

Beacon Shore on

Georgian Bay

PHOTO COURTESY OF JACQUIE BLACK

It's an idyllic waterfront acreage, with wooded, trillium-lined trails, visiting deer that munch on the tulips, even its own small lighthouse. Indoors and out, the owners savour their special relationship with nature. BY M. CAROLYN BLACK

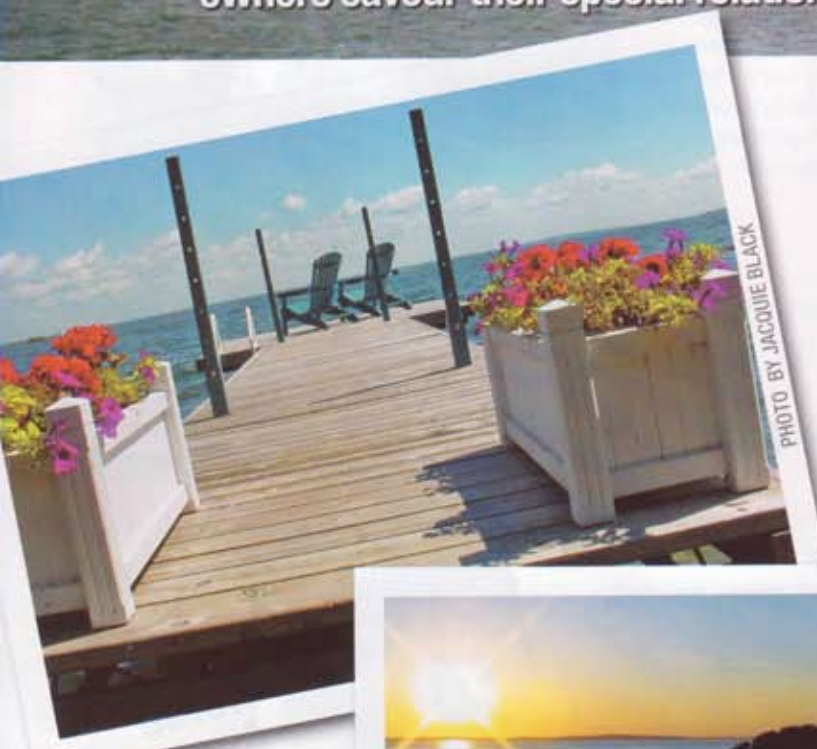


PHOTO BY JACQUIE BLACK

ABOVE: The dock offers a panoramic view of some of Georgian Bay's 30,000 islands. Purple Wave petunias and red geraniums spill from the planters.

RIGHT: Jacquie enjoys kayaking at daybreak.



PHOTO BY ROBERT BLACK

IT IS STILL DARK in the kitchen when the coffeepot begins its whispering gurgle, and the aroma wafts up the winding staircase to signal the approach of another summer day on southern Georgian Bay. By the time the sun peeks over the horizon, Robert and Jacquie Black are settled in Muskoka chairs on their dock, steaming mugs in hand, watching the fish jump. The only pressing concern while gazing out over the sun's glittering path on the water is deciding between a quick swim and kayaking along the rocky shore. Molly, the resident feline, leans precariously from the dock for a quick sniff of the sparkling water, then settles and tucks tail for a long gaze at the trees brimming with birdsong and twitching branches.

Lifelong early risers, the Blacks bought Beacon Shore, 13 acres of prime forested land, for just such morning indulgences. Robert — Bob to friends and family — is a retired business owner, and Jacquie has taught family studies at a nearby high school for more than 28 years. He's a woodworking hobbyist; she is keenly interested in cooking, gardening and home décor. I can personally attest to the artistry of both.

The Blacks are my in-laws, and I have been the lucky recipient of beautifully handcrafted picture frames from Bob, and elaborate meals prepared by Jacquie, who has never encountered food she couldn't transform into ambrosia.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Blacks' house, with its four dormers, nestles in the woodlands. Their lighthouse is adjacent; the one in the foreground sits on multiple property lines.

Having chosen an ideal elevated location for their home, overlooking Georgian Bay near Midland, Ontario, they planned each facet of its construction, down to the last detail. During the building phase, in 1987, they contracted tradespeople and became closely acquainted with the term "sweat equity."

The two-storey, 3,500-square-foot house has three upper bedrooms and a great room over the garage. The waterscape from the main floor and the four dormer windows was kept in mind when the property was cleared. The main floor features a large living/dining room, kitchen, family room, office and sunroom. The finished lower level includes a guest room and recreation room.

While clearing the land, they salvaged oak, poplar and cedar, and dried it for future use as cabinetry, furniture, and trellises. The impressive results include stair railings, oak baseboard mouldings of Bob's design, and a small oak pew situated at the base of a staircase.

Bob's fully equipped workshop is in the garage. As Jacquie says with a smile, "I can count on one hand how many times in 18 years vehicles have been in that garage."

Jacquie also makes the most of the natural surroundings. Herb plots reflect her interests in cooking and gardening. She grows summer savory, chives,

sage, parsley and lemon balm.

"I like to garnish dishes with nasturtiums—just a few, because they're peppery—and pansy petals," she says. Her favourite herb is woody lavender, which she uses in handmade soap.

They have planted fewer vegetables in recent years, because deer and other wildlife routinely help themselves to the banquet. They haven't found an acceptable solution. Jacquie says a deer fence would clash with the natural ambience of the property, and other deterrents (for example, hair clippings obtained from a local stylist and scattered around) have proved ineffective. For now, the Blacks are willing to sacrifice some plants in return for the parade of fauna glimpsed through their windows.

Jacquie's five-year plan is to create raised garden beds in a cultivated half-acre area now planted with tulips, poppies and morning glories that coil around Bob's poplar obelisks.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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PHOTO BY JEFF TRUJAX



PHOTO BY JACQUIE BLACK



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TOP: Bob and Jacquie Black on their curved oak staircase.

ABOVE: With a tractor, Bob pulls this portable sawmill wherever it's needed.

LEFT: Granite flooring and Bob's custom baseboard mouldings contribute to a gracious entryway.



PHOTO BY JACQUIE BLACK

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Several clematis varieties spread up trellises along a porch. A brick hearth surrounds an airtight wood stove in the family room. Ornamental poppies, bearded irises (*Iris germanica*) and chives bloom beside the house. Visitors look out from the small lighthouse on the Blacks' acreage. Bob built the rock retaining wall.



PHOTO BY JEFF TRIAX

featured in the book *Alone in the Night: Lighthouses of Georgian Bay, Manitoulin Island and the North Channel*. Unfortunately, the book erroneously describes the lighthouse as having been torn down in 1912.

The original acreage had no waterfront, and the couple's nagging feeling that a property with a lighthouse should extend to the water's edge was reconciled when they purchased adjacent shoreline several years ago. They immediately set about building a dock and modifying an existing cabin to store their canoe and kayak. Red geraniums, Midland's official flower, and purple wave petunias spill from the dock planters to greet guests arriving by boat.

In the evening, after a leisurely dinner, the Blacks like to pour a glass of wine, or champagne, if they're celebrating the completion of a big task. Then they stroll along the forest path to a place they call Sunset Vista. A bench sits at a high point in a clearing where their land opens onto neighbouring pastures and hobby farms. They watch the sun set in a big sky unobstructed by the nearby forest canopy. Stargazing on an inky night is a diamond-studded treat reserved for those who live far away from city lights.

Between the times set aside for the exhilarating sunrise view and the relaxing sunset vista, Bob and Jacquie can usually be found working hard at maintaining the property. They wouldn't have it any other way. Their lovely acreage emphasizes the benefits of meshing work with play, until the two are indistinguishable.

"We like to stay busy," Bob says with a shrug, and Jacquie nods in agreement. Hard work may be its own reward, but the fringe benefits are also very, very good. 🍋



PHOTO BY JACQUIE BLACK



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“Our plants, especially peonies, **seem to grow far taller than usual**, because they need to really **reach for that sun.**”

— JACQUIE BLACK



PHOTO BY JACQUIE BLACK

TOP: Shortly after this photo was taken, deer lunched on the tulips. The tree is a French hybrid lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*).

ABOVE: Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) cluster around the base, while tendrils of two morning glory (*Ipomoea*) varieties climb up the poplar obelisk.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23 “Our plants, especially peonies, seem to grow far taller than usual, because they need to really reach for that sun,” Jacquie says. Midday is the only time it beams directly between the lofty pines bordering her garden. Those pines create a living tunnel beside the garden; boughs touch above the 75-metre (250-foot) interlocking brick driveway laid by Bob. Jacquie envisions an old-fashioned gazebo in the centre of the garden, and frequently pores over a 1926 design book, *Beautifying the Home Grounds*, taking notes for Bob.

The forest is carpeted with trilliums, Ontario’s floral emblem. Ash, hemlock, linden and maple trees line the pathways, from which standing dead wood is culled regularly. Living beside a forest filled with such material is a woodworker’s dream, and Bob takes full advantage with his latest purchase, a portable saw mill.

“I can take the mill to the wood that needs cutting instead of having to haul the wood to the same location all the time,” he says. The couple feel that removing the dead wood allows more enjoyment of the property, since shady summer walking paths and winter cross-country ski trails form after a cull.

A unique feature of the property is the century-old lighthouse, standing sentinel some 60 metres (200 feet) from the water’s edge. Built around 1900, the three-storey, white clapboard structure had four different keepers until 1950, when it outlived its usefulness and its beacon was retired. Visibility extends for 11 kilometres (seven miles), and the brilliant white illumination helped guide laden ships safely into Midland’s deep harbour, which was bustling during the early 20th century.

“The original clapboard was replaced by aluminum several years ago, and Bob has done a lot of repair work on the cement foundation and the roof cap,” Jacquie says. They are nearing the end of negotiations to buy the lighthouse, which was