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HOUSE DESIGN

Inside a 16,000-Sq-Ft Lakefront Home Designed Around One Idea – Bringing Family Together

'Their priority wasn't creating something showy, but rather something generous, warm, and highly functional, where people could spread out but still feel connected'



By Hebe Hatton published yesterday in Home-tours

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After many happy vacations spent in the three cottages on this stunning lakeside plot, the owners decided they wanted to create a 'central hub'. A space where all the family could easily come together to cook, eat, play, and relax.

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The family brought on Olivia and Jenna Botrie, the dynamic sister design duo behind Dart Studio, and worked collaboratively to design a new build that was to become a home for family gatherings – a place for everyone to come together in relaxed, welcoming, open plan spaces. This vision inspired every design decision made from the layouts, right down to the color schemes.

'This was a new build in Penetanguishene, set on a beautiful lakefront property,' says Olivia. 'The setting is incredibly quiet and natural, with protected land across the water, so the view will remain untouched over time.'

'That sense of permanence and calm really shaped the design approach. It called for a home that felt rooted and enduring – something relaxed, warm, and deeply connected to the landscape, rather than overly polished or formal.'

Nothing was to feel too perfect – every room was to be designed to be used and used well by the whole family. This is a huge home, 16,000 square feet, 5-bedroom, 7-bathroom, but each space feels intimate and easy. Here, Olivia talk us through this collaborative project.



(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

'The clients wanted a true gathering place – a home that could comfortably host extended family and friends for long weekends by the lake,' explains Olivia. 'Their priority wasn't creating something showy, but rather something generous, warm, and highly functional, where people could spread out but still feel connected.'

'We were involved very early, working collaboratively through planning, layout, and overall vision. It was a close, iterative process – aligning on how the home would be used day-to-day and during larger gatherings. That early involvement allowed us to carry a consistent design language through architecture, interiors, and final styling.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

This idea of a 'hub' was what guided a lot of the design decisions, the home needed to feel open, flowing from room to room, so if someone was relaxing in the living room, they could still feel part of the goings on in the kitchen. There would be room for everyone, no matter what the activity.

'The home was designed to bring people together naturally,' says Olivia. 'The main living spaces – kitchen, dining, and living room – are all connected and oriented toward the lake, allowing for easy flow and constant visual connection. The kitchen in particular acts as the anchor, with a large island and generous circulation space that encourages gathering without feeling crowded.'

'There are three additional cottages on the property, each designed as an independent, single-family space. The intention with this home was to create a central hub – more of a lodge – where everyone could come together. It acts as the heart of the property, supporting shared meals, gatherings, and time spent together, while still allowing each family to retreat to their own space when needed.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

Even the house's color scheme was to ensure the rooms felt connected, warm, and welcoming. Olivia and Jenna call the palette 'color non-color' – the tones are washed and muted, but never flat.

'We approached the palette as a series of layered neutrals, drawn from natural materials like wood, stone, linen, and metal, and then quietly punctuated with subtle color,' Olivia explains. 'Muted, moody tones – plum, ochre, and teal – many inspired by the Farrow & Ball palette - were woven through each of the spaces. While these are technically colors, their washed-out, slightly muddy quality allows them to read more like timeless neutrals rather than accents.'

'The goal was to create a palette that feels cohesive and continuous throughout the entire home. Nothing feels isolated or overly defined – instead, everything blends and builds on itself. You could take a pillow from one room and move it into another, and it would still feel entirely at home. That consistency was intentional; it allows the house to feel calm, layered, and connected rather than overly styled or segmented.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

Of course, the kitchen was to be the hub of this hub. A huge space with an island and dining nook for casual dinners, a pantry, and an open-plan living room. And yet despite its size, the space still feels cozy.

'Designed as the heart of the home, the kitchen is anchored by warm wood cabinetry, a leathered stone countertop, and a generous island that naturally draws people in. The hood, which is centered on the peak of the roof, becomes a defining feature within the space – not overly decorative, but quietly strong – helping to ground the room and give it a clear focal point. Overall, it balances function with a quiet, timeless aesthetic – designed to feel considered, but never overworked,' Olivia says.

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

The kitchen is filled with personality, with prints and collections lining the walls and countertops. Vintage-style runners are used to soften the space and create a break in the wood tones. The marble countertops create a touch of luxury, but it's lived-in luxury, as per the brief, this was to be far from a show home; this needed to be a kitchen that worked for a big family.

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

'Anchored by a large stone fireplace and framed by expansive windows, the living room opens directly to the lake and feels both intimate and expansive at once,' says Olivia.

'The fireplace acts as a grounding element within the space, creating a sense of warmth and focus while still allowing the views to take center stage. Tucked just behind the stone column, there's a porch swing positioned to capture one of the best views of the lake.'

'It's a quieter, more private moment within the home – slightly hidden, but deeply connected to the landscape – and has become one of the most loved spots in the house.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

As well as the more informal dining spaces in the kitchen, there's also a large dining room, big enough for the whole family to eat together. Although more formal than the kitchen, this isn't a formal room; it's not designed to be saved for special occasions.

'Positioned to capture views of the lake and comfortably accommodate large gatherings, the dining area is designed with a focus on proportion and ease rather than formality. It's a space that feels just as natural for everyday use as it does for hosting,' says Olivia.

'A key feature is its ability to expand when needed – the console behind the sofa folds out to extend the dining table, matching its exact width and allowing the space to comfortably seat up to 20. This flexibility was important to the clients, supporting the way they host and ensuring the room can adapt effortlessly from intimate dinners to larger gatherings.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

'Designed as part of the "motel wing," the bedrooms were conceived to comfortably accommodate a large number of guests while maintaining a sense of calm and cohesion,' Olivia explains.

'Each room follows the same layout and design language, and while the architecture and millwork remain consistent, each bedroom is subtly differentiated through color, creating a quiet sense of individuality within a highly unified whole. The result is a series of spaces that feel intentional and consistent, yet still personal – designed for comfort, ease, and repeat use over time.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

'The principal suite was designed as its own building, connected to the main house by a glass hallway that creates a quiet moment of transition and separation. This allows the suite to feel more private and retreat-like, set apart from the energy of the main living spaces.'

'While it maintains continuity through the use of warm wood and natural materials, we introduced tongue and groove to subtly differentiate it from the rest of the home and give it a more tailored, intimate character. The view is the most important feature – the layout and detailing were kept intentionally restrained to allow the landscape to take center stage.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

This was a big project for Dart Studio and was four years in the making, and as with any large-scale project, it did come with challenges. For this new build, it was actually the size that proved the trickiest part of the process – the home needed to be big to accommodate all the people the homeowners wanted to regularly host, but it also needed to feel warm and intimate.

'One of the main challenges was balancing the scale of the home with a sense of warmth,' says Olivia. 'At 16,000 square feet, it was important that the spaces didn't feel oversized or impersonal. We achieved that through material choices, proportions, and layering – bringing in detail and texture to humanize the scale.'

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(Image credit: Niamh Barry)

'My favorite part of the project is the way the home feels when it's in use. It was designed to be lived in – full of people, movement, and energy – and seeing it come to life in that way is always the most rewarding part,' Olivia explains.

'Whether in the summer with doors open to the lake, or in the winter gathered around the fire, the house holds a crowd beautifully. It allows for both large, lively gatherings and quieter, more private moments to happen at the same time. Nothing feels forced or over-designed – it just works. That sense of ease and connection is exactly what we were aiming for from the beginning.'

'What made this project special was the clarity of intention from the beginning. It was never about creating a perfect, static space – it was about designing a home that could evolve, be used, and feel better over time. That mindset shaped every decision we made.'