



GILBERT + BURKETM

DESIGN / BUILD / REMODEL

A Canadian Cottager's Guide to Vintage Remodelling

Professional advice you need to know
before renovating a vintage cottage

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Introduction



Cottaging is the Canadian Dream

It's no secret that Canadians invest in cottage life. Over the years, the cottage industry in Canada has seen periods of ebb and flow, but in recent times, the cottage real estate market country wide is showing signs of major boom.

The results of the 2015 RE/MAX Recreational Property Report reported that 68% of Canadians would rather spend a long weekend in a cottage than any other kind of getaway (that includes flying overseas).

In another survey, 21% of people would even consider downsizing their house to have the spare means to purchase or renovate a recreational property. It's a large investment, but it seems to many home and cottage owners that the benefits of cottage living outweigh the cost.

However, the investment for a renovation of an aging or vintage cottage can be substantial. Design-Build professionals that specialize in old cottage remodelling projects know what it takes to turn a place you've enjoyed for years into your dream cottage, suitable for future enjoyment as a family retreat or retirement destination. From an investment standpoint, to design considerations and maximizing an existing location and character—this ebook looks at the realities of how a successful renovation can make an old cottage, new again.



First things
first: Short and
long-term goals

Before you make an investment on a major remodelling project, it's important to determine the primary use (short and long term) for your cottage. Ask yourself...

Is it a family getaway destination?

If you are planning on taking your young family up to the cottage for vacation during the summertime, the cottage should have access to activities and amenities that suit. You might need to consider building a deck or dock, or stairs down to the water for canoeing, swimming, fishing trips, etc. Make sure the space suits the function. You'll want large open areas inside the cottage for the entire family to enjoy together. If you're hosting family and friends, you'll want to create

a space that's accommodating for large groups (the kitchen, bedrooms, and common rooms are where to focus your attention indoors). You'll likely spend ample amount of time outdoors so invest in exterior or landscape projects, like gazebos, decks and porches, gardens and/or pools.

Is it a retirement dream?

A vacation property that will double as, or eventually turn into, a retirement retreat needs to have easy access to amenities, like grocery and retail stores, gas stations, hardware, restaurants and hospitals. Location, location, location! Keep that in mind as if you're looking for a vintage cottage to remodel. Then turn your attention indoors and create the kind of space that will be tranquil, comfortable and easy to maintain. Look ahead, consider remodelling a cottage that doesn't have a lot of stairs, a basement

or an attic. Consider showers instead of bathtubs for future accessibility, and wider doorways to accommodate optimal mobility. You may be close to water, but consider building an overlooking deck, porch or balcony so that you can enjoy the scenery passively. Find ways to take in the outdoors without having to exhaust yourself with activities. Features like fireplaces, wall windows, skylights, a walk out deck/patio will give you the indoor/outdoor cottage feeling without the physical strain.

Reno vs Rebuild Checklist





Many cottage-owners have an old (or aging) cottage, and are faced with the choice to rebuild or remodel. Professionals know how to assess “the bones” of an existing cottage, and how to come up with the right solution. And while it’s extremely important to get a qualified and professional opinion, we want to put some power in the hands of the cottage owner.

Here’s a simple checklist designed to help you look for the primary elements that go into making the decision to remodel or rebuild.

Section 1:

Cottage goals and vision

Will this cottage be used year round?

Yes

No

Does your existing cottage have emotional, sentimental or historical value to you and/or your family?

Yes

No

Do you like the location of your cottage?

Yes

No

Do you plan on keeping the footprint of the cottage the same?

Yes

No

Section 2:

Check "the bones"

Is the foundation frost protected around the entire perimeter of the building?

Yes

No

Are the floors level?

Yes

No

Are you happy with the current floorplan without major layout changes?

Yes

No

Is the roof in good condition (not caving, or in need of re-enforcing)?

Yes

No

Are the ceiling heights to standard (8')?

Yes

No

Are the walls free from signs of rot or mold?

Yes

No

Are you confident the structure is well built and sound?

Yes

No

Section 3:

Environmental and location considerations

Are there strict zoning restrictions in your area?

Yes

No

Was the cottage built with energy efficient wiring, plumbing, insulation and best practices in place?

Yes

No

Has the energy efficiency of the cottage been updated in the past 10 years?

Yes

No

Are there environmental/health concerns that you are aware of? (i.e. setbacks from waterfront, septic systems, septic systems close to wells, etc?)

Yes

No

What do your results say?

MORE 'YES'S THAN 'NO'S: REMODEL

From your results, it appears that you may be leaning towards a cottage remodel. Cottage owners who are working with good structural bones, in a location they love, feel a sentimental or historic attachment to, or are restrained by local zoning or environmental considerations, are more likely in a position to refresh vs redo.

Your next step is to get a professional opinion.


Talk to a design-builder with expertise in cottage remodeling that can provide a vision and a plan for achieving the cottage of your dreams.

MORE 'NO'S THAN 'YES'S: REBUILD

Your results show that a rebuild may be required. Typically, if an aging cottage hasn't maintained strong structural elements (such as framing, roofing, or foundation) the choice to rebuild is safer, and provides more longevity for its use. Any time major changes to structure, floor plan/layout, or critical utilities are in order, it's usually a sign the cottage needs to start fresh from the ground up.

Your next step is to get a professional opinion.

Talk to a design-builder with expertise in new cottage builds that can provide a vision and a plan for building the cottage of your dreams.

A large, modern wooden house with a curved roof and a deck on a lake. The house features a prominent arched window and a balcony. The deck is furnished with several chairs and a lounge chair. The water in the foreground reflects the house and the sky. The sky is filled with large, white clouds.

The differences
between a home
and cottage
renovation

Cottage renovations come with their own (highly specific) set of considerations, implications and factors that affect the final outcome. It's important for cottage owners to know the differences between a home reno versus a cottage reno, because they will ultimately have an impact on timelines, budget, and even design decisions.

Here are some of the key differences in approaching a cottage remodelling project:

Access to the property:

Often, construction is affected by the environmental and infrastructure complexities where the cottage is located. The crew may need to source highly specialized equipment (such as cranes, or heavy-duty machinery) to mitigate challenging terrain or access points. For example, if the cottage sits on an island, barging and water transportation solutions will need to be considered.

The elements:

An older cottage will have been plagued by the wear and tear of a remote setting. Consider the effect of years of erosion, trees falling or roots spreading, and extreme weather conditions of locations close to bodies of water will have on the structure and overall 'health' of the cottage.



Restrictions:

Do some research into the natural and government imposed restrictions your renovation might face. You may not be able to build an addition if the setback from the water won't accommodate it. The local building codes, or zoning laws will enforce strict guidelines on whether you can build vertically, use particular construction methods or materials, or add more square footage to your existing cottage.


A cottage remodelling project is also faced with different issues.

You should assess the following to avoid surprises:

- Rotting or moldy wood, rusty pipes
- Infestation damage
- Poor electrical wiring and plumbing
- The age of the structure
- The level of upkeep/maintenance and upgrades over the years

It's important for you to know and understand what can impact your remodelling project, but also, it's incredibly worthwhile to hire a design builder that specializes in cottage remodelling. As you can see, there are ins-and-outs that can add time, budget and complexity to a cottage renovation. A professional will know what to look for, and be able to navigate the issues if they arise.





The challenge
of making an
old cottage
new again

One of the primary reasons to invest in a cottage remodelling project is to bring an old or aging structure up to today's standards for energy efficiency, longevity and even style or design. It can be a challenge working within an existing space, but professionals with experience remodelling historic properties know how to navigate these intricacies.

Here are a few tips we suggest that will help to make your old cottage new again:

Energy efficiency

Lighting and electrical is an important update to make in an aging cottage. Replacing traditional incandescent bulbs with LED or compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) and adding lighting controls to moderate the amount of lighting in each room will reduce consumption and wasted energy exponentially.

Heat distribution and proper insulation is probably one of the most common and most critical upgrade older cottages require. Building codes, regulations, materials and trends have changed drastically over the years. Older homes and cottages in particular tend not to have much (or the right amount or type of) insulation in walls, and around windows and doors. Heating and cooling of the home can account for approximately 40%-70% of energy consumption.

It's typical for about 25% heat to be lost through the roof, 35% through the walls, 15% through the floor and 25% from windows and draughts. Thus, those are the focus areas for a remodelling project that aims to create a more energy efficient space.

Out of date appliances are also major contributors to a home's overall efficiency. Appliance efficiency has come a long way, even in the past decade. When remodelling a cottage, take the opportunity to update all appliances from fridges and stoves, to hot water systems and washer/dryers.



Style and design

The most obvious way to turn an older cottage new again, is to make aesthetic changes to its design and style. The tricky part in any overhaul of your cottage's design, is striking the right combination of old and new styles in an existing space.

A balance can be achieved with the use of mixed materials, colour palettes and even floor plan layout.

Mixing materials like stainless steel and earthy wood grains or stone will nicely bring balance to a cottage with old and natural charm that needs a modern boost. Colour palette packs a larger punch than one might think. An accent wall in a bold colour, or a fresh coat of paint in every room will immediately update your interior. Lastly, a remodel where the floor plan changes—perhaps to remove walls and open up the space—will feel more modern, as open concepts have become the preferred interior aesthetic.

Bringing the
outdoors in



The primary draw of cottage living is escaping to the great outdoors and enjoying everything nature has to offer.

That's why a large design consideration for cottage remodelling projects is creating a space that embraces its natural setting—bringing the outdoors in as much as possible. It's certainly one of the most popular cottage renovation trends in this part of the world, where appreciation for the natural beauty of the environment and the sun are common characteristics. Here are a few ways that the design for a space can allow for full enjoyment of natural light and beauty.



Muskoka rooms

Perhaps most common in cottages, a Muskoka room (or sunroom) is a space defined by its large—often floor to ceiling—windows that let in streams of sunlight, and ideally, a panoramic view of its environment (urban, suburban or rural).

It's important to plan the optimal placement of a Muskoka room in your home or cottage, because the goal is to bring in the most amount of sunlight all day long. So work with your design and builder to customize your plans for room shape, dimensions and windows to make the most of your room with a view.

The decisions you make for the interior of the room, will also enhance the "indoor/outdoor" feeling. For example, choose materials that harmonize with the setting. Consider using a mix of materials, like stone, wood, metals like tin or copper, and varieties of glass.

Screened porches

The draw of screening in a section of a porch or deck, is that you don't miss out on the benefits of being outdoors, yet it allows you to escape the elements of nature that are less than comfortable, like bugs, or inclement weather.

There are ways to customize a screened space to fit your design preferences and natural environment. Choose materials that are consistent with the style of your indoor space and create a balance with your outdoor setting. For example, use wood frames around the screens instead of plastic or metal, or source local stone and raw materials for an accent wall, outdoor fireplace or deck material.

Blog

Window walls

Instantly open up a room by replacing the walls with floor to ceiling glass window. This has become a highly popular trend in cottage remodel design, especially for homes with naturally beautiful views.

For example, cottages overlooking crystal clear lakes, homes with backyard escapes, or rooms with a view. Large picture windows are a modern and functional choice for this style because they will let in the most natural light, unimpeded by frames.

Folding glass walls have the same bright and airy effect, but have the functionality to slide or lift open giving you direct access to an outdoor space, or interior enclosure. This style would be ideal for pool rooms or entries to a deck, patio or courtyard.

A photograph of a modern, two-story house with grey horizontal siding and light-colored wood accents. The house features a prominent gable roof with a large window in the gable. Below the gable, there are two arched glass doors with wooden frames. A wooden deck runs along the side of the house, and a concrete dock extends into a calm lake. In the background, there is a dense forest of green trees. The sky is bright and clear. A dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "Getting started: Next steps" in a light yellow font. The text is underlined with thin yellow lines.

Getting started:
Next steps

1
—

Find the diamond in the rough

That is, if you don't already own a vintage cottage. Keep your short and long term goals for the property at the fore as you make your selection. Location is important, but also the structural 'bones' and how it will function for you and your family.

2
—

Get a professional assessment

We've determined that there are often hidden concerns behind the walls of an aging cottage. A professional will give you the full, honest picture to help you budget for your remodelling project.

3
—

Design to suit

Your lifestyle and primary goals for the property should determine the majority of your design decisions.

4
—

A professional by any other name...

Do your research. Find a design-build professional that has experience or a specialization in vintage cottage renovations. There are complexities unique to these types of property and you'll want someone with exclusive expertise navigating the problems as they arise.

About Gilbert and Burke

The signature of excellence

Gilbert + Burke is an industry leading design-build firm known for signature designs and distinguished excellence. Recognized for consistently delivering flawless communication and impeccable project management, alongside an award-winning cast of designers, artisans, and craftsmen, make Gilbert + Burke the go-to choice for discerning clientele seeking to create elite lifestyle spaces. Gilbert + Burke's design, build and remodelling services have been highly sought after in the cottage country hot spots of the Muskokas, Kawartha Lakes, and in areas spanning the GTA for over a decade.

Gilbert + Burke is registered with Tarion, with certification in Energy Star home building, and is a member of the Canadian Home Building Association, Renomark, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Kawartha Lakes and Orillia Chambers of Commerce.

Learn more about **Gilbert + Burke**, and see our portfolio of remodelling work at

www.gilbertburke.ca



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