

REAL ESTATE

I transformed my garage into a 1,400-square-foot laneway suite. Now it's my work sanctuary

BY ANDREA YU | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL NEUHAUS | SEPTEMBER 19, 2020



In 2018, the city started allowing property owners to turn laneway structures into livable suites. David Shedd, now 57, wanted to build a guest house or a potential rental unit, so he submitted an application. Then the pandemic hit, which complicated the building process and altered his plans for the suite. Now, with most companies working remotely, he thinks it will be the perfect work-from-home retreat.

David: I grew up in southern Indiana. In 2001, I moved to Toronto and found a job in financial services. I still work for that company as the vice-president of sales. In 2013, I bought a three-bed, two-bath detached at St. Clair and Bathurst for \$710,000, then spent about \$350,000 fixing it up. The place had a two-car laneway garage where I parked one of my cars and stored my bicycles and kayaks.



The old garage

In July 2018, I read about the city's new laneway suite program, which allowed homeowners to turn their detached garages into suites. I thought it was a great idea. The city was giving homeowners a way to maximize the potential of their properties. At the same time, I saw it as a way to beautify the alley while also adding more housing to the neighbourhood.

First, I reached out to a contractor. I had already worked with Angelo Antolino from Integrity Design and Build Inc. for the renovations of my primary residence, so I felt confident working with him again. Together, we designed a 1,400-square-foot, two-bedroom, one-bathroom suite. I wanted it to be a flexible space that could be used as a guest house or rental unit. We started drawing up the plans that July, but a few weeks later, we realized that my neighbourhood wasn't

included in the initial phase of laneway suite approvals. So we held on to our plans until the second phase rolled out in late 2019.



The old garage, as seen from the alley

In September 2019, we submitted our plans to the city. They were approved that December. As part of the approvals, I had to sign a document saying that I would not sever the laneway suite. Severing it would require installing separate utilities, like plumbing, along with registering for city services like garbage collection and mail. So the laneway suite would operate as a secondary unit, similar to a separate basement apartment. In January 2020, we started to build.

Angelo hired all of the tradespeople and arranged for all of the materials. Of course, there were some logistical challenges. I worried that the alley would be difficult for trucks to access, but thankfully, our alley is wide enough for two-way traffic, making it possible for trucks to enter and exit. Finding places to store materials, like lumber and scaffolding, was another issue. Fortunately, our neighbours let us keep stuff in their backyards. Most of the neighbours actually seemed fine with the project. I think they wanted to see how it looked in case they decided to build their own.

We were aiming to finish the project by Canada Day—July 1, 2020. But Covid delayed our project by two months. In a normal build, you might have plumbers and electricians on-site at the same time. But once the city opened back up and tradespeople were working again, Angelo coordinated with them so each group came in on separate days. There were also delays due to the availability of materials. Since a lot of people did renovation projects during Covid, pressure-treated lumber had all been bought up. So we had to wait for that to be back in stock. We also had some kitchen appliances coming in from Quebec, but since Quebec was also on lockdown, there was a delay in getting some of those.

We finished the build in mid-August. It's beautiful. To be honest, it's nicer than my main house—it feels like a luxury condo. All said, it cost about \$550,000.



Integrity Design and Build Inc.

The main floor functions as a garage. It's got radiant heat, high-end baseboards and floor-to-ceiling doors that open up into the backyard. I wired that area for an electric vehicle supercharger. I currently drive a gas-powered car, but I'm thinking of going electric soon.



Integrity Design and Build Inc.

The upper floor has an amazing kitchen with high-end appliances and a washer-dryer. There are two open-concept bedrooms, but I'm looking at installing some folding doors or Japanese-style screens to divide the space and provide some privacy.



Integrity Design and Build Inc.

There's a staircase that goes up to the roof, with a skylight that opens up. We can't use the rooftop as a patio, based on the current zoning by-laws, but we're planning to put solar panels on one half, with a green roof of small trees or plants on the other side.



Shedd peering out of his skylight

Of course, when I started the project, I thought it would be an awesome place to host guests. I have some friends visiting from just outside of Guelph in a couple of weeks, so that will be a good test. But at the start of the pandemic, my partner and I started working from home full time. We set up offices in adjacent bedrooms in our house, which made it difficult to work, since we're both always blabbing away on conference calls. So I decided to start working in the laneway suite, using a desk that I lugged over from the main house.



Angelo Antolino, the contractor, seated at Shedd's new workspace

The setup back there is great. My work station overlooks the backyard, a space that I find quite calming. And with the floor-to-ceiling windows and the skylight, the suite gets plenty of natural light. When we built the suite, we ran Internet cable lines over from the house, so the connection is stable. I plan to retire within the next 10 years, fingers crossed, at which point I might rent out my house and use the laneway suite as a pied-à-terre while I'm travelling. In the meantime, however, it's the perfect work sanctuary.

REAL ESTATE

A couple of GTA families just bought this 'resort-like' Prince Edward County property for \$4 million

BY JONATHAN FORANI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL VAUGHAN/VAUGHAN GROUP | SEPTEMBER 18, 2020



LISTED AT

\$3,970,000

SOLD FOR

\$3,970,000

The property

A 30-acre estate in Prince Edward County, with a four-bedroom main house, a two-bedroom waterfront cottage, a private beach and a small peninsula. The property is located near Picton in the community of Waupoos (rabbit in Ojibwe), just a short drive from a ciderhouse, winery and cheese shop.

The buyers

Mark Romkema, 48, a Mississauga firefighter; his wife Nicole Romkema, 44, a pharmaceutical sales rep; Daina Fencott, 50, a former pharmaceutical sales rep; and her husband Trevor Fencott, 50, CEO of Fire & Flower Cannabis Co.

The history

In 1996, a couple who lived in the Beaches bought this property. At the time, it consisted of a small rundown cottage near the waterfront. The couple initially planned to build a garage and woodworking shop, with a couple of bedrooms overtop, but the construction ballooned into a 7,000-square-foot house with steel beams and 22-foot ceilings.

In 2006, they moved to the property full-time with their young son, hosting beachside dinners during the summer and building ice sculptures along the shore in the winter. When the husband passed away, in 2012, his wife turned the property into a part-time rental space called “The Beach

Waupoos,” a nod to the property’s Ojibwe origins. She rented it for three to five weeks a year, at roughly \$1,500 a night.

In 2018, when her son moved to Europe, she decided to keep a 30-acre portion of the property to build a new home for herself, before listing the other 30 acres for \$3,970,000. Without an agent or exposure on MLS, the property sat for two years without receiving an offer, while also functioning as a rental unit. But when the pandemic hit and summer bookings maxed out—as Torontonians looked to escape the city—the seller focused on managing the Airbnb and hired an agent to sell the property. On July 10, the listing went live.

The sale

Around the same time, Nicole and Mark had planned to be in France and Portugal with their two daughters. When the pandemic kiboshed their summer vacation, they were eager to ditch Oakville for a different getaway. Mark visited Sandbanks Beach in Prince Edward County every summer with his family when he was younger, but hadn’t brought his own girls in a while. In early August, they booked an Airbnb in Picton.

Meanwhile, Nicole’s sister Daina and brother-in-law Trevor, who also live in Oakville, were considering buying a vacation property for themselves and their three kids. Though they initially wanted to find something in a sunny U.S. location like Florida, the pandemic made them shift their attention closer to home. Daina and Trevor were interested in Muskoka, but after Nicole’s Picton trip, Daina suggested the two families team up for a joint property in PEC.

Both couples wanted a place where their families could stay simultaneously, while also having the potential to function as an income property for part of the year. They first considered converting a \$700,000 triplex in Picton into a single unit, but rules for short-term accommodation in the county were becoming increasingly strict, so they moved on.

When Nicole came across the \$4 million online listing for The Beach Waupoos, she sent the link to her sister on a lark. They hadn’t considered a place so large, resort-like and expensive. Everyone was skeptical, but Daina’s husband, Trevor, ran the numbers and convinced the group to consider it. With their combined savings, the income potential and likelihood for a 30-acre waterfront estate to appreciate over time, everyone started to take the idea more seriously. The beach, which came with kayaks and stand-up paddleboards, piqued the interest of both couples. Plus, it was the type of place that could be passed down for generations.

Neither family wanted to miss out, so on August 3, without a proper viewing, they submitted an offer that matched the asking price, conditional on visiting the property and getting a home

inspection. The same day, the couples went up to Prince Edward County to drive past the property and explore the Picton area.

On August 8, when they first visited the place in person, the seller was preparing to film a “lifestyle” video for the listing, featuring a beachfront BBQ, an outdoor dance party with a disco ball and a helicopter landing on the lawn—hoping to target big-pocketed buyers. The visit sealed the deal. Once both of the couples saw the scale of the property and the potential to carve out trails through the trees and build cabins in the woods, they firmed up the offer. Plus, the home inspector gave the property a passing grade, noting that the worn wooded façade of the main house would need to be repainted.

The sale closes at the end of October. In the meantime, the buyers are applying for their short-term accommodation license. They plan to take over the current Airbnb listing, but change the name from The Beach Waupoos to “The Two Sisters Beach.” And the seller will stay nearby. She recently purchased a house in Picton, where she’ll stay while her new lakefront home is built. Next summer, she hopes to rent out The Two Sisters Beach with friends and family.

The tour

Here’s the front of the main building, which the sellers called the “Big Blue House”:

Inside, the steel-beam structure has 22-foot ceilings:

Here's the 670-square-foot living room, which has a gas fireplace:

The 275-square-foot dining area abuts the kitchen bar:

Here's the kitchen, which the seller painted blue to match the exterior:

Above the main floor, there's a 250-square-foot loft, where the sellers added extra beds:

The first two bedrooms are both less than 200 square feet:

The master bedroom is 450 square feet with plenty of headroom:

Outside, the beach is a two-minute walk from the house. It has a pavilion with a kitchenette, dining area and ping-pong table:

Pre-Covid, the sellers hosted 25-person luncheons at this 18-foot table, which is made from Indonesian teak:

After living in Bali for a year, the seller bought this seating area as a birthday gift for her late husband. It's known as a *bale-bale* in Indonesia:

There's a small peninsula on the property, where the sellers hosted multiple family weddings:

Here's the beach cottage, which has beadboard ceilings and hardwood floors:

Both bedrooms look out onto the forested area between Big Blue House and the beach:

Here's the second:

There's also a sunroom on the beach-side of the cottage:

That sunroom connects to a deck with views of Lake Ontario:

Here's another view of the 560-foot beach:

By the numbers

- \$3,970,000
- \$13,101 in taxes
- 8,200 square feet (including beach house)
- 29 days on MLS
- 6 bedrooms

- 3 bathrooms
- 6-car garage
- 10 parking spaces