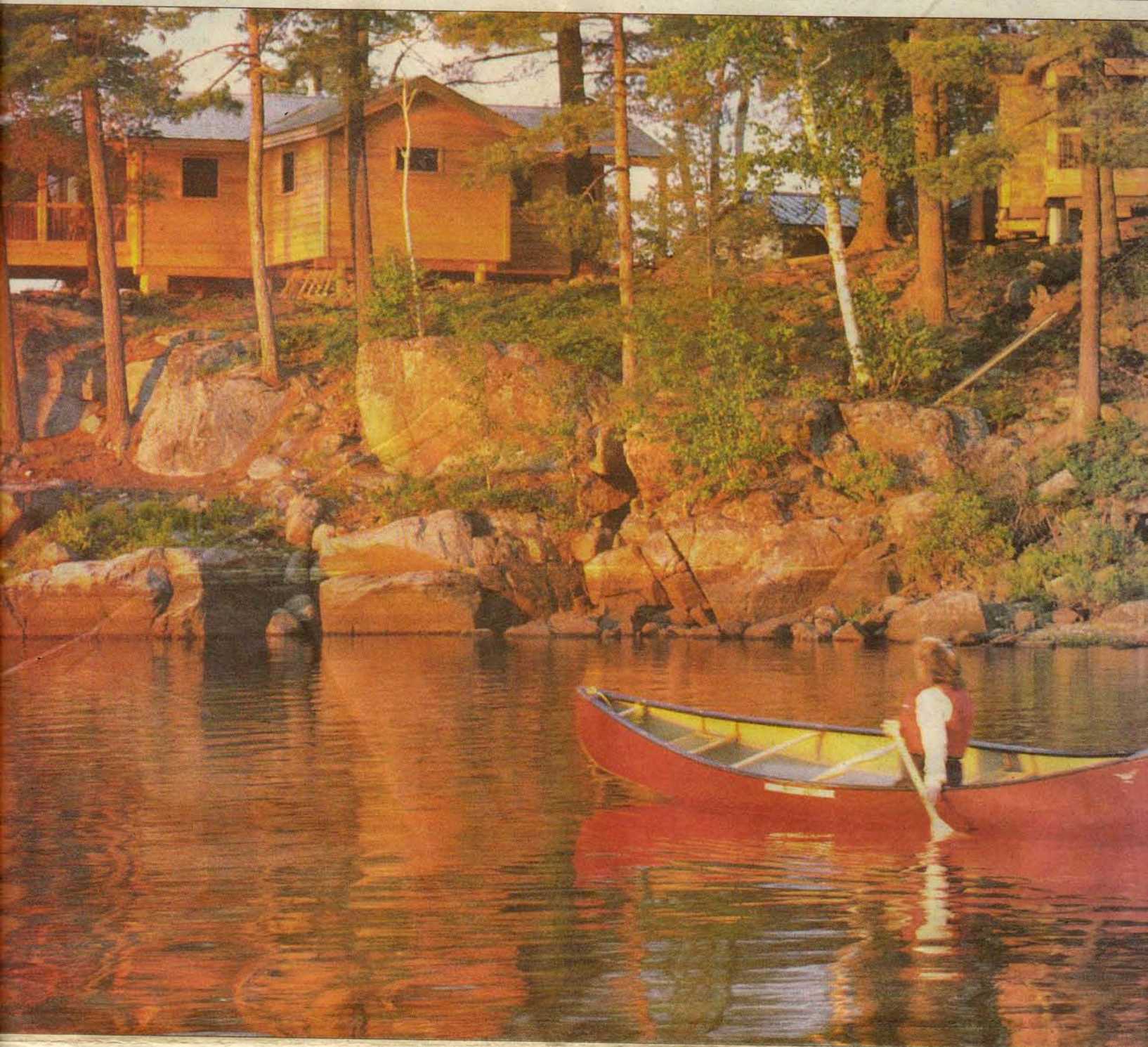


Travel

Chamberlain, 674-5271, ext. 233, fax: 674-6834, e-mail: wchamberlain@thesudburystar.com



has existed in different forms since 1935. A fire in the 1960s destroyed the lodge. It was rebuilt, but not to its former glory. That is until the n

Tranquility on the French River

ness — the kind he always finds on the French River. Strachan, 68, wants his lodges

smelled of gasoline from the watercraft constantly zoom-

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Serenity on the French

The restored Lodge at Pine Cove offers peaceful respite

BY LARA BRADLEY
The Sudbury Star

It's only an hour and 10 minute drive from Sudbury.

Along that last stretch of Hwy. 528 A, dipping under the pines — giants by Sudbury standards — you wonder if maybe you've taken a wrong turn.

There's not a sign, not a blue provincial highway marker or a hand-painted one, announcing that The Lodge at Pine Cove is near. But sure enough, when you run out of road, there it is.

It was while carrying a canoe on his head that Alex Strachan, the lodge's owner, first saw this curious piece of French River geography.

A veteran outdoorsman and paddler of the river, a friend suggested they put in at the rundown Pine Cove lodge, in the Wolseley Bay area of the French, for their trip.

"This is a different little place," he thought, looking at pink granite, the sand and the cove.

And he knew he had to have it. Although Strachan was not shopping for a lodge, he set out to buy the property.

A short time later, Strachan left his job as Royal LePage's senior vice-president of commercial holdings and set to work with the help of his friend, a world-class humidifier maker, to design the lodge.

They spent two full years living on a small cottage on the property, completely gutting and rebuilding the lodge that had been a long-time landmark in the area, first erected in 1935 by Gene Rioux.

Back then, there was no highway, no road, so all the supplies had to come in by water. Three decades later, a fire destroyed Rioux's gem. Although it was rebuilt, it was not restored to its former glory.

When Strachan first came across it in 1996, the lodge



PHOTO SUPPLIED TO THE STAR

The Lodge at Pine Cove is just a 70-minute drive from Sudbury and is open year-round.

had suffered decades of decay and sat unused for many years. He wanted to recreate the 1930s feel.

Four-hundred red pine trees from Strachan's farm in Caledon went into the new structure.

"We get lots of artists, paddlers, canoers, kayakers and some fishermen. The river is infinitely variable."

**Alex Strachan,
Owner of The Lodge
at Pine Cove**

Copper was used for the top of the bar, while its base was lined with strips of different colour woods, like that of a wooden canoe.

At its front entrance is the forest-inspired ironworks, hammered and designed by an award-winning blacksmith friend of Strachan.

Its library is dedicated to Toni Harting, a veteran paddler and photographer, who wrote the book *French River: Canoeing the River of the Stick-Wavers* after spending six years exploring its contours.

On its walls hang paintings by artists who have stayed there, including some by Greg Hindle, who heads the lodge's art program when he isn't teaching at the Ontario Arts College in Toronto.

Later came the building of its 12 cottages on a promontory across the water from the lodge, accessible by a footbridge.

Each cottage faces the water, with a screened-in porch, and boasts bedrooms with deluxe mattresses made from Sudbury's North Star Bedding.

In fact, about 80 per cent of the materials used rebuilding the lodge came from local suppliers and its current staff all hail from the area.

Although The Lodge at Pine Cove has been open since about 2000, Strachan counts its history as beginning about 3 1/2 years ago, when Chef Craig Young, a former member of B.C.'s famed Wickanishish Inn in Tofino's kitchen, joined its team.

Young prides himself on creating mainly organic meals, made from primarily locally available ingredients.

The cost of staying at the lodge includes three meals from Young's kitchen. For those who plan to spend the day exploring the French River on one of the lodge's canoes, kayaks or motor boats, Young will pack them a picnic basket.

Sitting with his fiancée Janine Suboch, looking out onto the waters, Strachan talked about his philosophy and vision for the lodge.

While he had a "very good, very successful career" in real estate and prior to that as a global grain trader, they weren't careers that brought him a lot of personal happi-

ness — the kind he always finds on the French River. Strachan, 68, wants his lodge to offer others an escape from their hectic, busy lives.

"My vision is peace and serendipity in really comfortable and elegant, but simple surroundings ... so people can relax from the madness that surrounds them in their daily lives," he said.

You won't find TVs, computer terminals or other techno distractions at the lodge or in its cottages.

"It's simple and quiet," Strachan said. "A lovely place to come for dinner or to stay for a few days."

Despite only advertising in southern Ontario publications, Sudburians are starting to find their way to the lodge through word of mouth.

One group held a breakfast meeting there recently. This summer will mark the second time a wine-tasting association will stay there.

While the lodge has hosted large weddings, Strachan would rather stick to smaller affairs in the future to preserve its tranquility.

"We get lots of artists, paddlers, canoers, kayakers and some fishermen," Strachan said. "The river is infinitely variable."

Single women, looking for peace and a wilderness experience, also find the lodge's cottages attractive.

Suboch came to the lodge a few years ago looking for that respite. She had been to a lodge in Muskoka where 160 people would sit for dinner and the water in the lake

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STAY

Cottages

► July 1-Oct. 10 rates: Double occupancy \$190 per person/night; third and fourth adult is \$165 per person/night. Children younger than 12 (July 1-Aug. 31) are \$80 per person/night. Children younger than two with own cot stay free. Single night stay: add \$25 per person. Note: Minimum 2 night stay on weekends and minimum 3 night stay on long weekends

► All cottage rates include dinner on arrival, breakfast on departure, three meals per day, including packed lunch if requested, linens, towels, daily

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Life on the French River



PHOTO SUPPLIED TO THE STAR

Pine Cove is just a 70-minute drive from Sudbury year-round.

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smelled of gasoline from the watercraft constantly zooming by.

"I swam in the pool because I was afraid to swim in the water," she said.

In contrast, The Lodge at Pine Cove has a capacity of 44.

But it's the French River itself that is the key to its charm.

"I don't think there is another waterway like this," Strachan said, "that has the pureness and the variety. It's just endless bays and channels. About 95 per cent of it is park land, crown land or Ojibwa reserve. This is paradise."

Linda Gagnon, the lodge's carpenter and staff scheduler, has been living on the French most of her life.

"This is an escape," she said about the waterway. "A true north wilderness experience."

Alfredo and Gabrielle Spizzirri, of Toronto, have been coming to Pine Cove for 38 years, renting cabins from the lodge's various owners over the years for a month each summer.

Alfredo spends his time on the river looking for pike, although he has also caught a 62-pound Sturgeon and a 25-pound Muskie in its waters.

"I have a place in Italy, but I would rather come here," he said.

"I love nature. I love the French River. I have a lot of friends here."

So, why aren't there signs on the road to Pine Cove?

Suboch, Gagnon and Strachan all laugh.

"Don't you think it's more special that way?" asked Suboch.

"People who really want to find us will find us," Strachan said.

OWN A PIECE OF THE LODGE

- ▶ A half-share in a cottage will give an owner six months use of a cottage each year. Cottage use will be divided into two seasons: the first runs from the beginning of February to the end of July. The second runs from the beginning of August to the end of January. Each year cottage owners will rotate seasons.
- ▶ The prices for a half-share of a single cottage unit ranges from \$115,000 for a one bedroom to \$160,000 for a three bedroom.
- ▶ The maintenance fees are

\$200 per month per cottage unit. This money is paid to the non-profit organization that is owned by the cottage unit owners so it can conduct and pay for the necessary maintenance on behalf of the owners.

- ▶ There will be a total of no more than 17 cottages built, of which 12 have been constructed and are ready for use. The land on which the cottages are built has approximately 1,600 feet of waterfront. All of the cottages are on the water.

STAYING AT THE LODGE

Cottages

- ▶ July 1-Oct. 10 rates: Double occupancy \$190 per person/night; third and fourth adult is \$165 per person/night. Children younger than 12 (July 1-Aug. 31) are \$80 per person/night. Children younger than two with own cot stay free. Single night stay: add \$25 per person. Note: Minimum 2 night stay on weekends and minimum 3 night stay on long weekends
- ▶ All cottage rates include dinner on arrival, breakfast on departure, three meals per day, including packed lunch if requested, linens, towels, daily

maid service and use of facilities.

- ▶ Boats, canoes, kayaks, art courses, whitewater certification, river and fishing guides are available at an extra cost.

Housekeeping Cabins

These are considerably more basic than the private cottages and do not have custom finishings, furniture or deluxe beds.

- ▶ Rates: \$50 per person (minimum of two). Four or more people is \$40 per person. Single night is \$75 per person. Single night group of six or more is \$40 per person.

Policies

- ▶ **Children:** The lodge accommodates children younger than 12 between July 1 and Aug. 31. Prior to and after these dates, it is an adult-only resort. It asks that families with children younger than 12 please sit for dinner from 6-6:30 p.m. to allow others the option of eating at a later time.
- ▶ **Pets:** \$30 per pet per night.

Information

- ▶ **Online:** www.frenchriver.com
- ▶ **Phone:** 705-898-2500

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Alex Strachan,
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