

"When building in a natural environment, the materials should be natural"

# Naturally beautiful

*Boathouses made of natural, sustainable materials enhance Lake Simcoe's shoreline*

BY JOHANNA POWELL

Whether you are planning a grand edifice to house your boat or a slightly more modest shelter, many of the considerations in building a boathouse on Lake Simcoe are similar.

Durability is the first best investment in a boathouse, says Ted Handy, lead architect and principal at Ted Handy and Associates Inc. in Barrie.

"The best way to be sustainable is to be durable," says Handy, who has been designing boathouses for Lake Simcoe denizens since the 1980s. "You're in a highly humid environment, so we've learned to try to stay away from wood framing for the boathouse itself. We typically have concrete walls. And we encourage the owners to put concrete ceilings in the boathouse itself — they are a little more expensive, but a little more durable."

You also will want to consider the quality of all materials used.

"Boathouses are seasonal, so you are not looking at the same high-quality

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envelope that you would on a full-season environment," Handy says. "Once you are up above, for the living quarters, then it's standard construction from the point of view that it's not quite as humid as right at the water."

If there are living quarters above the boathouse proper, however, the humidity will still be relatively high, so good airflow is critical.

Handy recommends natural materials for boathouses: "Lake Simcoe still looks very natural except for pockets, and I think it would be desirable to maintain that sense of natural amenity. You are building in a natural environment, and the materials should be natural."

Stone, wood, glass, steel and concrete — sourced locally — are the types of natural,

traditional materials Handy recommends. He considers brick and stucco to be foreign elements in the marine environment.

"We have some excellent quarries nearby," he says, "and I am a big proponent of wood siding versus manufactured materials."

A critical consideration when building a boathouse on Lake Simcoe is to plan for the potential problems caused by ice.

Typically, a boathouse should be approximately one metre above the high-water mark to minimize the risk of damage from ice, which moves in and out because of the winds and long, open stretches of shoreline.

"Ice will still come up there," Handy cautions, "so you still have to have a strategy for protecting the boathouse doors if it becomes a problem."

With the access up so high, your boat will be moved in and out on a railway.

In order to make a boathouse aesthetically pleasing, Handy says, it should go with the house: "The house has to be a reflection of the lifestyle, character and aesthetic of the owner. Once the character of the house is established, then the boathouse evolves out of the same principles."

Handy adds that most people are looking for a "natural, warm, inviting" environment when building a house. He likes to create an almost seamless environment in which the outside and inside feel connected, so people have a sense of being bathed in sunlight.

Most of Lake Simcoe's shoreline is regulated by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, so anyone building a boathouse on Lake Simcoe needs to check with the LSRCA and probably will require approval.

The LSRCA is concerned about the quality of the lake and ensuring the fish habitat is maintained. One of the issues paramount to the LSRCA is the stabilization of the shoreline. Says Handy: "You want to stabilize the shore edge, and the way to do that usually is large rock infill so that the ice and the lapping water aren't going to cause damage."

Granite is preferred over limestone; because of its alkaline character, limestone is not as beneficial to the fish habitat. And the shoreline has to allow constant flow so that the water is fresh.

It is important to stabilize the area around your boathouse with plantings, and the more trees that you can get to take root in the slope to hold it in place, the better. **LSL**

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