

A home with a *View*, built with *Vision*

By *Charlie Davidson*

It was the look in John's eyes that told Irene this was the property they had been looking for.

John and Irene Wright were visiting friends in Muskoka, and had been looking for just the right cottage for a number of years. At their friend's suggestion, the Wrights toured Woodland Heights, a luxurious development in the hills east of Huntsville. "We drove up to the top of the hill here, and John's eyes just went wide," Irene said. "He said 'Look at this gorgeous view! I think we should buy this.'"

It wasn't the cabin by the lake the couple had been thinking of, but it's

easy to see why John fell in love with the site. One of the highest sites on the property, it has a commanding view of the surrounding forest, a vista that begins with a sea of seemingly unbroken treetops, leads to the shimmering waters of Peninsula Lake a kilometre or so away, and takes in a canopy of forested highlands stretching beyond that.

The couple quickly bought the lot, then began planning a house that would take full advantage of the view. For two years they took regular trips to the lot, measuring and staking out rooms, and even using a ladder to climb up trees so they could examine the view from various second floor vantage points. They took some teasing from friends and family. "They'd say 'oh you're going to visit your lot again? Do you think it will have changed since last week?'" Irene said.

But John, who has a degree in landscape architecture, said the process is important. "You look at it from all angles, at all times of day and all times of year, and the design will tell you what it wants to be," he said.

The results speak for themselves. The Wright's home is simply breathtaking, with a design that takes complete advantage of the stunning view. A wall of windows dominates the open concept main floor, the lush green foliage complemented by the pale green walls and natural pine trim. A deck runs the length of the house, edged with tempered glass panels instead of spindles so that the view is preserved.

"Our philosophy was to bring the outdoors in," said Irene.

The basic design was inspired by

homes in the Rockies, which often feature walls of windows to take in the sweeping view. The initial vision came from the Wrights, but the details that make it work were achieved through numerous discussions with the design team at Woodland Heights. "Everyone has been amazing," said Irene. Sometimes it was just a matter of simple suggestions. The original design called for triangular windows on the second floor, to follow the line of the roof. Then designer Jim Fox pointed out that trapezoids could follow the same line, but allow several additional square feet of window.

Interior designer Caroline Vink provided many excellent design ideas. Construction manager Roy Vanduzen ensured the house was finished to the original design intent. People on staff who had no direct connection with the Wright's home provided useful suggestions too. Nina, one of the sales staff, advised painting a large piece of drywall, and walking around the site with it to ensure the colour was right. The Wrights followed her advice, and

found the colour they had chosen looked yellow once it was seen against the green foliage.

That kind of involvement from the staff at Woodland Heights impressed the Wrights. "It's a real family feeling here," said Irene, noting that they have become friends with a number of the people who worked on the house.

On their frequent visits to the site, the couple also began to realize how much of a gem the Huntsville area is. There are countless kilometres of hiking and biking trails in the area, including some that run through the Nature Sanctuary set aside by the Woodland Heights developers. There are theatres, restaurants and art galleries within minutes of their home, and of course there is an endless number of lakes. "I have the boat on a trailer, and I can just pick a lake and go," said John, showing off a pair of large lake trout he'd just caught in Lake of Bays.

"When we started touring the area, we said 'this is such a beautiful place,'" said Irene.

"Never mind vacationing here, it would be a great place to live!"

