



**STEEL PINS** were drilled into the granite to provide stability for the timber frame foundation. Discreet glass railings offer a safe perimeter without interrupting the view.



996 SQUARE FEET

# Remote Possibility

Building an off-the-grid island retreat poses significant challenges but yields lifelong rewards. BY JAN SOULTS WALKER







DOUGLAS FIR timber framing and boards form a beautiful golden interior for the cabin. The highly durable wood was widely available locally.

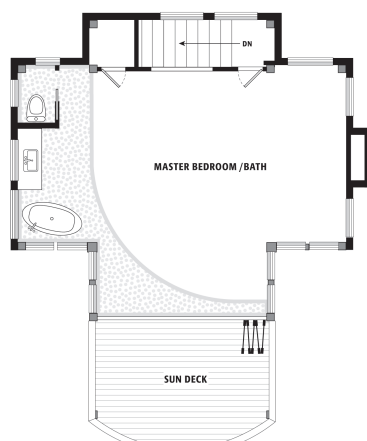
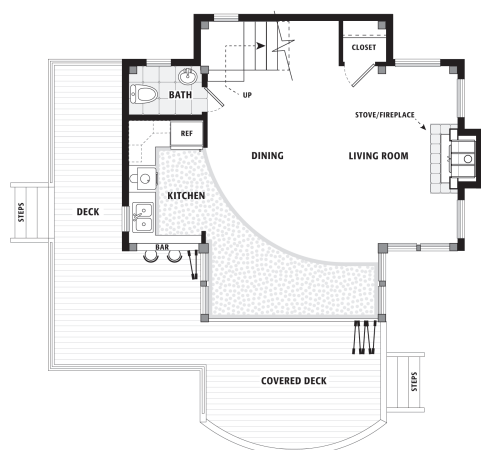
When your noisiest neighbors are humpback and killer whales spouting in the bay and the only “nearby” lights at night are the moon and stars, you know you’re miles from civilization. Throughout the year, Brian Kingwell and Janine Vertone happily escape the bustle of Vancouver, British Columbia, embarking on a three-hour excursion to their tranquil Nelson Island cabin retreat, making the last hour of the trip by boat. “If we go by sailboat, it takes longer, of course,” Brian says. “It really depends on how anxious we are to get there.”

“There” is an 80-acre piece of paradise—mountainous hills blanketed in Douglas firs, craggy granite outcroppings, winding trails and a stream-fed 20-acre lake. Perched high on the rocky hillside, the getaway affords a breathtaking view of the rugged coastline and misty-blue ocean bay frequented by playful sea otters and pods of whales and dolphins.

When Brian and Janine purchased this wilderness wonderland, they knew the location was perfect for unwinding and refreshing from the workweek grind, but building a home on a granite hillside located so many miles from the mainland would call for ingenious problem-solving and precision planning.

“We knew that even though we wanted a small cabin, it would still be a challenging place to build with no roads in, no power, no water,” Brian says. “Brilliantly and beautifully conquering all those hurdles—that’s really where Dave Petrina and his company, Kettle River Timberworks, shine.”


Petrina and his team handled the project from concept to completion, designing and building the 996-square-foot cabin and devising smart solutions for solar-powered electricity and wood-burning heat. Brian came up with strategies for running water







**GRANITE, QUARRIED** from nearby Hardy Island, and locally harvested Douglas fir pair with expanses of glass to make the house look and live as a natural part of the remote setting.



**"AN ELEGANT** engineering solution in the wall framing," says designer/builder Dave Petrina, allows these steps to cantilever sans metal supports, keeping the look light and open. A wall of pebble tiles on the staircase adds natural color and texture.





**SKYLIGHTS PUNCTUATE** the master bedroom ceiling with sunlight and blue sky. Wall-size doors fold back to make the space part of the outdoors.

using a rainwater collection and filtration system, and equipping bathrooms with composting toilets.

A barge delivered the hefty load of construction and finish materials, including prefabricated timber framing, to the island, and a helicopter lifted the loads to the cabin site. “It was only 100 meters from where the barge moored up to the building site,” Petrina explains, “but it was 100 vertical meters.”

Even with all these hurdles, the cabin, although modest in size, offers an abundance of luxuries and “wow” design features, including a “floating” staircase, open beam architecture, generous expanses of windows and skylights, a glass-topped deck roof and curved glass railings, and folding glass walls that blur the line between indoors and out.

“The beautiful woodwork is all locally harvested Douglas fir, so we’re surrounded by a forest of the wood the home is built from,” Brian says. “When we’re here and the weather’s good, the full-wall doors remain open, so even when you’re inside, you feel like you’re living in part of the forest. With all the glass, decks and opening planning, we feel like the house is much larger.

“This really is a complete escape,” Brian adds. “No city sounds, pristine forest—a complete getaway.” ■



**IN THIS REMOTE** location, privacy isn’t a concern, allowing even the freestanding tub to take in views through uncovered windows.





The perfect perch  
to watch for orcas  
and sea otters in  
the bay below



## Off-the-grid construction

"It's all about planning," says Petrina. Here's how he pulled it off.

- Locally harvested Douglas fir timber framing was cut to size and drilled off-site then delivered for assembly.
- Timbers, walls and all other building supplies traveled on two ferries to a barge, which transported the cargo to the island, where a helicopter off-loaded 26 tons of materials. "We had to time the barge's arrival to coincide with tides."
- Workers remained on-site to build the project, staying first on a sailboat and later in a wall tent. A crew of four working 12-hour days completed the house in about 75 days.

...  
WITH REMOTE  
CONSTRUCTION,  
YOU CAN'T  
RUN TO THE  
HARDWARE  
STORE BECAUSE  
SOMETHING  
BREAKS OR  
YOU FORGOT  
SOMETHING.  
...

