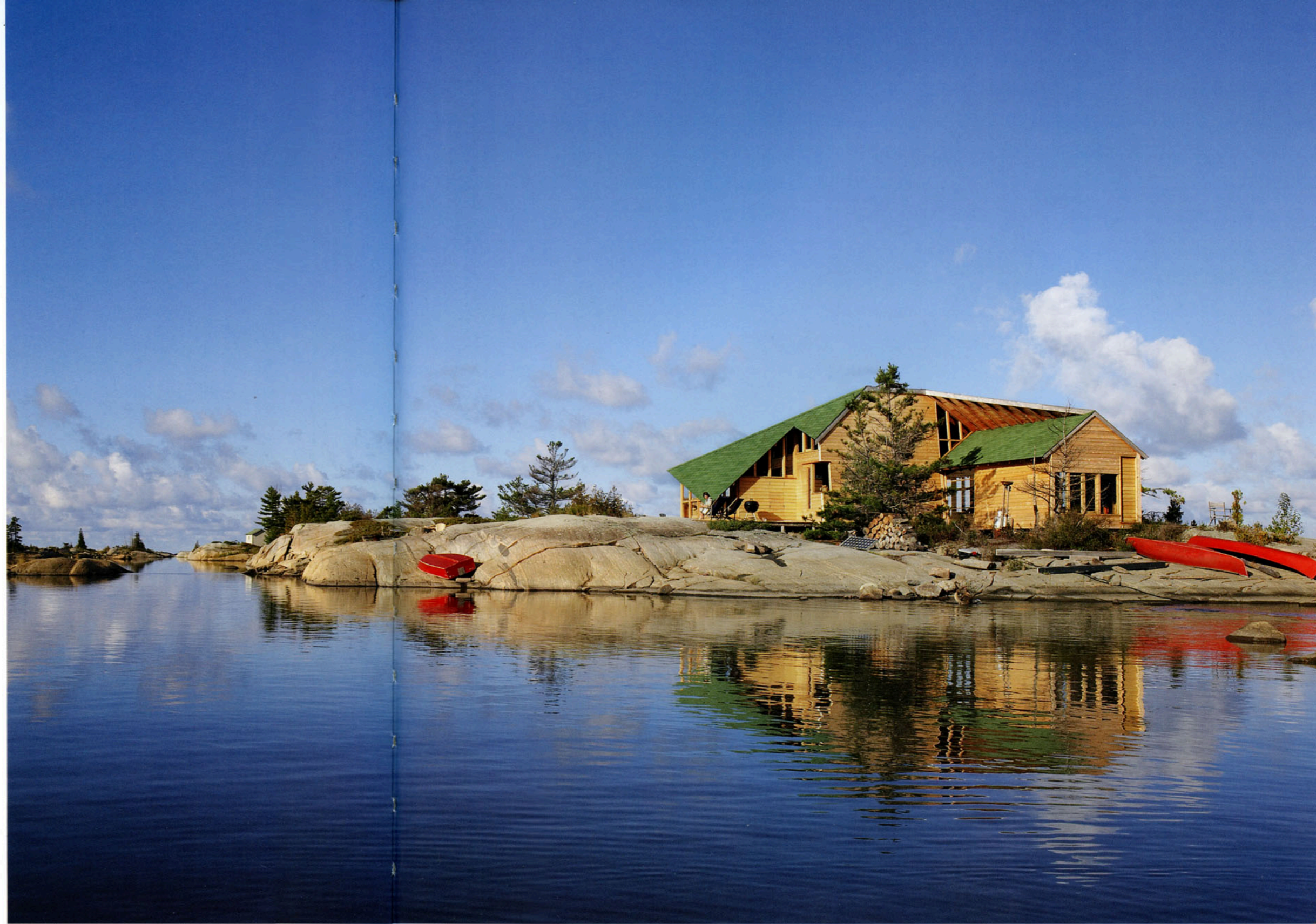


The Edge of the Archipelago

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Agathom Co.: Molly's Cabin,
Pointe au Baril, Ontario, Canada



The architect owners describe the house, with its wraparound roof, as a 'wooden tent', a simple but effective summer shelter.



Opposite The principal source of heat is the central fireplace with its stone surround, which is used on colder evenings; the open-plan nature of the living spaces allows warmth to circulate freely.

Below Banks of floor-to-ceiling glass in the living area frame views of the water and the archipelago, and the surrounding granite shelf forms a natural terrace.

A crucial consideration in the evolution of an off-grid home is how and when it will be used. A case in point is Molly's Cabin, on a remote island on the eastern edge of Georgian Bay. The winters are extreme, and few inhabitants choose to spend the coldest months there, although in the summer the population swells and the summer cottages open their doors. From the start, then, the architects and owners of Molly's Cabin decided that this off-grid house would be used for only three seasons of the year at most. Even so, the project presented many challenges.

'The cabin is on the outer edge of an elaborate and extensive archipelago where the islands are made of igneous granite, scraped and sculpted by glaciers,' says Adam Thom of Agathom Co., the architectural practice he founded in Toronto with his Danish wife, Katja. 'Building on an island without electricity that is 13 kilometres (8 miles) from the nearest marina is a challenge, and the building season is short. It's absolutely impossible to work here during the winter, from the freeze right up to the spring thaw.'

The Thoms decided to design and build a modestly scaled, contextual home without the services and facilities that might be needed for year-round residence. Molly's Cabin, which they describe as a 'wooden tent', has a distinctive wraparound shingle roof enclosing a timber building that splices vernacular and modernist influences.

The single-storey cabin sits on granite boulders close to the water's edge, with a backdrop of trees. Since all the building materials had to come in by boat, the Thoms kept the palette simple. The timber framework and much of the other joinery consist of reclaimed and recycled pine taken from former Ontario barns; many of the beams are hundreds of years old. The cladding is cedar and the roof is asphalt.

An open-plan dining area and kitchen leads out to a substantial deck, and there is also a sitting room, a library and a bedroom. The principal source of heat is a central fireplace, complemented by a stove in the kitchen. An array of solar panels provides electricity for lighting, refrigeration and the pump that draws water from the lake; a composting toilet is in an outhouse nearby.

'We are impressed by how the building keeps giving,' says Adam. 'It's really pleasing to see the cottage in full use by the whole family – children, parents, grandparents. We wanted the design to create many routes to the exterior, and while the rock landscape is rugged it is also a delicate ecosystem. Despite the pressure of climate change, development and pollution, the region is home to a vast and gorgeous spectrum of animals, many of which are endangered. The project fits our tradition of responding fully to the site, which is a constant theme in our work.'

