

The hills **ARE ALIVE**

A young Canadian family realised their dream home with a contemporary, Switzerland-inspired gem on a hillside in Ontario

Words Elizabeth Choppin **Photography** Shai Gil/Kriss Communications



AT A GLANCE

Name Jeff and Kara McIntosh

Location Clearview, Ontario

Property Timber-framed
new-build

Bedrooms 6 **Bathrooms** 3

Project started Autumn 2012

Project finished Autumn 2014

Size of house 660.5sqm

When Jeff McIntosh and his wife Kara first decided to build their perfect property, it was the dramatic landscape around their plot that influenced the direction that they took with the design. With the help of Atelier Kastelic Buffey, a local architecture practice, the couple has built an understated yet generously sized family home. It's located around 90 minutes' drive north-west of Toronto in Clearview Township, in the wilderness of the eastern side of the Niagara Escarpment. Nestled into a sloping ridge, the property is an eye-catching modern-day masterpiece with unfettered views of the boreal forest below and out towards Georgian Bay.

Before construction started, Jeff, who works in the building industry, Kara, an artist, and their three children spent a little time living in the original, existing house before it was torn down – this proved to be a major advantage in working out how the sun and wind moved across their 100-acre property. And as a result, one of the chief tenets of the architects' brief was to bring in as much sunlight as possible – not an easy achievement with a north-facing house – and to take a sensitive approach to the natural surroundings.

Atelier Kastelic Buffey's solution was to keep things simple with a linear wood-frame construction over two levels, incorporating expansive floor-to-ceiling windows

along the side overlooking the valley. Deeply recessed windows on the south side help keep the house cool in summer and warm in winter, says architect Kelly Buffey, and in a nod to local heritage the gabled form was inspired by the longhouse – one of the earliest types of permanent wood structure used in Ontario by European settlers and First Nations people.

Inside the property, a simple palette of white oak floors, whitewashed walls and local Ontario stone make for an earthy and contemporary aesthetic. Organised around a 'central elbow', or a slight bend in the line of the house, the ground floor is where the majority of communal living spaces are situated, plus two of the six bedrooms.

A spacious, bright kitchen, dining area and living room are the main family hubs and give a connected, open feeling throughout the house. 'We didn't want closed off rooms or that feeling of really long hallways,' says Kara. A cosy, screened-in porch leads out to the gardens, where the family grow their own vegetables.

Tucked away on the far east side of the ground floor is the master suite, including a den and study, which opens out to a secluded deck with hot tub, all of which was designed to give Jeff and Kara a bit of private space.

'We'd never lived in a contemporary house with clean lines and minimalist detail before,' explains Kara. 'I find that it gives you a brand-new energy: there is so much room →



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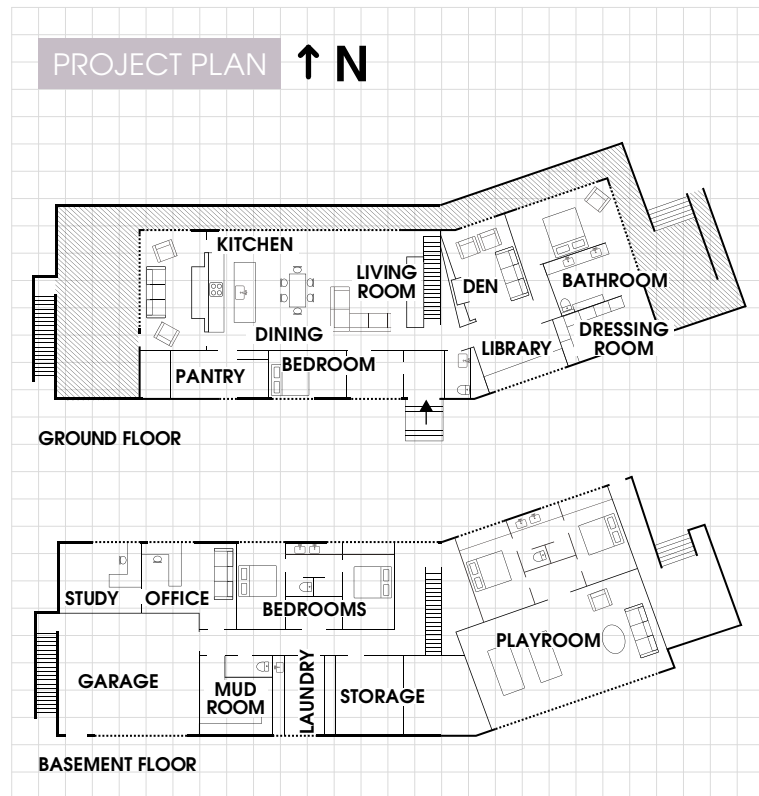
left The architects designed a custom light fixture for the kitchen, which is minimalist yet warm, with timber cabinetry

below Local Ontario stone has been used on fireplaces throughout the house, and paired with furnishings in muted tones

this picture The unique wood chandelier and antique furniture in the screened-in porch was brought in from the family's previous home

'There is so much room to breathe without all the clutter. It gives you a sense of quiet and calm'





right Floor-to-ceiling windows and slate floor tiles help to maintain a simple, earthy aesthetic

below Minimalist furniture and artwork ensure that nothing competes with the views from the master suite



this picture Atelier Kastelic Buffey worked with Toronto-based Lafabrika to achieve the clean-lined aesthetic of this ground-floor bathroom



to live and breathe without all the clutter. It really does give you a sense of quiet and calm,' she adds.

A staircase at the building's central elbow leads down to the children's and guest rooms, as well as a large play and recreation room, an office, an artist's studio, utility rooms and a garage.

There were more than a few hurdles faced from the outset – chief among them being that the McIntoshes moved to Switzerland for two years shortly after they bought the property. 'We met with the architects, gave them a brief before leaving, and they sent us drawings that we would comment on,' says Kara. 'It was quite collaborative, but as we were living away we couldn't meet face-to-face. However, because of their attention to detail and aesthetic sense, I knew it would be beautiful and functional. They listened to us,' she says. Throughout the process, Jeff visited the property every other month or two to oversee things. What's more, while abroad the couple found inspiration in the efficiency of Swiss architecture, which helped solve some design issues back home in Canada.

At the beginning, the plan was to build a detached annex for guests and grandparents, which would sit on top of a

garage. However, as the design developed it became too costly, and the idea was ruled out in favour of something Jeff and Kara had seen a lot of in Switzerland. By building into the ridge, the garage could fit underneath the house on the lower level. This allows easy access to the mud room that the family uses all year round, but which is particularly important during the winter months for taking off boots and coats and storing ski equipment, says Kara. In the end, the couple feels this new design works a lot better for their family.

In terms of the budget, the project more or less went along as planned, Jeff says, and it was down to being prepared and not rushing into things before they were ready. 'The contractor provided realistic allowances for every expense before we started. We went through several design changes and budget reviews to get what we wanted in terms of how the spaces worked and the energy efficiency of the home, and we actually delayed the start of the project by a year to ensure we had the best plan for us,' he explains.

Of course, there were a few surprises and additions to the budget as the development moved forward. The foundation costs went up because of unforeseen geotechnical →



this picture The house's exterior is clad with warm red cedar while windows are deeply recessed to protect from heavy snowfall in winter

conditions, which had to be dealt with properly. Also, an exterior glass railing cost more than expected, Jeff says, but it was a worthwhile investment. Another last-minute spike in the budget came with the decision to build additional exterior storage space, but it's proved invaluable for seasonal items that need to be tucked away for much of the year.

Savings were made as well, which balanced the overall costs. High-quality windows came in at a low price due to a sluggish European economy, says Jeff. A switch from zinc to a less-costly pre-weathered zinc composite on the roof saved cash, and the couple decided to reduce the stonework on fireplaces and opt for less-expensive carpeting and lighting in the kids' areas.

From start to finish in late 2014, the entire process took two years. Looking back, Jeff and Kara feel it went exceedingly well considering they were overseas for most of it. If they had to do it all over again it would be only very minor things that they'd tweak, now that they've lived in the house for more than a year.

All involved attribute the easy-going nature of the build to the contractor, Wilson Project Management. Atelier Kastelic Buffey had worked with them on several other houses in rural settings, and was confident that the firm would understand the level of detailing required to make the design work.

'Our home is incredible,' says Jeff. 'The materials, fit and finish perform very well to the rigours of everyday life. I look forward to waking up every morning before the rest of the family gets going, having a coffee and taking in both the view and design of the home. They work perfectly together.' **GD**



IN FOCUS

To achieve the effect of a stone interior wall without the cost or weight, try cladding panels made with thin stone tiles. Real Stone Cladding offers a range of stone and slate colours and shapes from £31 per sqm. (0131 331 5473; realstonecladding.co.uk)

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM

Architects Atelier Kastelic Buffey (+1 416 204 1331; akb.ca) **Engineer** Blackwell (+1 416 593 0215; blackwell.ca) **Construction manager** Wilson Project Management (+1 416 222 9433; wilsonproject.ca)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Windows and doors Protec (01376 334 655; protecwindows.com)

Kitchen and bathrooms Custom millwork designed by AKB, made by Lafabrika (+1 416 200 4544; lafabrika.ca)

Lighting Custom fixture above kitchen island designed by AKB, manufactured by Nelson & Garret (+1 416 463 0050; lightingnag.com) **Pendant light above dining table** David Weeks (+1 212 966 3433; davidweeksstudio.com)

Pendant light over staircase 4201 by Secto Design (+358 9 5050 598; sectodesign.fi)

Wood-burning fireplace Outdoor Lifestyles by Hearth & Home Technologies (hearthnhome.com)

Living-room fireplace Renaissance Rumford 1500 (+1 450 565 6336; renaissancefireplaces.com)

Gas fireplace in the library Montigo (montigo.com)

STYLE FINDER

Simple furniture and fabrics nod to Jeff and Kara's cosy style

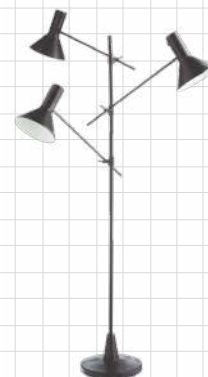
Compiled by *Emily Seymour*



Curved design Singapore armchair in rattan and nickel (H87xW69xD75cm), £227, Pols Potten at Made in Design (020 7692 4001; madeindesign.co.uk)



Scandi style Tile rug in wool in earth (H230xW160cm), £240, Linie Designs at Heal's (020 7896 7451; heals.com)



Tall story Nyx three-head floor lamp in metal in black (H170xDiameter25cm), £160, Habitat (0344 499 4686; habitat.co.uk)



Patterned fabric Textural Spectra cushion (H50xW50cm), £68, Anthropologie (00800 0026 8476; anthropologie.com)



Solid wood Accent coffee table in oak (H48xW150xD70cm), £964, Swedese at Utility Design (0151 708 4192; utilitydesign.co.uk)