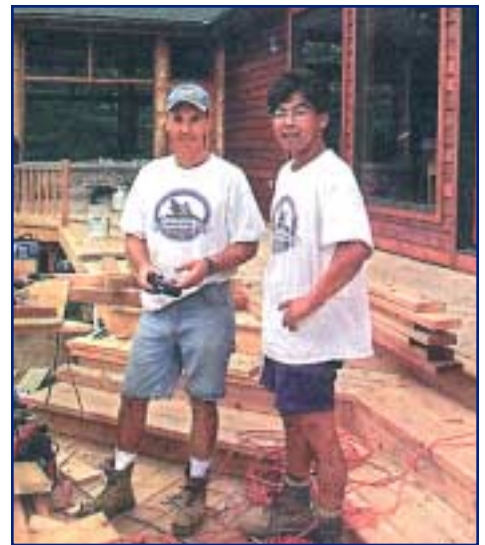


New in Homes

Building by E-mail **Toronto Star • Saturday, October 11, 2003**

Digital camera lets clients as far away as Europe approve changes and materials the same day. Latest project a 4,000-square-foot, \$1 million Kashabog Lake waterfront home. By Tracy Hanes



Left: The dramatic second-floor walkway of the 4,000-square-foot house Scott Wootton is building on Kashabog Lake features a glass floor made of the same materials used in the CN Tower's observation deck. **Centre:** Wootton won a design award for his own 2,500-square-foot home, which features a staircase built from cherry logs cut on his 40-hectare property. **Right:** Scott Wootton, left, and construction manager Mario Yee examine digital images at the Kashabog Lake house site.

One of builder Scott Wootton's most invaluable tools is his Nikon digital camera.

The camera has become indispensable to the owner of the Kawartha Lakes Construction Company, as he documents new construction or renovation jobs in progress and e-mails the images to out-of-town clients.

Most of the Peterborough-area builder's business comes from affluent cottage owners who are renovating their summer abodes into year-round residences or building new homes on their waterfront lots.

While clients may live as far away as Europe, "someone doesn't have to be any farther than Toronto for the camera to be useful," says Wootton, who operates his business from a log cabin in Young's Point and is president of the Peterborough Home Builders Association.

"I always have it in my truck and it's useful if someone can't be around when decisions have to be made," he says. "You can get answers immediately. It's a same-day delivery service."

Through e-mail, the homeowner can make a decision from the comfort of his or her home or office in another country, expediting the work.

Take the case of Wootton's clients who were vacationing in Florida during construction of their house. He wasn't sure they would like how the large bulkhead required to hang kitchen cupboards from their soaring ceilings cut into the openness of the space. So he sent them pictures of the bulkhead and got the go-ahead before installing the cabinetry.

Wootton photographs most stages of construction and keeps a digital database of his projects.

As well as keeping clients informed of what's happening, the camera also helps Wootton receive payments (typically made as the job progresses) as he can show that phases such as the foundation, framing or roof are completed.

The technology is also useful if a problem arises in the future, because he has a detailed record of the whole building process to see if the snag resulted during construction.

Wootton has enthusiastically embraced more new technologies than just digital photography to help his building business. He routinely uses insulated concrete forms (ICF), radiant heat flooring, solar energy methods and R-2000 practices. R-2000 homes are built to high standards to be draft-free, are highly energy efficient and offer excellent air quality.

Meanwhile, he's putting the finishing touches on the home he says has been his greatest challenge yet. The 4,000-square-foot, \$1 million Kashabog Lake home is a 135-degree prow-shaped design, which sits on a craggy granite lot. It has two 30-foot sections of windowed walls that are 16 feet tall, and a second-floor walkway that has a glass floor made of the same material used in the heart-stopping, see-through floor of the CN Tower, which lets guests look 1,122 feet straight down.

While the home uses many natural materials, such as rock, cedar siding, recycled wide-plank hemlock flooring and log pillars to support the screened-in porch, it boasts the latest state-of-the-art technology.

Although the Peterborough couple building the home are staying just two doors away during construction, thus close enough to make decisions in person, Wootton's digital camera still comes in handy.

He'll add photos of the Kashabog home to his digital library, which he uses to illustrate to potential clients what certain features will look like.

He has also photographed where the extensive wiring is in the walls. These images will be useful in detecting where the required wires are when the owner decides to add automated window blinds in the future.

"There's enough wire in here to go to the moon and back," quips Wootton.

The home's lights and heating systems are computerized; and there are four plasma screen TVs, including two that operate in tandem.

Another plasma screen sits above the built-in range in the kitchen, which is a gourmet cook's delight with its high-end appliances, massive island and countertops in stainless steel, Corian and poured concrete.

"The geometry of this place was totally challenging (few walls meet at 90 degrees) and because of the amount of windows," says Wootton. "I encouraged the owner to make this place R-2000 and it's quite remarkable for its configuration."

Energy-efficient, low-E windows (treated with a coating that serves to absorb and reflect radiant heat and ultraviolet rays) filled with argon glass were used to meet the stringent R-2000 standards.

They cost about 30 percent more than standard windows.

In 2001, Wootton won an R-2000 Excellence Award for best overall design for his own 2,500-square-foot home, where he lives with his chiropractor wife and their three children.

The single-storey house with wrap-around veranda boasts ICF construction, radiant heat flooring in the hard-surface areas and a staircase built from cherry logs cut on his 40-hectare property.

He's found his business has shifted in the past two years. He used to handle about 60 projects a year, but this year will do just 25 to 30.

Although the number has dropped, the complexity, customization and size of the projects has increased.

Wootton became interested in technology and building through a construction science course he took at Markham District High School.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Waterloo in 1988, he moved to the Kawarthas, where his family had a cottage on Stoney Lake, and started a deck building company. He established Kawartha Lakes Construction in 1995 and incorporated it two years later.

"I worked my way through high school with my hands and put myself through university with carpentry," he says.

Wootton takes his career seriously and says one of the most important steps was joining the Ontario Home Builders Association (OHBA) in 1996. That membership helped him further his knowledge about leading-edge technologies, such as ICFs and R-2000 standards.

"A lot of builders are self-taught and if that's the case, you can develop bad habits," says Wootton, who as well as being president of the Peterborough association, serves on the OHBA's renovator's council. "I've seen the value of training

and education programs and I want to raise standards and access to information for builders."

But, he says, the latest technologies may not be for everyone.

"If you're planning to move (again) in less than five years, it doesn't make sense to invest in things you won't get the pay-back on," says Wootton.

"But my client base is not inclined to move. Most of them are building retirement dream homes and don't mind spending more for lower operating costs and energy efficiency."



Above: Scott Wootton's kitchen features a centre island with a granite countertop.