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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

Drama after Dark

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WASAN ISLAND

Cottage compound
with a global legacy

LUND BOATS

Little details,
big differences

SERENA WEST

Bold colours
and confident
brushstrokes

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 10 EDITOR'S NOTE**
Making hay while the sun shines
- 18 COTTAGE PROFILE**
Wasan Island's global legacy
- 34 GREY BOATHOUSE**
A piece of architectural heritage
- 36 DRAMA AFTER DARK**
Stunning outdoor cottage lighting
- 46 GARDENING GATEWAY**
Canning your surplus
- 52 IN PURSUIT OF CREATIVITY**
Serena West's artistic journey
- 58 IN THE NEWS**
Silver Bridge work, Lake Partner Program and more



- 62 LOOKING BACK**
The Brighton Beach Hotel
- 66 SCENE AND HEARD**
The Rosseau's evolving elegance
- 72 FATHER & SON ROCKIN'**
The Van Hillert Band
- 74 LUND BOAT REVIEW**
Little details, big differences
- 79 BOATING NEWS**
Marine stereo, outboard remote and more



66



62



74

- 82 **CULINARY READS**
Make your ice cream “extra”
- 88 **VINTAGE SELECTIONS**
Chardonnay’s new palate
- 89 **REAL ESTATE LISTINGS**
Local homes and cottages for sale
- 106 **PRIVIED INFORMATION**
The history of outhouses



82



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Sales Representative, SRES, ABR

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.....
Check out Lake Rosseau's Finest Private Island in the Venita Group of Islands with over 2,500' of frontage & 7 acres of mature pine trees & Muskoka granite. Featured on page 18.
.....

JOE QUINN

Sales Representative, SRES, ABR

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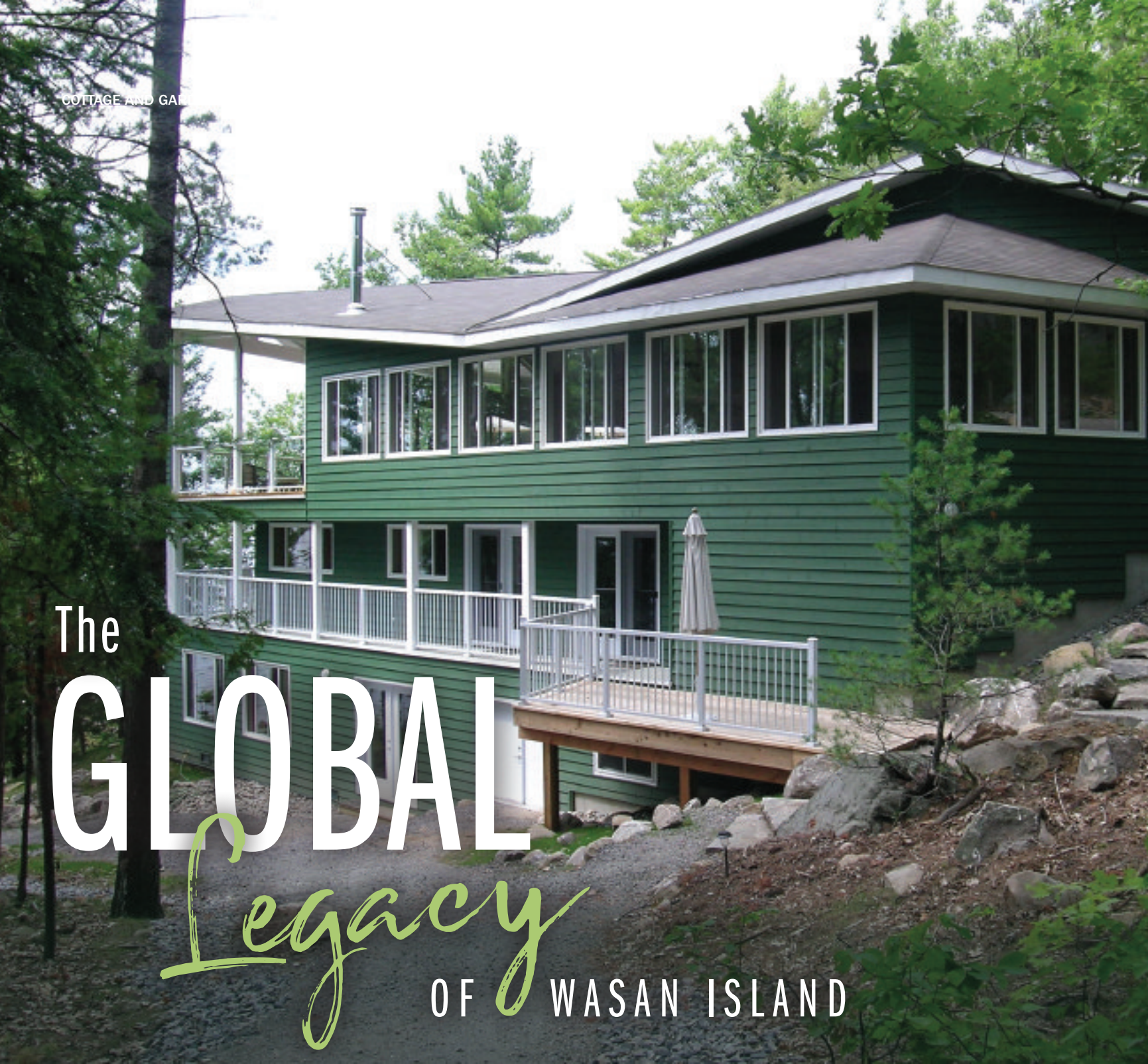
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The GLOBAL *Legacy* OF WASAN ISLAND

For a quarter century, groups of international experts, leaders and professionals arrived at Wasan Island to focus on making the planet a more peaceful place. Though the conferences hosted by Germany's Breuninger Foundation have ceased, the innovative ideas generated there still resonate globally.

BY PATTI VIPOND



In the early 1980s, Helga Breuninger, co-founder with her father Heinz of the non-profit Breuninger Foundation, travelled from Germany to stay at a friend's cottage in Muskoka. As many have, she fell in love with the area.

Breuninger immediately bought a cottage with a stunning sunset view on Fairylands Island on Lake Rosseau. However, the property lacked even a glimpse of sunrise.

Breuninger knew owning an entire island would give access to both prospects.

That's where historic Wasan Island enters the story.

Located in the Venetian Island group on Lake Rosseau, six-acre Wasan Island had been a local landmark for generations with its tall vintage Grey Boathouse. Some say the island once belonged to the first president of the Muskoka Steamship

Company. There's also a rumour that Clark Gable and Carole Lombard stayed in one of the island's intimate cabins on their honeymoon.

Breuninger purchased the property in 1985 as a family cottage compound. Existing structures on the forested island included the main cottage, Grey Boathouse, Green Boathouse, a guest cottage and a bunkie.



LOCATED IN THE VENETIAN ISLAND GROUP ON LAKE ROSSEAU, SIX-ACRE WASAN ISLAND HAD BEEN A LOCAL LANDMARK FOR GENERATIONS WITH ITS TALL VINTAGE GREY BOATHOUSE.



"When Helga bought the island, the Grey Boathouse's wood was totally rotten," said Hann, managing director at the Breuninger Foundation. "The contractor said the smartest thing would be to take it down and rebuild. Helga said no way. We invested in a renovation in the later 1980s, keeping the original style. Afterwards, she got messages from fellow cottagers thanking her for keeping their childhood memories alive. The buildings on the island were fairly worn down when Helga bought Wasan. She brought the buildings back to their natural beauty."

Wasan Island fulfilled the role of Breuninger family cottage and quiet retreat for a busy executive for about 15 years.

Meanwhile Hann, invited by Breuninger, came to Muskoka in 1997 to experience Wasan Island. The property's effect on him was life changing.

"I was blown away, just loved it," said Hann. "Somehow, when I set my foot on

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BREUNINGER PURCHASED
THE PROPERTY IN 1985 AS A
FAMILY COTTAGE COMPOUND.
EXISTING STRUCTURES ON
THE FORESTED ISLAND
INCLUDED THE MAIN COTTAGE,
GREY BOATHOUSE, GREEN
BOATHOUSE, A GUEST COTTAGE
AND A BUNKIE.

the rock at the Grey Boathouse it felt like home. At the time, Helga's kids had grown up and she felt it was time to sell. We sat by the fireplace one night talking about it. I didn't think she should sell because Wasan Island was such a special place. I said, 'What if we get the people you are working with together at a place like this?' Back then, we usually went to city hotels or conference halls for our think tanks. But what if we started the day with yoga, had simple accommodations, provided good food, and after the daytime work we spent evenings in further conversation by the fireplace? At breaks, people could swim or go canoeing. Helga, who is a very creative and inspired person, said 'If you'll take it on, let's do it!' I said yes, but had no idea what I was getting into."

This initiative was based on Breuninger's desire to bring her heritage as the great granddaughter of the founder of Germany's renowned Breuninger's department stores into a foundation. This would give back some of her privilege through non-profit work in education and research.

The first Breuninger Foundation conference on Wasan was in 1999. However, additional accommodation and meeting spaces were under construction during the spring and fall. All of these additional structures remain on the island today.

Hidden away in the woods, the pavilion was the first build. A large multi-purpose space for groups, it was designed for

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morning yoga and daily meetings as well as celebrations and concerts. The 1,997-square-foot pavilion contains a conference room, kitchen, bedroom and two bathrooms.

Hann worried great thinkers and renowned guests invited to the inaugural summer session wouldn't want to share the eight guest rooms. But the feedback was full of gratitude from people who loved the experience.

"We didn't even have proper programs," said Hann. "We started with a few groups of people that we wanted to work with or

had already worked with. It turned out to be awesome."

As a non-profit, the Foundation didn't have a budget for expensive buildings. Older structures were refurbished with a balance between making guests comfortable and staying on budget. Larger buildings were kept simple in design.

With a growing number of groups interested in experiencing Wasan Island, the three-storey lodge was built in 2007. With six guest rooms on the first and second floors, the total number of guest rooms rose





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“IT’S LIKELY ONE OF THE LARGEST KITCHENS IN MUSKOKA BECAUSE WE WANTED ROOM TO BE ABLE TO COOK TOGETHER AND MAKE MEALS.”





to 16 to accommodate up to 22 guests. The third floor of the 4,800-square-foot lodge houses a massive kitchen and dining area, an expansive covered outdoor patio and a cozy sitting area. A laundry and workshop are also on the first floor.

"It's likely one of the largest kitchens in Muskoka because we wanted room to be able to cook together and make meals," said Hann. "Sharing and preparing food is a great activity for groups. But it turned out to be far more convenient for great chefs to make meals so people could focus on work."

The 2,035-square-foot main cottage, originally built in 1940 and rebuilt in the late 1980s, has a living room with a huge stone fireplace, sun porch, dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a laundry.

Two new guest cabins supplemented the existing 1960s single-bedroom Love Cabin and Forest Cabin. The larger 1970s Guest Cabin has a living room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen. This cabin would become housing for Hann and his four-person team who did the enormous job of maintaining the buildings as well as bringing all supplies and people to and from the island.

The Sunset and East docks were added to give guests beautiful morning and evening views. The Grey Boathouse, built in 1930 and renovated in 1990, is an entertainment hub with a second floor



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WITH A GROWING NUMBER OF GROUPS INTERESTED IN EXPERIENCING WASAN ISLAND, THE THREE-STORY LODGE WAS BUILT IN 2007. WITH SIX GUEST ROOMS ON THE FIRST AND SECOND FLOORS, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF GUEST ROOMS ROSE TO 16 TO ACCOMMODATE UP TO 22 GUESTS. THE THIRD FLOOR OF THE 4,800-SQUARE-FOOT LODGE HOUSES A MASSIVE KITCHEN AND DINING AREA, AN EXPANSIVE COVERED OUTDOOR PATIO AND A COZY SITTING AREA.

lounge and recreation room with a pool and ping pong tables. On the other side of the island, the Green Boathouse, Breuninger's traditional and cozy residence, has a wet slip for boats, a dry slip for canoes and kayaks, and a dock with a hot tub. Upstairs, living quarters contain a living room with fireplace, a bedroom and bathroom.

Today, accommodation on Wasan Island totals 21 bedrooms with 13 bathrooms and about 10,000 square feet of living space in cottages, cabins and other buildings. The island's 2,500 feet of natural shoreline encompasses a gazebo, a hydro cabin with electrical panels, and a network of walking trails.

The history of the Breuninger Foundation years on Wasan is found on the pavilion's Wall of Fame. Portraits of every group invited to the island tell the story of the almost 4,000 people who inhabited and enlivened the place. Between 1999 and 2023, numerous conferences, think tanks and non-profits ran every year from May to September in collaboration with German and Canadian foundations.

Deep discussions held on this small island gave diverse groups the ability to learn, lead and cooperate to find better



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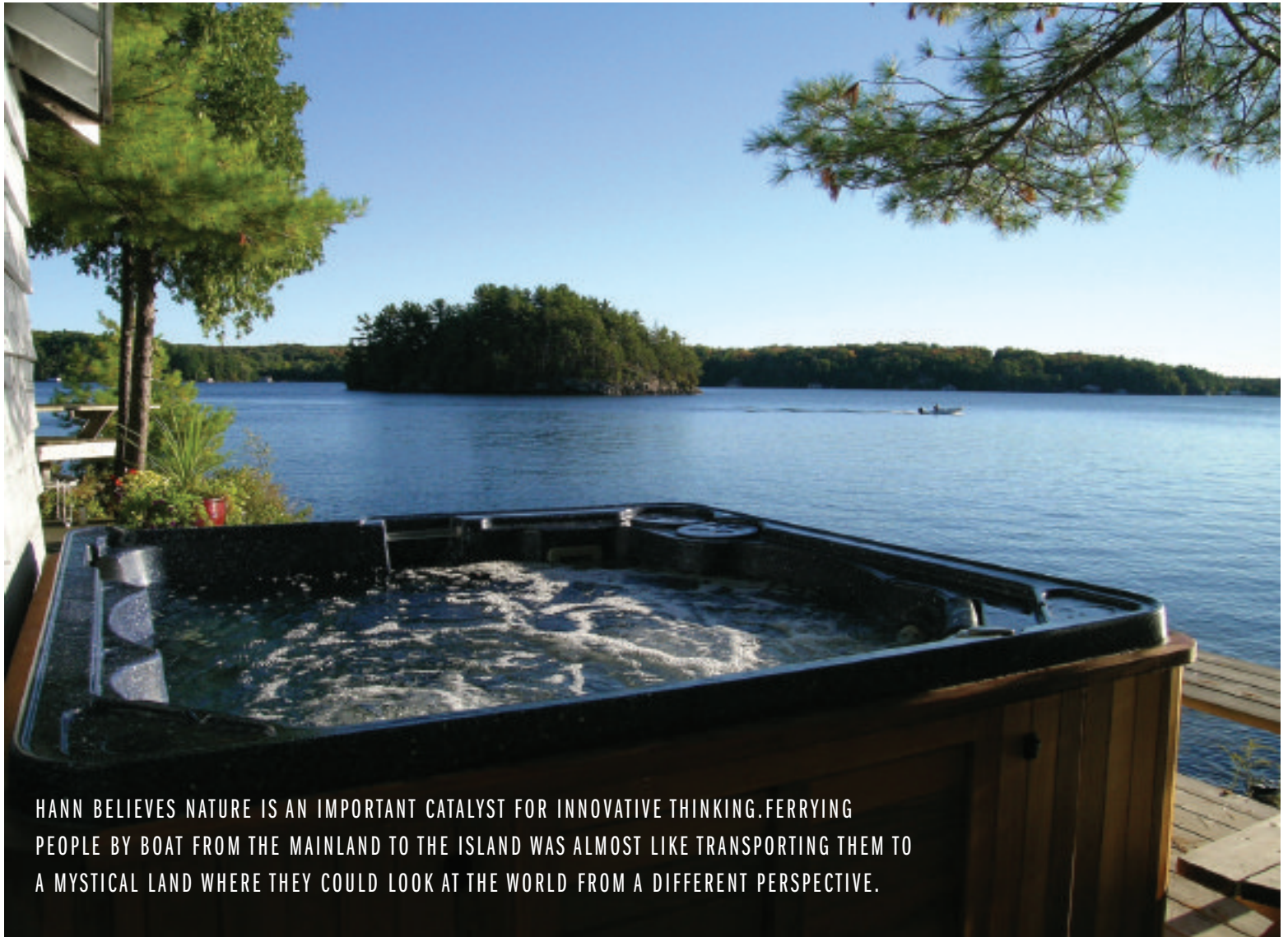
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HANN BELIEVES NATURE IS AN IMPORTANT CATALYST FOR INNOVATIVE THINKING. FERRYING PEOPLE BY BOAT FROM THE MAINLAND TO THE ISLAND WAS ALMOST LIKE TRANSPORTING THEM TO A MYSTICAL LAND WHERE THEY COULD LOOK AT THE WORLD FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.





“TO COME TO A PLACE LIKE WASAN ISLAND WHERE LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE REALLY LISTEN TO YOUR PROBLEMS AND IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE HELPED MANY FIND A BETTER WAY TO DO THINGS.”

ways to create peace at local, national and international levels.

“The joy of sharing the island to make a difference in the world and to acknowledge people’s work while connecting with them inspired Helga,” said Hann. “To come to a place like Wasan Island where like-minded people really listen to your problems and ideas about how to make a difference helped many find a better way to do things.”

Hann believes nature is an important catalyst for innovative thinking. Ferrying people by boat from the mainland to the island was almost like transporting them to a mystical land where they could look at the world from a different perspective. He believes leaving something behind to find something new is the true idea of retreat.

“I have been reflecting on how we connect to places,” he said. “Coming as a German to Canada is wonderful because we love Canada. Both countries have forests, rivers and cities, but Canada is a thousand times bigger. It’s almost a romantic notion we have about Canada.”

Through speaking with members of the Wasauksing First Nation in Parry Sound,

Hann discovered an Indigenous connection to Wasan Island. The Wasauksing elders had memories of the Venetian Islands, and specifically Wasan Island, being visited as a place of retreat. Ceremonies were not held at Indigenous settlements but at special places of ritual energy.

“Going to Wasan was a privilege for them,” said Hann. “When you landed on the island, you were retreating from your world into a little continent where you could centre on yourself. The idea of ceremony or retreat, of hiding from the world and creating new ideas or attitudes, is done by following the tradition. I learned the Indigenous quote, ‘We don’t own land, land owns us.’ I realized that’s what I’ve always felt. We’re more stewards than owners because land has a history and will have a future beyond our impact.”

The Breuninger Foundation, which bought the island in 2006, brought the conferences on Wasan Island to a close in 2023 after the pandemic. However, inspired by the work there, Breuninger found a way to continue the initiative in Germany.

With Wasan listed for sale, Hann found it

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difficult to let go of the island and the kind of work done there. But he is enormously grateful for the experience and for those who shared it. He still receives messages from people who say their time on the island was life changing.

“My favourite comment from the guestbook is, ‘We came as guests and left as friends,’” said Hann. “We always wanted to keep the atmosphere of a private cottage

on the island for our invited guests.” 🌿

1 Wasan Island R40 on Lake Rosseau is listed at \$10,995,000 by Joe Quinn of Chestnut Park Real Estate Brokerage, 110 Medora St. in Port Carling. To arrange a tour of this property or for more information, please call Joe at 705-644-3015 (cell) or 705-765-6878 (office), email jquinn@muskoka.com, or go to muskokacottages.com.

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The Grey Boathouse





With its crisp white dormers and unique roofline, the Grey Boathouse on Wasan Island has been a defining feature of Lake Rosseau's southern Venetian Island group for nearly a century.

Easily visible from the busy boating route between Port Carling and Port Sandfield, the boathouse is more than just a handsome vintage structure. It's a piece of Ontario's architectural heritage and Muskoka's history.

The boathouse is believed to be the work of Mackenzie Waters, a prominent Toronto architect in the early to mid 20th century. In 1933, he designed a lakeside pavilion called The Deck at the Elgin House Hotel on nearby Lake Joseph. The possibility that Waters also designed the Grey Boathouse is supported by a record in his biography of another project in Muskoka. The boathouse reflects the architect's skill for combining form and function.

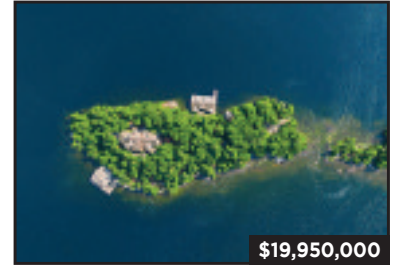
Known for his elegant neo-Georgian and colonial revival designs, Waters was also an early advocate for architectural preservation, co-founding the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. His portfolio also includes the 1928 Elizabethan-style Ridpath's store in Toronto.

Perhaps most notably, Waters collaborated in 1931 with Jack Ryrie and the renowned Montreal firm Ross & Macdonald in designing Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto's Art Deco sports palace. That same firm also styled some of Canada's most iconic landmarks including the Royal York Hotel, Toronto's Union Station and Ottawa's Château Laurier.

The Grey Boathouse's image has graced the pages of many books and publications over the years, earning its place in the district's cultural and architectural legacy and the memories of Muskoka cottagers. 🍂



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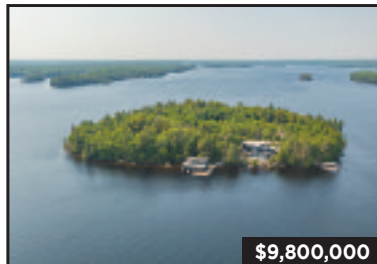
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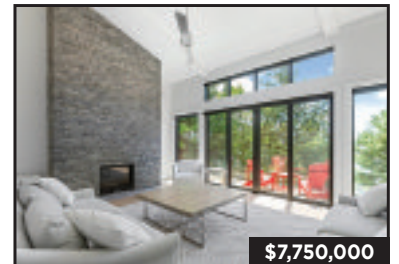


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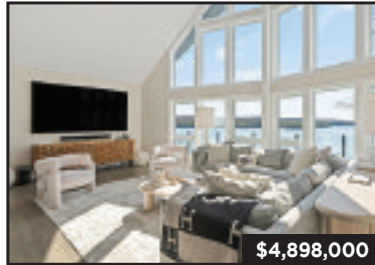
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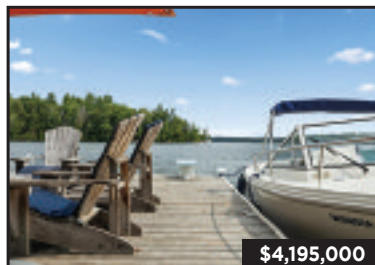


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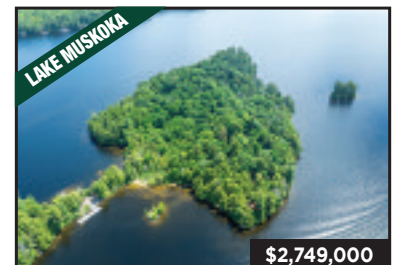


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