

Savvy on a • HILL

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY TED SIMPSON



The architecture and design team of Dylan O’Keefe and Haley Fiorenza are known for their versatility in projects that range from modern infill to grand waterfront newbuilds to heritage home restorations. With some of their recent work taking place at the expanding ski village of Mont Ste-Marie, the duo are perfecting the art of building houses on hills.

Dylan and Haley have been creating custom homes together in the Ottawa area for the past nine years. Haley is a registered interior designer and Dylan an architect. Being a small firm, the principals of O’Keefe Fiorenza Design Group tend to wear many hats, and have a hand in all aspects of the design and finishing. Haley sees herself as more of a traditionalist while Dylan leans into more modern designs. Their sensibilities come together perfectly when the pair get to tackle a modern restoration of a classically built house.

Since 2018 the duo have done four chalet build projects on the steep slope of Mont Ste-Marie, where development has been booming. The small ski resort north of Ottawa is not as large or well-equipped as the more well-known Mont-Tremblant, however, it offers up a much shorter drive from the city and an escape from the large crowds.

This kind of rugged location brings new and exciting challenges for the designers to collaborate with the natural world. Two projects on the mountain include an open concept, mid-century that sits high near the top of the development and a more intimate, modern design near the base of the hill.

“The open concept chalet was interesting because we had a design and we had a layout done but we are designing with a lot that’s uncleared, so it’s hard to really gauge what’s going on under the ground,” says Dylan.

“Dylan and I spent a lot of days walking through the trees trying to get a bearing for the landscape and one thing that we learned through that process was it’s a lot easier to do the general massing of the space and then clear some of the area and then go back and revisit our design,” says Haley.



THIS PAGE (RIGHT) DYLAN AND HALEY DESIGNED THE MILL WORK AND CUSTOM DETAILS THROUGHOUT THE HOME
BELOW THE KITCHEN IS BY IRPINIA
FACING PAGE HALEY (LEFT) AND DYLAN HAVE WORKED ON NUMEROUS CHALETs AND COTTAGES IN THE AREA.



“ Dylan and I spent a lot of days walking through the trees trying to get a bearing for the landscape...”

HALEY FIORENZA



When the trees and soil were finally cleared away from the property to reveal the bedrock, Dylan and Haley found a natural shelving of the stone that formed three distinct levels. At that point they were left with the decision to either go ahead and blast the natural rock away to force their initial design for the mid-century build, or to re-evaluate and step the foundation to match.

“We ended up doing a split-level configuration where you come in at a level and then enter up or down,” says Haley. “And that was all because of the three layers of bedrock that we didn’t want to blast.”

The open concept living area of the chalet draws on a mid-century style with a shed roof and exposed, black beams. It is then warmed up with wood ceilings, stone and natural wood finishings incorporated with the kitchen space.

Further down the slope the talented team used a similar incorporation of nature and design to create a modern chalet with a network of smaller, more intimate spaces that follows Doctor Who’s ethos of being bigger on the inside, with half of the chalet concealed within the mass of the hill. “We actually had a very small footprint that we’ve maxed out by going up four floors,” says Dylan. “It doesn’t really look it from the streets; we broke it up with the massing but it’s actually four floors and there’s a dumb waiter that goes from the basement to the top floor because the kitchen is on the third level.”

It’s looking certain that the savvy pair, and others in the architecture and design field, will be spending a lot of time on the slopes of Mont Ste-Marie in the years to come.



THIS PAGE (ABOVE) STAINED, PINE WOOD CLAD CEILING CAME FROM LES BOIS HERITAGE IN KAZABAZUA
LEFT ENGINEERED HARD WOOD FLOORING IS GOODFELLOW SAN MARINO IN THE COLOUR, LYNN CANYON

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