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Remodeling an Older Lake Home

With creativity, you can blend old features with new amenities

by Nancy Leasman

Many of us dream of owning a rustic little cabin on a secluded Minnesota lake. For some who are fortunate enough to find one, the rusticity, draftiness, inefficiency and poorly thought out floor plans may leave them scratching their heads. How can a seasonal kitchen be remodeled to accommodate year round living? What can be done about a porch on the wrong side of the structure? How is that mustiness eliminated? Though lingering odors may stimulate memories of last year's fish stories, most cabin

owners are more inclined to grab a can of air freshener than bask in the sentimental scents of last summer.

Richard Hardine of Infinity Design and Ringdahl Architects of Alexandria and Nisswa offer a creel full of ideas. Angling for solutions to moisture problems? Hardine suggests taking a look under the cabin. "Lots of old cabins were built with crawl spaces, on cement blocks or concrete slabs. Adding insulation in the crawl space controls cold air flow and reduces moisture," he says.

While mustiness is a relatively minor issue, what hooks most cabin owners on a more involved remodeling project is the reason they acquired the property: the lake.

"They want a better view of the lake," says Hardine. "Opening the spaces up, combining the kitchen and living areas, allows for better socialization and a better view. They want to walk in the door and see the lake."



Before and after photos provided by Ringdahl Architects, Inc.

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Making changes to the floor plan and traffic path not only makes the space more inviting, it adds value and equity. When the desire to alter the floor plan and add equity is combined with the need to upgrade old windows, wiring and plumbing, it's time to go for the gold and attack the project hook, line and sinker.

Finding an architectural firm with a boat load of experience may be the best route when the project is bigger than a guppy. Hardine's and Ringdahl's approach in working with cabin clients and any home owner looking to tackle a remodeling project is to listen, plan and listen some more.

They'll also ask lots of questions: What are the goals of the project? What are the needs now and in the future? What do you like? What fits your lifestyle? Are there constraints to the electrical or mechanical structure? How will the neighbors respond to your plan? What is the local building code concerning lakeshore property? What is the time frame? Do the plans fit within budget constraints? Can 3D modeling help visualize the project?

In fishing for the facts, the most important facet may be to know what local building codes will allow. These can vary from county to county, and some counties follow codes more strictly than others. A cabin owner who listens and cares about the structure, the site, the environment and the neighbors also will understand why the codes are in place. Architects who care about quality and their reputations understand the codes and make recommendations accordingly.

No one wants to get mired down in the dirty details. However, planning prevents problems, and when the road map is clear the creativity can begin. Whether working with the existing footprint, adding on or demolishing and building new, there's a sea full of creative options.

"About 60 percent of the time, existing features are incorporated into the project," says Hardine. He sug-

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gests using old sand window glass in new cabinets, re-using sections of wood floors in entry ways, salvaging trim and woodwork. Additions can feature new rafter tails, woodwork and other features that match the existing structure.

In Hardine's experience, about 20 percent of the time, after careful consideration, the decision is made to totally demolish the existing structure and build new. Even then, architectural details can be saved and incorporated into the new lake home. Other times, the existing structure can be sold and moved, generating enough to pay for the excavation and footings of the new home. "It could cost \$10,000 to \$20,000 to take it to

the dump. At least once a year I know of someone who buys an old house and moves it to their hunting land," says Hardine.

Whether remodeling or building

Adding closed-cell foam insulation tightens up drafty walls. Planning the orientation of a new structure or altering window locations allows for solar gain. If it's a seasonal home, consider low maintenance siding to minimize painting or staining duties during Minnesota's too-short summer.

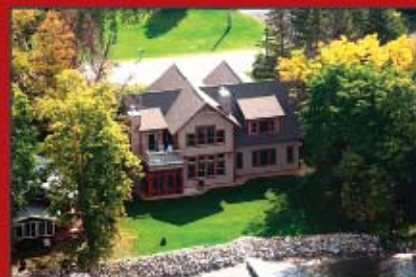
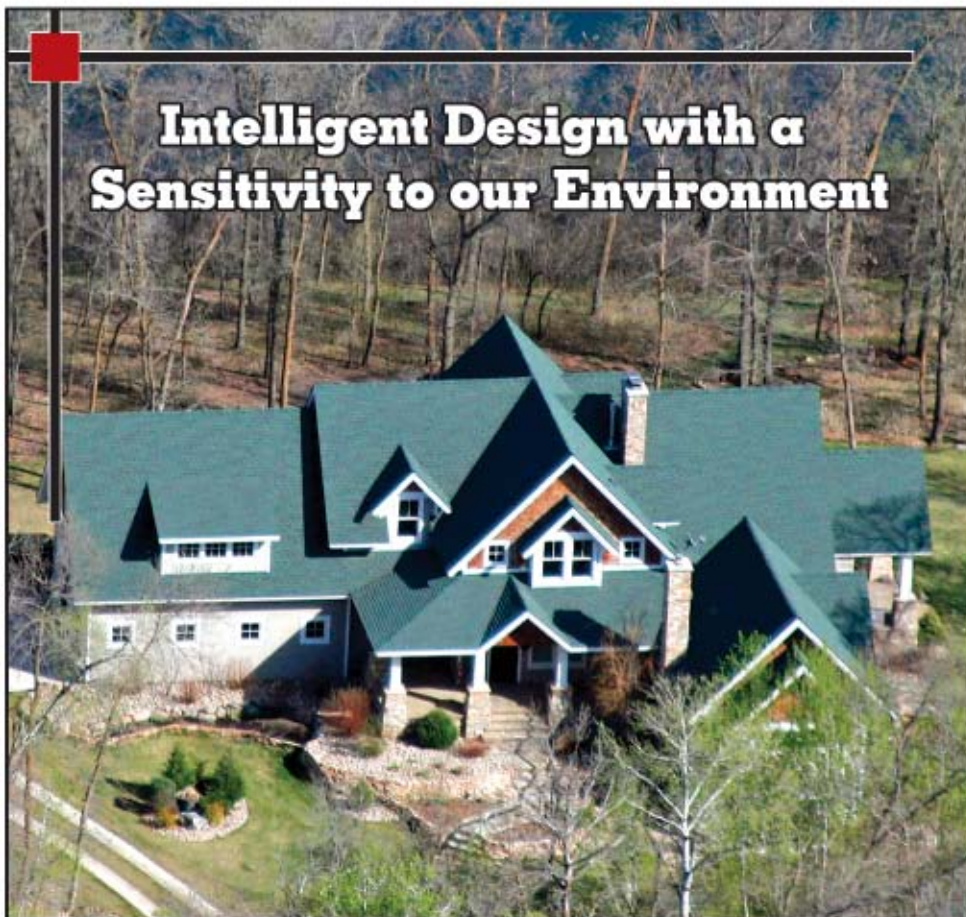
Regardless of the scope of your lake home venture, your architect and project manager should be able to suggest ways to orchestrate the work to allow on-going use during the construction phase so you can still have fun in the summer sun.

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new, home owners can incorporate energy efficiency into their plans. Perhaps a kitchen can be moved to take advantage of the morning sun.

Nancy Leasman is a writer from Long Prairie.

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