

Weekend Travel

Pine Cove and its owner have serendipity to spare

By Melanie Cummings
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

The good life for Alex Strachan is about a four-hour drive north.

At age 48, he packed in a career as executive vice-president with Royal LePage and bought a dilapidated, abandoned property in Noelville, Ontario, north of Parry Sound.

Over three cold winters, the former Oakville resident lived in a little house and devoted his time, money and energy into reincarnating a former fishing lodge back to its former 1930s-era glory.

What arose from his sweat, labour and love of the outdoors is Pine Cove, a collection of cedar and pine cottages located just a hop, skip and jump across a 50-foot bridge from the Lodge.

Strachan came upon the scenic setting in the mid-1990s, while out canoeing with his son and daughter on the myriad lakes and waterways of the French River.

"It was a gem at the end of the road," said Strachan. That statement holds literal and figurative truth.

In October 2000 he took ownership and set to work. "I wanted out of the corporate life, I was looking for peace and quiet." The landscape and lifestyle provided both.

Strachan left behind the big money world of 13-hour work days spent in a

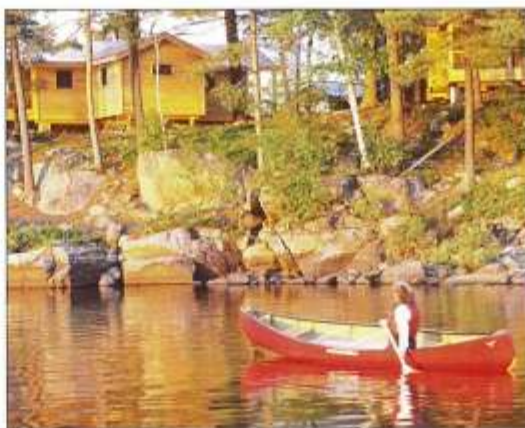


COURTESY PINE COVE

WELCOME: A cottage entrance.

glass office tower and traded it all in for six months of surrounding pink granite rock, white pine trees and serene waters. As an innkeeper the hours are as long as they ever were, but the pace, people and pastimes are more low-key.

"In the business world it's difficult to penetrate the inner core of the people you interact with, but here, at Pine Cove, I get to know people on their own terms



COURTESY PINE COVE

GETTING AWAY: Out for a paddle.

because when people are on vacation they let go of the veneer."

Over the past few years the cottages have become a retreat for Halton residents who know exactly this speed-of-light workday routine. When people arrive Strachan, recognizes well the stress etched into their clenched hands, jaws and shoulders. Each symptom is erased in short measure, though.

"Pine Cove is a place of serendipity and reflection, a place to sit back and reflect," said Strachan, 54.

A great bed, good food and wine, wonderful setting and, of course, the cottages contribute to the mellow atmosphere.

"It has changed my life from being linear to lateral, creating pathways I wouldn't have discovered if I were in this business just for the money," said Strachan.

It's an atmosphere that is definitely conducive to relaxation when the owner himself can still manage to hop in a canoe to explore the myriad islands that dot the French River, swim, fish, picnic, paint and hike.

Pine Cove's predecessor was the Rioux Lodge, which was owned by namesake Gene Rioux between 1935 and 1949. The establishment burned in a fire in 1965 and was rebuilt, but never achieved the glory of its original architecture.

Strachan reincarnated three of the decaying cottages and added new ones, which are replete with all the modern conveniences.

The result is a unique combination of vacation



COURTESY PINE COVE

PEACE: A quiet nook.

resort and shared-ownership cottages on the historic French River, which is 19-metres at its deepest, spans two kilometres at its widest and winds 105-kilometres long. In the summer the water is warm and in the winter thick ice covers the river.

Ever the entrepreneur, Strachan is now selling off 13 cottages specifically built for private ownership, in order to fund a non-profit, grassroots endeavour charged with improving female representation on corporate boards.

Three cottages have already been sold to six owners. Strachan intends to create a village of 26 owners (two per cottage) who each get use of the three-season vacation spot from February to July, or August to January.

For information log on to www.frenchriver.com.



COURTESY PINE COVE

GLORIOUS VIEWS: Rich landscapes viewed from the Pine Cove cottages.

McTavish Travel information service

AHOY MATES!

A mysterious pirate ship has landed at Disney's private island, Castaway Cay, providing **Disney Cruise Line** guests with a swashbuckling photo opportunity and a sneak peek into moviemaking magic! Guests sailing on a Disney Caribbean Cruise that stops at Castaway Cay will discover a 175-foot ghost ship – the Flying Dutchman – that made its silver screen debut on July 07 in Disney's summer box office hit... Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest.

While visiting the Cay, guests should keep a lookout for the infamous Captain Jack Sparrow himself – he has tales to tell of his adventures on the high seas – and may even pose for a photo!

Starting this summer, the **Disney Magic** will embark on seven night alternate western Caribbean itineraries with two stops at Castaway Cay. This special itinerary sails every fourth week through December 09 and will include two days at sea and stops at Costa Maya and Cozumel.

For sailing dates, prices, and more information, give us a call!

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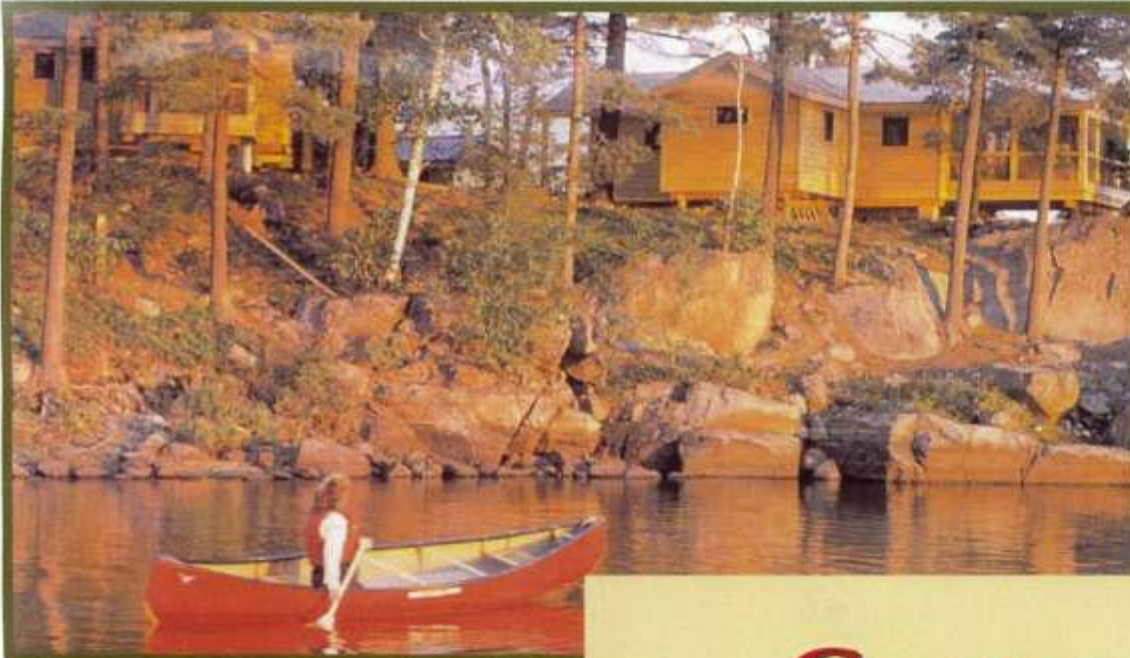
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Peter Strachan
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