

Better than A BUNKIE

At her Kawarthas property, designer Emily Griffin led a “barn raising” to create a Canadiana-inspired space loved by the whole family.

Design by EMILY GRIFFIN | Text by ALISON GARWOOD-JONES | Photography by VIRGINIA MACDONALD

RIGHT: Vintage green glass vases are filled with blooms amidst a gallery wall of family photos.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The kitchen is not a working kitchen — yet. “It’s more of a bar right now, but we plan to install a range,” says designer Emily Griffin. The desk was one of her first-ever junk shop purchases. *Captain’s chair*, Kate Thornley-Hall.

OPPOSITE: Emily (pictured beside Norman, with Max, Grace and Oscar above) repurposed the barn’s windows, doors and side lights from older cottages on the property as they were being renovated. *Exterior door and trim colour*, Copley Gray (HC-104), Benjamin Moore.

DRAP MUSIC, midnight bonfires and wandering packs of teenagers. It wasn’t exactly the relaxing experience designer Emily Griffin and her husband, Norman Howe, a travel exec, were hoping for at the Balsam Lake cottage they share with their three kids, Grace, 19, Max, 17, and Oscar, 14. Desperate to turn off the lights and the teenage joie de vivre by 9 p.m., the couple set about planning a separate, barn-inspired great room and sleeping loft to help keep the peace. “Norman and I spent many nights lying in bed thinking, ‘We’ve got room to build a separate structure....’” They found an ideal spot at an out-of-earshot distance from the family’s cottage (an original Pan-Abode kit from the 1970s), and designed the 1,600-square-foot space using mostly scrap materials from the property.

The land has been in the Griffin family for more than 100 years. Today, it houses a number of cottages, including a main residence and icehouse turned cottage built by Emily’s great-grandmother, Mabel Griffin, daughter of Sir William Mackenzie, the transcontinental railway builder who also turned Toronto’s horse-drawn trams into TTC streetcars. The lot was later divided between her grandfather Anthony Griffin’s four sons. Emily and Norman occupy the Pan-Abode she summered in as a kid.

Emily’s grandfather had the land zoned as agricultural, so they applied for a barn permit. When the frame was up, they filled the barn with repurposed windows, doors, wooden shelves, vanities, side lights and staircases sourced from the oldest cottages on the property, all while organizing regular raids at Dunk’s Junk in nearby Cobocok, Ont. Emily’s historical Canadiana touches brought it all together, from the colourful rustic kilims and pillows covered in vintage camel blankets to the old-fashioned skis and family-owned vintage snowshoes she hung on the whitewashed pine walls.



Emily had the corner sectional made using old barnboard and mattresses for seat cushions. The mattress covers can be zipped off and washed. Sectional **mattresses**, Ikea; **scounce** (over sectional), Pottery Barn. **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** Norman and the boys love to play snooker in the airy space.



What started as a spot for adolescent shenanigans quickly turned into a favourite gathering place for the entire family. "Norman likes to read the morning paper under the cathedral ceilings while the kids are fast asleep in the 'hay loft,'" says Emily. By the afternoon, it's Emily who's curled up with a good book on the sectional as the sun streams through the slightly warped 19th-century windows. By cocktail hour, the kids are all back from the lake for games of snooker with their dad. After dinner, everyone returns to the barn for music and more pool.

Generations of Griffin family photos line walls and side tables, many of them highlighting the family's role in Canadian history. There's even a railway spike over the door, a decades-old lucky find by Norman's dad on a scuba diving adventure from years ago. With plans to add a shower and fireplace, and beef up the kitchen, Emily and Norman are looking ahead to when their kids bring their own families to the lake, and the cycle starts all over again. **USA**

RIGHT: At the round table, the family almost always has a puzzle going, or they'll play Bananagrams or cards. "It's a rainy-day gathering space," says Emily. "Our cottage is small, so when it's too wet to go outside, we head over to the barn to play guitar, listen to music and play pool. The kids are often up in the loft watching movies or having pillow fights." **Peacock chair**, Vintage Fine Objects; **table colour**, Pale Powder (204), Farrow & Ball.

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LEFT: The stairway up to the second floor was salvaged from the old icehouse (until recently, her grandparents Kitty and Tony's cottage). "My grandfather died in 2015 at the age of 104, and my grandma died five years before him at 99," says Emily. "At their ages, they were going up and down those steep steps without handrails! Our contractor's brother custom-made these iron ones for us."

BOTTOM RIGHT: In the bathroom, the designer brought in a repurposed vanity and added a hammered bronze sink that was given to her by a friend. **Plumbing fixtures, Taps Bath; mirror, CBZ; sconces, Kendall & Co.**

OPPOSITE: To accommodate her kids and their friends in the loft, Emily designed two platforms out of raw pine (to match the walls), installed drawer fronts for each bed and added four double mattresses on each side. "We can squeeze 16 up here," says Emily. The strap windows let breeze and light into the loft. **Mattresses, white reading lights, Ikea; bed linens by Emily Griffin, Imli Lifestyle; double sconces, RH.**



Emily's CLASSIC COTTAGE MOVES



1 Toile Sink Skirt
"Kitchen cabinets felt too conventional, and a sink skirt is an old-fashioned cottage trick. When I put the captain's chair in place with its toilet-covered seat cushion, I switched from the idea of solid linen to full-on toile! We have a bar fridge and microwave hidden underneath those skirts."



2 Pickled-wood Finish
"Norman and I wanted wood walls throughout the barn, but we felt natural pine would be too much wood. We decided to whitewash the walls. It's light and airy, and has the texture and smell of wood but not the heaviness. We got the best of both worlds."



3 Vintage Washstand
"Turning an old vanity into a washstand is a trick I've used a few times in bathroom renos. In this case, after a family member gave us the pine vanity, I added in a hammered bronze sink from Morocco and, voilà! It fit the whole vibe of the barn perfectly."



4 Sage Green
"All the cottages on the Griffin property have windows and doors in 'Balsam Lake Green,' which is a mixture of dark forest green and cobalt blue. 'Twas ever thus, but I just couldn't do it. I preferred this softer, sage green, Benjamin Moore's Copley Gray. It blends in more with the landscape."



5 Multiprint Bedding
"In 2017, while the barn was being built, I went on a trip to India and was blown away by the hand-block printed cottons. I searched online for bedding that was colourful, durable and affordable, and came up empty-handed, so I designed my own line called Imli Lifestyle."

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