



LIVING SPACES

## BEAUTY IN THE BEACHES

A sharp focus on detail by a builder/architect couple

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SECTION G

# Globe Real Estate



## THE TAILORED COUNTRY HOME

The city home sold, a couple build on their own private slice of light, earth, air and trees **PAGE 4**

Owners David Daub and Pascal Arseneau first experienced their Wasaga Beach property from an inflatable mattress in a garage-sale tent. Their lodgings have improved since then. **STEVEN EVANS**

# Home delivery

The long gestation of a Wasaga Beach home



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**I**t was love at first sight," says David Daub about meeting the two principal architects at Agathom Co.

Katja Thom laughs, embarrassed at this unexpected tidbit, to which Mr. Daub insists: "It absolutely was!"

So, was that the moment this house was born? Even though a shovel hadn't yet dented the soft earth of Wasaga Beach, could it be "the moment?" Laugh if you will, but, much like a baby in the womb, it's a difficult question to answer: so many milestones, so many emotions.

"We were very emotional about this project because it meant so much to us," adds Mr. Daub's partner, Pascal Arseneau. "We couldn't say: 'Hey, build us a \$1-million cottage and we'll see you when it's done' – that wasn't the direction, so we had to find someone we could trust."

Maybe establishing trust was the moment.

Maybe not: Mr. Daub and Mr. Arseneau first saw the property in 2001, when it was still owned by Mr. Daub's father. They loved it. In that first year, they so wanted to experience their newly acquired slice of light, earth, air and trees, they bought a tent at a garage sale, and, from a store, a big inflatable mattress. Too big, actually: "As the mattress was inflating, the walls of the tent were falling," Mr. Arseneau recalls with a big laugh. "Our poor dog looked at us as if to say: 'I'm not going in there.'"

After that epic fail, they'd park a tent-trailer near a stand of old trees and visit whenever they could. They'd plant new trees, too, while dreaming of where, one day, a house would go.

Those seem like birthing moments too, don't they?

Wasaga Beach is a lovely place to ride a bicycle. So, the couple would pedal to new-builds and chat up local contractors. They'd meet with prefab home builders, too, but would become frustrated at the blank stares they'd receive after asking if the standard gable roof could have one angle removed to become a shed-roof. Or if all that crown moulding could be canned in favour of clean, modern lines. Or if most of the windows could be placed on the private side of the house.

In 2008, they'd finally meet (and quickly fall in love with) the Thoms, because the Thoms are more than just architects: they're artists, sculptors, dreamers, parents to two lovely girls, textile experts, story-tellers, perfectionists, and lovers of good food and wine.

In other words, birds of a feather: "David and Pascal are great entertainers, great chefs, great kitchen lovers," Adam Thom says. "As I recall, they gingerly approached us with the concept, because they're great students of classic North American residential architecture; we thought maybe the Usonian type of house, L-shaped, would be appropriate, if they agreed."

They did agree, but had to shelve the project for a year for a number of reasons.

"And we were very, very nervous," Katja Thom admits. "Architecture is very much about pace, and if you're not striking a pace, you start second-guessing yourself and it waters down the purity of the design."

So that, definitely, was not a moment, but rather a fork in the road.

And speaking of forks, when the foursome finally did get to the drawing board, eating was involved: "Every meeting, we brought food," Mr. Daub says.

"And we thought whatever happens," Mr. Thom adds, "we'll be well-fed throughout this process."

The breaking of bread over sheets of paper filled with ideas is certainly a candidate for when this house was born, no?

An obvious date, however, is July 2014, when the earth moved, literally, so a foundation could be poured. And, of course, spring 2015, when the couple sold their city house and rented an apartment (they still work in Toronto) so they could begin living part-time at their new Wasaga residence.

And that a residence: A walk up a ramp places you at the hidden front door. Inside, feet greet a polished and heated concrete



David Daub and Pascal Arseneau chose architects Katja and Adam Thom in part out of admiration for their artistry – and love of food and wine. STEVEN EVANS

floor, and a hand reaches instinctively for a rough, poured-in-place concrete cap on a pony-wall that defines the dining room. The eye observes that a long hallway leading to the living room is covered in dark grey industrial carpet: this is the "salon wall," and it showcases the couple's ever-changing art collection.

A long wooden drop-ceiling hides standard light bulbs that are forced into punching above their weight: boring white light hits wooden reflectors to create a soft reddish glow. A monumental cinder-block wall creates mystery – what's in the kitchen? – while acting as a "major signpost" in

the home.

But come right in, and walk to the living room. It has a low ceiling and a tall fireplace. Frank Lloyd Wright loved low ceilings because they create intimacy, and Ms. Thom, originally from Denmark, loves them because they create something the Danes call *hygge*.

Exit the living room at the other side via a wide, downward ramp. In a home with no basement, level changes such as these are "another method of separating spaces even though they're open to each other," Mr. Thom says. The ramp takes you past the dining area to the "glass hall,"

which contains the home's two bedrooms, its one large, "locker room style" washroom, and the study, which has been affectionately dubbed "the Wasaga Room."

While most would choose to locate the master at the tip of the L-shape for the best views, having a quiet retreat that can be enjoyed both day and night made more sense. And, in here, the expert craftsmanship brought to the project by young Jim Davies, site supervisor for contractor Porter Skelton and Associates, is on full view as well. Agathom, you see, loves to challenge builders with complex intersections between windows,

shelves, walls and built-ins. "If you botched it, it would be horrible, and it would show," Mr. Thom says. It doesn't show.

There's a window like that in the home's lovely kitchen, too: wedged between the drop-ceiling and a countertop, it even turns a corner. Sadly, there's too much going on in there right now – Mr. Arseneau is checking acorn squash in the oven, Mr. Daub is basting meat, Mr. Thom is opening a bottle of wine while doing a little jig and Ms. Thom is laughing her head off – for us to take a better look.

Oh, wait: This is the moment a house is born.