

# Lake Superior Location

Family's North Shore retreat offers spectacular views

BY AMY CARLSON GUSTAFSON

PHOTOS BY ALYSSA LEE PHOTOGRAPHY



**F**ly fishing, hunting, snowboarding and skiing — for husband and wife Luke and Stephanie, those hobbies and a love for the northeastern tip of Minnesota drew them to build a custom home on the shores of Lake Superior.

In February 2015, while the ground was still covered with snow and the wind from the largest of the Great Lakes was quite nippy, the couple — who live in the Twin Cities

full time with their three teenagers — went on the search for a property between Duluth and the Canadian border. After looking at 13 potential sites, they came back to the second place they hiked through the snow to see — a nearly 16-acre parcel of land with a significant amount of lake frontage. A bonus was it had never been built on before. The couple fell in love with the land and purchased it a few months later.





“It was extremely unique – it hadn’t been developed, it had a striking view,” Luke says. “We knew instantly that this was the type of property we were drawn to. As soon as we bought it, we started talking about building a home that really complimented the land and the setting.”

To create their dream home, the couple teamed up with Minneapolis-based Christopher Strom Architects. They were impressed with the work Strom had done on a Lake Superior Wisconsin home and were excited about the possibilities for their new property with its woody setting and rocky shoreline.

The couple weren’t hurting for places to put their new abode – after all, they had acres of land to choose from. But finding the perfect spot for the construction was key to making their North Shore dream home a reality.

“When you’re coming over the top of the hill of the property, you see this kind of mini-island of solid rock just off the shore – you can wade over to it,” Strom says. “It was windy that day and I was struck by the crosscurrent that was coming in and hitting that rock. The water was just exploding on it. It was very dramatic.”

They found the spot with the massive rock becoming the focal point of Strom’s home design.



“Rather than stretching the house out parallel to the lake shore, we did it a little differently where we gave it an axial view,” Strom says. “The view from the main key spaces — the kitchen, dining, living and upstairs loft areas — is right at the access of that rock. You can see those big weather events — it’s an absolutely picturesque view.”

While the black 3,400-square-foot house doesn’t have the traditional log cabin vibe many might envision for a North Shore home, the exterior of Luke and Stephanie’s home has a peaceful, unassuming feel in its place, perpendicular to the breathtaking shoreline.

Inspired by the work of well-known Minnesota ar-

chitect Edwin Lundie, Strom used natural (and low maintenance) materials including a stone base and Douglas fir timbers along with composite wood siding in the home’s design. The many windows are clad in aluminum, assuring they’re tough enough to hold up to the harsh lake winds.

“We knew we wanted a lot of windows and a very different kind of feeling than what we have in our house in the Twin Cities,” Luke says. “We wanted something that was clean and a little modern, but I wouldn’t necessarily consider my taste to be modern. I was skeptical about the black, but I just loved how it turned out.”

With three bedrooms and a loft upstairs and the



master bedroom with elegant bathroom on the first floor, there’s plenty of room for the family of five along with Bear, their British Labrador.

“When you step inside, it’s a really refined space that catches you by surprise,” Strom says. “It’s relaxing in the sense that it’s very clean and beautiful. But there’s a refinement to it. It’s almost like a point of relief from the rugged exterior and landscape. If you’re outside kayaking or hiking, you come home to something calming. What’s unique about this project is that it isn’t cabin-y at all on the inside. It’s an interesting counterpoint to the landscape.”

Black accents are continued inside the house but it doesn’t feel heavy thanks to the natural light from all the windows and prominent double sliding glass doors leading from the living space to outside. The dark cabinetry pops in the kitchen and master bath with light Cambria countertops and bold brass hardware adding a sophisticated feel. The unlacquered brass will develop a patina over time.

“Part of our thinking was we wanted the fixtures to stand out because there’s really no wall space to put art,” Luke says. “With all the windows, you can’t break stuff up with pictures or art, so the fixtures are the statement pieces.”

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With an open concept on the main floor, the lake views are stunning no matter what area the family is in. The house is terraced to match the exterior grading with white oak floors leading the way from the kitchen down a few steps to the dining area and then down a few more to the living space with a vaulted ceiling and inviting stone fireplace surrounded by windows.

“We set a pretty high bar with the concept to have this focused view,” Strom says. “The biggest challenge was really to follow through on

that goal. We didn’t compromise — every room in the main space had to have a view of the lake. It wasn’t easy to do. We had to make sure the sight lines from the kitchen, dining and living areas were all working. There were some technical things that needed to be done, too, since we had so much glass. The easy way would have been to remove a couple of windows and make solid walls to brace the house, but we said no — we have to have all the glass. We have a great structural engineer who worked with us



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tirelessly making sure the house would stand up to the winds of Lake Superior.”

It took more than a year to complete the build. When it was final and the family saw the finished results, they were blown away.

“We’re morning people, so waking up and seeing the lake right there with an unimpeded view – it’s amazing,” Luke says. “The wildflowers are beautiful – the lupines pop up in unexpected places. Eagles fly by. Every day we’re up there, between 8 and 9 in the morning, a family of eagles comes to sit on the rock and check things out. We hear them throughout the day. That’s pretty cool.”

It makes their dream home that much more amazing. ■

*Amy Carlson Gustafson is a frequent contributor to Spaces.*



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