

A Lake Sunapee Cottage Renovation

BY CHRISTINA O'BRIEN AND DOUG STEWART

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Anyone familiar with Lake Sunapee knows that it truly is a special place to visit year round. There are plentiful boating and swimming opportunities over the summer months, beautiful foliage car rides to take throughout the fall, and great skiing and snowshoeing during the winter and early spring. So it comes as no surprise that many people who visit decide to purchase a vacation home so they can come back and visit as often as they like throughout the year.

renovation images courtesy of SSR



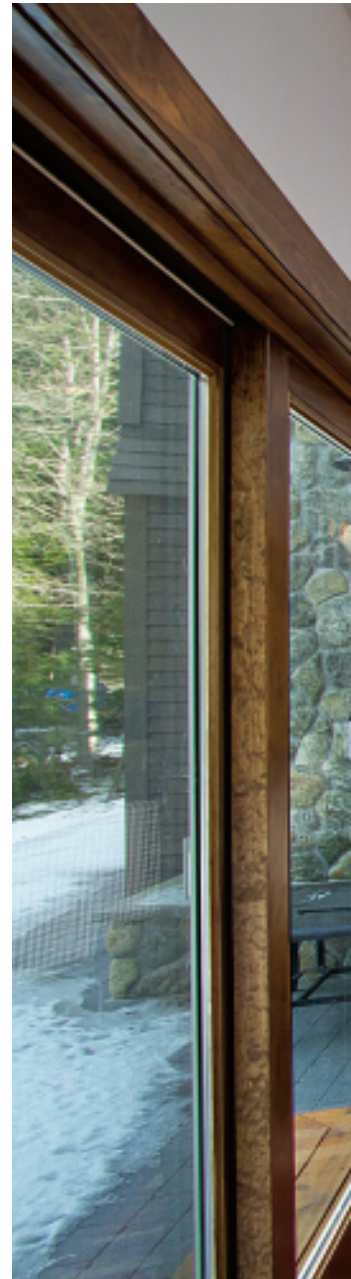
One: A view of the exterior, before renovation, from the lake side



Two: The house was raised up on steel beams and cribbing



Three: the new basement adds a level to the existing footprint





Part of the lake's charm is its still somewhat undeveloped, quiet country setting. Much of this appeal has been maintained in recent years, thanks to the state's adoption of rigorous shoreland protection regulations. These regulations are meant to protect the fragile lakefront ecology, but have also served to limit overdevelopment on the lake. It has become difficult to build a new home within 250 feet of any body of water in New Hampshire without serious concessions to environmental concerns. And if you own an existing home within 250 feet of the water's edge, you

may have to keep your improvements within the building's footprint.

This was the dilemma for Sue and Shaun Murphy. They purchased a cozy little cottage located about 20 feet from the water's edge on Lake Sunapee and wanted to enlarge it to have ample space for their family of four growing boys. Since the Murphys could not add on next to the cottage, due to New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services restrictions, and could not add a second floor on top of the existing cottage due to an inadequate foundation, a local contractor, George Neuwirt >>>>>

After the renovation: Views of the lake are a major feature in the kitchen, dining area and sitting area of the lower level. The master bedroom and bathroom are seen in the background, along with the split level stairs.



The new entryway leads into a split level staircase. Lower level is the kitchen and dining area, living room, master bedroom and bathroom. (Another view is on page 11.) The upper level is the children's bedrooms.

of George M. Neuwirt Construction in Sunapee, N.H., recommended raising the cottage and building a new walk-out basement underneath it. This would

The dream driving the Murphy's renovation was a kitchen with a lake view as well as direct access to an outdoor lakeside dining patio.

double the existing square footage while staying within the building's footprint.

And to make sure the wonderful views were incorporated into the new lower level, Neuwirt called on Christina O'Brien and Doug Stewart — licensed architects and co-owners of SISR (pronounced "scissor") Architecture, LLC in Marlow, N.H. — to help design the new space.

The existing cottage consisted of two bedrooms, a living room, dining area, small kitchen, bathroom and loft space in the attic. One of the bedrooms, the

living room and dining area faced the lake, but the windows were small and the views were minimal. The kitchen and second bedroom both faced the driveway. The dream driving the Murphy's renovation was to relocate the kitchen to have a lake view as well as direct access to an outdoor lakeside dining patio. Another design priority was to create a new master bedroom and living room separated from the children's bedrooms. A final design priority, at the children's request, was to keep the existing attic space as >>>>



Great Island Photography



courtesy of SISR



courtesy of SISR

A view from the driveway after renovation.

The new front door is oversized.

High ceilings and a landing that faces south make the entryway sunny and airy.



Great Island Photography

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their private getaway.

With these ideas in hand, SISR started putting designs on paper that incorporated all of the requests into the space constraints of the cottage. One immediate challenge was designing the new entry. By raising the existing cottage, the entry would seem to require several stairs outside of the building to access it, which the Murphys were not excited about. They wanted to minimize any exterior stairs at the front and back of the home to reduce the need for winter shoveling and the hazard of accessing the new patio from the upstairs kitchen with trays full of food.

In order to accommodate this, SISR designed an interior split-level entry stair. The main entry facing the driveway would remain at grade level — a visitor would walk up half of a flight

of stairs inside the home to get to the existing cottage and walk down a half a flight to access the new lower walkout level. The existing kitchen was relocated to this lower level so that the family can

The family can walk right out onto their patio to enjoy meals outside overlooking the lake.

walk right out onto their patio to enjoy meals outside overlooking the lake.

A new living room is adjacent to the kitchen and faces the water as well. Off the living room is the new master bedroom, also with the signature view. The existing cottage level was left virtually intact and retains most of its original character and charm. A new children's bedroom and bathroom replaced the old kitchen, effectively

separating this floor from the new adult master bedroom and space below. This change truly made the existing cottage level (the lower level) the “children’s floor” — complete with access to their attic loft.

To raise the cottage, Neuwirt hired Rick Geddes of Geddes Building Movers in Bow, N.H., to do the job.

Steel beams were installed underneath the building to support the floor joists and hydraulic jacks were strategically positioned. As the jacks slowly raised the building in 14 inch increments, timbers (called cribbing) were placed under the steel beams to support the weight. The jacks continued to lift the building, and additional cribbing was placed, until the desired height was reached.

Once the house was raised, the un-



A new walk-out patio extends the dining area in the warmer months. It is also a wonderful transition space from the outside to the inside.

derside of the building was cleaned up, the site was prepared, and the concrete work began. Stepped foundation walls were erected to create the walkout basement. The site sloped toward the lake so only about three feet of new basement wall is evident from the driveway side of the home. This helps keep the cottage from looking too tall from the road. The lake side, however, appears as a new two-story home complete with new sliding doors in the kitchen and living room and full size windows in the master bedroom.

Because of the small windows in the existing cottage, the space was rather dark and the views were not evident. Although technically considered a basement level, the new lower level space is bright and airy throughout due to the open kitchen and living space and the great light coming in from the new windows and sliding doors. But the true testament of the project was this note from Sue Murphy to SISR: "We just want to send an email to thank you for the great job you did on designing our 'new' house. It was hard for us to imagine what it would look like on paper but now that it is almost done we want you to know that the house came out amazing and we are so happy. The part we are most amazed at is the split entry and the foyer. It is just beautiful! It makes the whole house! So thank you for all of your great ideas and hard work. We really are pleased with the results." ■

SISR Architecture was founded by Christina O'Brien and Doug Stewart in 2007. Christina and Doug are both licensed architects in the state of New Hampshire and Doug is also a LEED Accredited Professional. They named their firm SISR, which is an acronym for Sustainable, Innovative and Socially Responsive.

A lifelong passion with photography and the Lake Sunapee region led Lindsay Holmes and Tom McHugh to abandon successful careers elsewhere to relocate to New London, summer on Great Island, and pursue the craft of photography professionally. To see more of their work, visit www.greatislandphotography.com



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