



RESTORING THE

Old Caledon Ski

By Dan O'Reilly ■ Photos by Mike Davis



◀ The original ski cabin of the Caledon Ski Club is being restored to heritage guidelines, by the owners David and Tina Reale.

Club Cabin



▼ David and Tina Reale at home.

◀ The living area of the cabin. One of the stones in the fireplace is a meteorite. Restoration is a work in progress; some changes have been made to this fireplace since this photograph was taken.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT designer David Reale vividly remembers the day he showed his wife Tina the old and rather rundown log house in north Caledon he wanted to purchase.

“I had to prove to her it could be a beautiful home. We have been married for 32 years and it has been 32 years of renovations,” he says in a reference to both her skepticism and the number of city houses they have purchased and renovated during their marriage.

This house was and is different and its eventual

purchase and restoration by the couple is a story of vision and passion converging and meshing with historical preservation and measures to protect the Niagara Escarpment.

Located off a busy highway, it was built sometime in the early to mid-1930s and was the original ski cabin of the Caledon Ski Club at the Forks of the Credit about six km away. In the early 1960s it was relocated and reassembled on a foundation on its present site.

Reale was unaware of that history when he drove by about 2 ½ years ago and

saw a For Sale sign. He took a look and fell in love in the 3.5- acre property.

“My idea was that we could purchase the property and live in the house while I built an ultra-modern house. I love modern design. Later we could perhaps tear down the cabin.”

But there was a snag which he soon discovered. Under the Niagara Escarpment Plan, single dwellings are limited to one per lot in the Escarpment Natural, Escarpment Protection and Escarpment Rural Area designations. There are, however, exemptions to that stipulation such as

the one which may allow a second home if the existing one has been designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Caledon Heritage

A Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) planner brought that pertinent information to his attention during a telephone conversation during which David mentioned the cabin’s history. Later he faxed a copy of the listing to the planner, who told him to contact the Town of Caledon’s heritage department.

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▲ The original entrance door to the old ski cabin is now used as a bedroom door.



▲ The luxurious bathtub tucked into a corner of the log cabin.



▲ David made the sliding door to their daughter's bedroom, out of reclaimed barn board. On the right, he made a wall out of end cuts left over from another project.



▲ The round log construction with logs exposed inside and out helped the cabin be designated as a heritage structure.



▲ David Reale, an industrial designer, made this chandelier out of Mason jars and lids.

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“Sally was quite interested,” says Reale, referring to Caledon heritage resource officer Sally Drummond, who organized an exploratory site visit by the town’s heritage committee which is comprised of volunteers.

At this point David hadn’t even purchased the property and was in somewhat of a Catch 22 situation. He couldn’t get the house designated until after it was purchased and there was no guarantee it would be designated. Or that the NEC would approve a second dwelling, even if designation was achieved. A real estate agent friend advised him to walk away from the property. Then there were his wife’s misgivings.

“I knew it would need a lot of work,” says Tina, a special needs teacher’s assistant.

Still, the couple took the plunge and purchased the house in August 2013. Shortly after taking possession, they submitted a designation request to the town. That necessitated a second visit by the heritage committee in the winter of 2014 and a heritage assessment study by Su Murdoch Historical Consulting.

In addition to pursuing designation, David embarked on an extensive interior restoration and repair. The challenge was not to alter the elements that made the house worthy of designation in the first place, he says. “It (the restoration) had to be done in accordance with the heritage guidelines.”

A Lot of Work

Some of the work included the installation of a new heritage-style basement staircase banister, laying new pine floors over the existing ones, and removing a barn board wall which divided the cabin in half. Some of the barn board was recycled for the construction of a sliding door on his daughter’s adjacent bedroom. Recycled wood was also used to re-erect a partial wall, allowing for a wide spacious connection between the kitchen and the family room.

“One hundred thousand dollars’ worth of work has gone into this house and I have done most of that myself,” he says.

But there were repairs he didn’t expect and couldn’t tackle such as the need for an entirely new electrical system. Tina’s predictions about the house needing work were further borne out during last year’s harsh winter when snow seeped through the roof and onto the kitchen floor.

In the spring, however, town council formally approved the heritage committee’s recommendation the cabin be designated. Citing the construction method of using round logs, with the logs exposed on the interior and exterior, the consultants’ study noted “The cabin has a cultural association with the important recreational activity of skiing in Caledon.”

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▲ David also made this ceiling light out of various orbs he had collected over the years. “These were ornamental orbs out of glass, metal, straw and driftwood that I had to put holes in and convert to fixtures,” he explains.

▼ During the Ice Storm and harsh temperatures of last winter, the roof leaked. The plan is to replace the metal roof with cedar shakes.



“I am a born-again heritage enthusiast. Restoring the cabin has helped me recognize the beauty of heritage houses.”

“A three-point criterion under a section of the Ontario Heritage Act for determining ‘cultural heritage value or interest,’ is used by the town when assessing whether a property warrants designation,” says Caledon’s Sally Drummond.

There are a number of designated properties in Caledon within the Niagara Escarpment Plan area. To date, five property owners have made use of, or intend to make use of the second dwelling policy, she says.

“The NEP’s second dwelling policy, which requires the heritage designation of the property’s existing dwelling, is an important planning tool in encouraging the retention and preservation of local heritage features,” says Drummond.

But there “are a lot of grey areas” and the owners of properties that have been designated by their local municipality shouldn’t expect they will automatically receive approval to build a second dwelling, cautions NEC planner Michael Baran. All the NEC’s regulations would have

to be met and the development application scrutinized and subject to a “fulsome review. It’s not a slam dunk.”

Those conditions are readily acknowledged by David Reale. “I understand there are many more hurdles. But I truly believe we can meet the NEC’s strict requirements and guidelines for a second dwelling.”

But that is a project for the future, if and when, that approval is obtained. For now, the focus is continuing the restoration of the cabin including removing the tin roof and replacing it with cedar shakes. Although it would be conditional on the Caledon Heritage Committee’s approval, he also plans to design, build, and install five heritage-style heritage windows.

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Dan O’Reilly is a Caledon-based freelance writer and contributor to Niagara Escarpment Views. His last article was “How to Stop The Quarry” in Spring 2013.