

BY MARLA R. MILLER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
KIMBERLY WAY JONES

Secluded paradise

RENOVATING ROUND ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE BECOMES
A LABOR OF LOVE FOR A CHARLEVOIX COUPLE WHO
CREATE A PRIVATE ISLAND SUMMER ESCAPE.

TRAVELING NORTH from Charlevoix to the eastern Upper Peninsula, a pontoon boat waits at a private dock in Raber when Georgeann Lindberg wants to escape from it all. There, she departs for a 15-minute boat ride to her private island home in the St. Marys River — a secluded paradise near the United States-Canadian border — where the freighters honk, the stars light up the night sky and lush green moss reminds her of being in Ireland.

“I think it’s just the tranquility,” she says. “It’s the most beautiful, wonderful place to spend time.”

Known as Round Island, Georgeann and her late husband, Paul, transformed an abandoned lighthouse on the nine-acre island into a true summer escape. Paul, a Charlevoix businessman and landscape architect, discovered the property while duck hunting and came back excited to tell Georgeann.

“I asked him ‘When are you going to buy it?’ I knew that was in the back of his mind,” she says. “We pursued it, and it was our destiny.”

Together, the couple embarked on an

As the only connection between Lake Huron and Lake Superior, the St. Marys is a well-traveled waterway. Freighters and ships from all over the world navigate the river.



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— Libby Dinwiddie



Top: The lighthouse has a modern kitchen complete with granite countertops. Left: An attractive window dining space provides a nice view. Below: The living room looks out on a deck and natural scenery.



extensive renovation project in 2000 that spanned three years and involved a crew working spring through fall with hands-on involvement by the Lindbergs. They started by stabilizing the original structure, a square wooden tower on the verge of falling down, with a new roof and repairs to the siding. Built in 1892, the Round Island lighthouse served as a beacon for ships navigating the river, until it was decommissioned in 1922. The historic structure fell into disrepair

due to years of neglect and Michigan’s harsh winters. But Paul saw the property’s potential, and the Lindbergs joined an elite group of private island owners. There are roughly 3,000 in the world. Discovery Channel’s “Epic Private Islands” even featured Round Island’s modern-day makeover. The renovation of the lighthouse home included an addition off the back that honors the historical integrity of the original structure. Paul consulted a historical architect to make sure it would keep the traditional feel



of the exterior, but they added larger windows, a large, two-level deck and returned the front door to its original location facing the river. They wanted the original keeper’s quarters and tower to remain the focus of attention from the river. Georgeann, a prominent interior designer in Charlevoix, admits bringing the property into the 21st century was no easy feat. But it became a labor of love for the couple. Transporting supplies and equipment to the property from the mainland and then up the shore was the first hurdle. They had to run electricity to the island, install a sewer filtration system and added a state-of-the-art water management and filtration system. Everything is top of the line. Even as an experienced landscape contractor, Paul found the island’s rocky landscape a real challenge. So, Paul invented his own piece of equipment, patented as Rock Jaw and sold globally, to move and place more than 1,000 rocks. He used those stones to create the island’s stone terraces, garden walls, walking paths and boat well. “It was definitely a labor of love for them,” says Libby Dinwiddie, Paul’s daughter. “He just loved to take things and make them to the best they could possibly be. That was my dad’s gift. He could see it. He could envision it, and he could do it.”



Georgeann handled the interior décor and furnishings, described as contemporary and comfortable with traditional elements. Oriental rugs, antiques and custom bookcases complement classic leather furniture and granite countertops against a neutral backdrop. “The interior is beautiful. It’s very com-



fortable and well-put together,” she says. The home was their happy place, and with Paul’s passing in April 2015, Georgeann now has it up for sale. She still visits as much as she can, even driving and docking the boat, and a caretaker helps when she is away. “It’s so fresh and always changing, whether it’s the seasons, the weather pattern; the night sky is just as spectacular as the daytime,” she says. As a couple, they always enjoyed sitting on the deck, cruising the river, and visiting some of the waterfront restaurants. It’s very unique and exciting, a nature-lovers paradise with fishing, hunting, birding and boating surrounding them. “You can go up and down the river, you can kayak,” she says. “There’s so much adventure. That’s what I like about it.” The island’s outdoor space features lush gardens and flowers, coniferous and birch trees, and more than 30 species of birds. They also added walking paths on the island, where Georgeann enjoys taking in the island’s natural beauty and solitude.



Georgeann Lindberg, an interior designer, opted for a contemporary look with traditional elements and antiques, an open-air floor plan and high-quality furnishings from oriental rugs to leather couches.



Top: Large windows allow daylight to fill the bedroom. Middle: A modern bathroom and lighting add comfort appeal. Right: A view of the St Marys River from behind the lighthouse.



She says it has a spiritual quality, especially when moss gives life to the rocky paths and everything turns green in the spring.

“It’s so beautiful, not only the paths, but the ships that come by, she says. “I still go out on the porch with a glass of wine and a good book, and I’m in heaven.”

The island is adjacent to the St. Marys shipping channel and is a great place to watch the freighters headed to and from the Soo Locks. During the renovation project, the captains came to admire the Lindbergs for their efforts to restore the lighthouse. Dinwiddie lives on an island near Detroit and says her children have been spoiled by the freighters saluting them at their grandparents’ place. She also says the stars are “absolutely unbelievable.”

“When we would go up there, the freighters would come by so close, and they watched that restoration that my dad was

doing,” Dinwiddie says. “When they would pass by, they would give the big salute. They just loved it, and they had respect for my dad. He has the horn at the lighthouse, and he would salute back with the horn.”

The Lindbergs’ adult children weren’t surprised to hear about their plans to renovate the lighthouse and have enjoyed visiting in the summer. They usually gather as a family over Fourth of July, and it’s been a fun place for their children to explore and escape city life.

“It’s so them because of their background,” says Amy Allen, Georgeann’s daughter. She lives in Chicago and says her children “think it’s the greatest thing,” as the freighters go by and blow the horn. “It became their passion project and this really cool, exclusive place. So now, it’s actually been a really good comfort for her. ... It’s so peaceful; it’s a special place.”

Marla R. Miller is an award-winning journalist who lives in Norton Shores and enjoys the lakeshore lifestyle.



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Above: More than 1,000 rocks were moved to create a boat well and stone terraces, garden walls and walking paths. The property was landscaped to accentuate the island’s natural beauty.

