

Shuswap Cabin's deft and generous use of wood garnered a Residential Wood Design Award from the Canadian Wood Council.



# The rough with the smooth

Nigel Parish of Vancouver-based Splyce Design takes the idea of the cabin – close to the ground, in tune with the elements – to a refined new level.

—By Adele Weder

In the living-dining area, the wood millwork and post-and-beam framework are offset by an urbane polished-concrete floor and slate-tile fireplace. When the sliding doors are open, the inside-outside barrier almost vanishes.



Once, a cabin was – by definition – a rough and simple wooden dwelling, the Thoreau-esque hole-in-the-universe where urbanites would flee for a cursory escape from the world. These days, the cabin still serves as breakout room, but the design brief is much more ambitiously refined. Even the fact that a cabin would *have* a designer suggests we're not in Walden Pond anymore.

Nestled in the heart of the Okanagan, the lakefront Shuswap Cabin was designed by Nigel Parish, principal of Splyce Design. The Vancouver-based Parish sees this project as an urban house transplanted to Shuswap, with all necessary adaptive features. The clients had originally considered a two-storey structure, for instance, but Parish persuaded them to harness “the luxury of a broad site.” The idea of the

cabin – whether rustic or refined – is to be close to the foliage, the rockery, the water. A second storey in the city can add views or extra square footage – but out in rural Okanagan, a single storey generously provides for both. “It was literally about being grounded,” says Parish. “Going up two levels, you’re just removing yourself.”

The front facade is inscrutable: a hybrid of cedar cladding and powdercoated



aluminum, it conveys protection more than welcome. The sole architectural gesture of invitation is its front entry. Here, the transparent glass front door generates a sightline clear through the house, through the glazed foyer back wall, to the swathe of lake water that lies beyond.

Inside, the material palette is comprised of what we collectively once thought of as “city” stuff: polished concrete, felt uphol-

stery, stainless-steel appliances, translucent cupboard doors, and sleek white and cherry-wood-veneered cabinetry fitted flush into the walls. But a kind of atavistic rusticity is there too, in its open post-and-beam construction and indoor-outdoor ambiguity. The massive glulam posts supporting the structure allow for the remarkable sliding-door system.

The vast expanse of glazing creates a

heart-stopping view and a terrific party backdrop. “It’s meant to be a pavilion for the experience of the setting,” says Parish. “To me, the refinement of the interior places more emphasis on the view.” It sounds contradictory, but in certain ways, it’s tenable: the huge German-manufactured glass doors of the living-dining area are very urbane. Yet when you slide them open, the sense of being “indoors”

**Below left** The sleek open-galley kitchen descends to the dining area. **Below right** Tucked away in the intimate west wing of the cabin, the master bathroom is infused with light and strategic views. **Opposite** The copiously glazed lakeside facade of the cabin glows at night.



vanishes and you feel almost outdoors. I say “almost” because as soon as those sliding doors open partway, one feels an urge to kick away the supporting posts, too, for a truly unfettered view. As it stands, we content ourselves with a Miesian “almost nothing.”

What energizes the Shuswap Cabin is its trapezoidal plan, generated by an oblique lot line on the east side, and a wise

inclination to avoid the static formality of a shoebox form. Parish chose to cant the eastern wall both to follow the lot line and in order to maximize the view. That oblique line is echoed in the patio wall, which fans out to an expansive lake view from the front foyer, in the process generating a series of triangular niches into which you can squirrel away, in tribute to the original purpose of a cabin.

Inside, the post-and-beam framework is visible and would be rather overbearing if not for a number of leavening gestures. First, the ceiling joists sit right on top of the supporting beams, generating the uncanny feeling that one could simply life the roof right off of the framework. Second, the roofline inflects upwards toward the fireplace, making the whole ceiling appear as it could take flight. Finally, the whole



interplay of wall and floor is lightened by a continuous and universal series of reveals. The white walls, the concrete plinth of the fireplace and even the massive glulam posts seem to graze one another lightly.

What, then, is the purpose of such a finely wrought structure? Definitely not to rough it or seek out one's inner Luddite. The clients and owners are not, in fact, using this place as a weekend get-

away (it's too far from their Vancouver-area home). Instead, they spend weeks at a time here, conducting their business and personal lives within the ether, basing their family gatherings and entertaining here. This makes refinement logical rather than gratuitous.

In keeping with a secondary-going-on-primary residence, the Shuswap Cabin is all-season and all-hours. Every region of

the structure is infused with natural light, even during a mid-afternoon drizzle. Hours later, the setting sun sends the light scudding across the polished concrete, like a warm-up act to the evening's entertaining. As night falls, a series of pot lights and LED footlights illuminate cupboards' translucent doors. The scheme conveys the cool of a city soir ee, and the warmth of a camp-side fire. ◻