

HOME OF THE WEEK

A couple honours the architectural history of their home while adding a few contemporary touches ■ H5

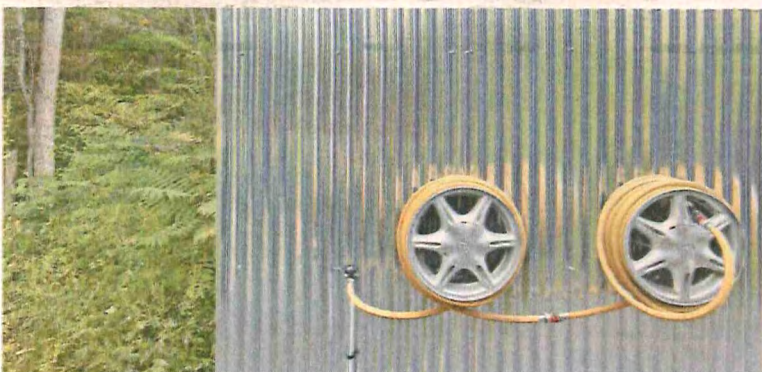


BRITISH COLUMBIA

Renters and other full-time residents in Whistler are feeling the housing crunch ■ H3

MONTREAL

A legal battle brews over an owner's occupancy of Ernest Cormier's onetime studio ■ H9



SLOW AND STEALTHY IN THE COUNTY

A time-consuming, hands-on approach results in a striking Ontario rural home

■ H4

Gary Ridge pretty much built the house himself, from constructing the kitchen to pouring concrete for the pillars on which the house sits.
PHOTOS BY TOM RIDOUT/INDUSTRIOUS PHOTOGRAPHY



Gary and Carol Ridge's shy personalities are reflected in the design of their house, which sits over a meadow and so far below the tree line that it almost disappears into the shadows. The black cladding on the house and most of the two 'outbuildings' helps them blend into the landscape. TOM RIDOUT/INDUSTRIOUS PHOTOGRAPHY

A striking house sinks into the shadows in Prince Edward County

DAVE
LeBLANC
ARCHITOURIST



CARRYING PLACE, ONT.

You've no doubt heard of the "iron triangle" of project management? Each point is labelled "good," "fast" and "cheap," but you only get to pick two: Fast and cheap can't be good; cheap and good won't be fast; and fast and good certainly won't be cheap.

This applies to home construction also. This is why it took so very, very long for Carol and Gary Ridge to settle into their striking, black-metal-clad home a stone's throw from the canal in Carrying Place, Ont. It was cheap, but it is oh so good.

Great, even.

Sitting on pilonis over a meadow – actually, it became a meadow only after trees and bramble were removed – the Ridge residence hunkers so far below Prince Edward County's tree line, it almost disappears into the shadows. Its stealth, however, is betrayed by pops of burnt orange, lime green and deep violet, and a few walls with a lean so extreme it looks as if the architect sneezed while mousing in AutoCAD and didn't bother correcting the mistake.

That lean, however, comes from the very steady and talented hand of Hamilton-based architect Bill Curran of Thier + Curran Architects, and it does serve a purpose: The "wedge" shape acts as the perfect shade to keep things cool in summer, yet allow heat inside in winter. Plus, it reminds Mr. Ridge of the farm buildings of his youth.

The idea for the bold accent colours, also Mr. Curran's idea, were inspired by muscle cars and stock cars of the 1960s and early 70s – Dodge Challengers, Ford Mustangs, Plymouth Road Runners – even though Mr. Ridge, 66, owned a Beetle back then.

"I ended up with an Empi Volkswagen," Mr. Ridge corrected, thinking back to his modified VW, "which could beat a Chevrolet – it was fast."

What wasn't fast was the process of building the home the Ridges have now retired into. That's because Mr. Ridge, a renaissance man if there ever was one, pretty much built the place himself.

"Every nail and screw, if he didn't put it in, he had an eye on it and directed it," Mr. Curran said. "You talk about that cliché, 'labour of love.'"

And that labour all started with a stepladder, Mr. Ridge said.

"So we got here, we put a stepladder right in the middle of the lot, I climbed it to see what I would see, and when I got up as high as I wanted to get – we decided it was okay with the boats going – I said, 'Okay, this is where we put the house.'"

The one-hectare lot was purchased toward the end of 2014, a year after Ms. Ridge retired; by November, the couple e-mailed Mr. Curran – an architect Ms. Ridge had worked with while an administrator at McMaster Family Practice – with images of Todd

Hunkering far below the tree line, the Ridge house's stealth is betrayed by pops of bright colours and extreme angles



Architect Bill Curran designed the structures on the property of Gary and Carol Ridge, top, with an extreme lean to act as the perfect shade to keep things cool in summer, yet allow heat inside in winter, while Mr. Ridge built the kitchen himself. TOP: DAVE LEBLANC; OTHERS: TOM RIDOUT/INDUSTRIOUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Saunders's Fogo Island Studios and Clear Lake Cottage by MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects, and these words: "1,000 square feet, one level, open concept, lots of glass and light."

To that, they added: "Excited by unusual building materials and fixtures."

By December, they'd met with Mr. Curran in person, and closed on the lot (\$78,000). Preliminary plans would arrive by January, 2015, so the couple moved into a rental house in nearby Concession. In early spring, they were selling their Hamilton home, experimenting with the best way to remove trees at the new place, and receiving final plans from Mr. Curran, who says that the couple were "very respectful" of the architect's role.

While shovels would finally hit the ground in April, they wouldn't move into their 1,400-square-foot home until November. Even then, they'd use a temporary kitchen in their mudroom for more than a year – during this time, two "outbuildings" were built, an enclosed porch called the Haven and a tall building called the Lab – while Mr. Ridge built their real kitchen in his new garage and sprayed everything in a temporary spray booth.

"And when you look at the quality of the work, it's pretty astounding," offered Mr. Curran, who pointed out that his client also learned how to pour the concrete columns that hold the house up and over the potentially "soggy and boggy" site (the site is lower than the road and has the potential to flood).

The couple would take a break for eight months in 2017 while Mr. Ridge turned his focus to making jams and hot sauces for farmer's markets under the 3 Angry Cats label; he'd do this inside the aluminum-clad Lab, which will also be where Mr. Ridge tries his hand at a few towering sculptural pieces for the property.

At the end of 2017, Mr. Ridge would pick up his tools again (it should be noted here that "back in the day," Mr. Ridge built 25 to 30 houses) and work until the present day getting interiors finished.

Dedicating four years to a project isn't strange if you know a little bit about the sixtiesomething Ridges, who describe themselves as being "a bit shy" as well as architecture buffs: "When we were first married, our friends would be going out drinking and partying and we'd be, like, let's take that drive again down to Stelco to look around and see them making steel," Ms. Ridge explained with a laugh. "We'd rather do that."

That shyness, Mr. Curran added, informed their choice of black cladding. Black, as well as being cool, is the same colour as moose and bear, creatures that can "disappear into the woods."

"You'd think black would be a very forward colour," but "the woods aren't just green, they're green and black."

With those pops of muscle-car colours and the still-waters-run-deep personalities behind those walls, this cheap and cheerful house is anything but a shrinking violet.