



# 7 Essentials for Building a Second Home

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by Megan Kallio

**W**hat does “vacation” mean to you? To most people, a vacation means flying far away to a tropical island or resort. And, surprisingly, vacation can also involve a lot of extra stress—planning and preparation, taking time off of work, getting the kids out of school and finding a flight and hotel package. But what if taking a vacation didn’t mean taking a week or two off of work, packing, loading up the kids and flying far away? What if it meant just getting away for the weekend at your very own cabin or cottage?

Everyone needs to get away—sometimes just a few miles out of town, and other times several hours away. Whether we’re escaping the bustle of a busy city and rush-hour traffic, or just the pressures of everyday life, we all desire that special getaway—our own personal sanctuary where serenity is found around every corner. The reflection of the stars dancing on the lake. Watching the sun set behind the mountain. Even something as simple as the wind softly whistling through the pines.

Whatever your dream getaway is, it is possible to make that dream a reality by building your own second home—on the lakeside, by the sea, in the woods or anywhere else you can imagine—and as near or far from home as you want. However, there are plenty of things to consider before delving into the project of building that getaway home. You have probably started clipping and collecting photos that inspire you. That is a good place to start. The challenge is to incorporate all those different elements into a functional, comfortable home.



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***Top:** Two inviting sun decks and a cozy porch introduce this home, which offers two master suites, making it perfect for hosting guests.*

***Above:** This Victorian-style home is perfect near the water—an expansive storage area beneath the main floor easily stores your boat and equipment.*

## Do your homework

Research your options. Tracy M. Ruff, managing editor of *Log Home Living*®, suggests gathering information from friends and family members who have built their own getaway homes, and also from experts on home building. Good or bad, their advice will give you ideas on deciding what you want to incorporate into your home and what you'd rather leave out.

Consider also your site and your lifestyle. Do you want to take advantage of a particular view or location? Do you want a fireplace or an outdoor hot tub? Will it just be you and your spouse enjoying this home, or will you have children or in-laws staying with you?

Another important part of your research involves knowing what the trends are. While trends come and go, there are ways to make sure your home is always in style. Choose basic colors and building materials that you know aren't going to be out of style in a year.

The open floor plan is a staple in vacation homes, and is something you should definitely consider—after all, you brought your family up there to spend time with them, not escape from them. Other common trends to take advantage of are—budget permitting—a main-floor or secluded master suite, so you can still have privacy when you need it, a larger kitchen, a home office, or fun extras like a hot tub or sauna.

## Get your hands dirty

Helping out in the construction of your new home will not only save you some money, but it will also give you a sense of pride. A little sweat equity will help you appreciate your new home even more.

Although doing things yourself is a great money-saver, make sure you know what you're doing. Taking on tasks that you aren't familiar with may put you in over your head, and end up costing you more money if you need to have someone come in and fix them, so leave the tough stuff up to the professionals and stick with what you can handle.

## Consider location

You could have several reasons to pack up and leave all your cares behind you—well, for a few days at least. Which location will help you forget your stress and allow you to feel totally relaxed and at peace? In order to take full advantage of your getaway spot, the plan that you choose should complement where you're going—whether it is the lakefront, the oceanfront, the hideout with breathtaking views, or the deep woods. It is important to remember that where you build is just as important as what you build. Your



*This beautiful screened porch is entered from the home's Great Room and provides a serene setting to relax and enjoy nature—without getting bitten by mosquitoes! If you do want to venture outside, however, the expansive wraparound deck is accessed from here.*

vacation isn't going to be much of a relaxing getaway if you build your dream home in the middle of a swamp. Take the time to choose the best location, taking full advantage of the views and surroundings.

## Choose your “relaxitecture”

According to Mark England, president of St. Paul-based LifeStyle HomeDesign Services, *relaxitecture* is a made-up word that describes the design we seek to create at our destination. Nobody wants a second home that replicates the home they're escaping from. You want your second home to give you a much different feeling than your primary residence. Slow down the pace. Steer clear of all the chaos of the real world. Create your own private paradise. Whether your “relaxitecture” is a rustic A-frame cabin or a clean, stucco contemporary overlooking the ocean, make sure to



*Steer clear of all the chaos of the real world.*



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*A great design like this is perfect in a wooded area or on a lakefront setting. The facade is simple and clean, and in the back of the home, you'll find a great trellised patio to enjoy warm summer days.*

select a plan that constantly reminds you that you're on vacation. The design you choose could make or break the feeling you desire when you arrive after hours in a packed car.

## Downsize

Why recreate your mansion in the suburbs—complete with a duplicate set of everything, including the riding lawn mower? Keep it simple, Englund says, and enjoy the serenity of the lake or mountain views, without being tied to the housekeeping and the groundskeeping that an oversized vacation home requires. Put any savings from downsizing the design into upgrading exterior finishes, creating cozy reading niches for rainy Saturdays, or incorporating walls of windows to capture breathtaking views.

Have some big dreams? Modify your dream design to fit your budget. Alternatives like resizing the master bedroom or leaving the basement unfinished help people stick to their budget without losing track of their initial goal for the home.

## Plan for the future

Families grow up and out, and your design needs to be just as easy to change. Keep some flexibility available for design changes through the years. An unfinished room now could be a perfect guest suite in five or 10 years when your

children bring their families to stay. A walk-out basement can be completed when funds allow in the future to host more guests. Position the home on the lot to allow for a later addition if the budget is tight now. You'll want to be able to stay in this vacation home long into the future, enjoying the fruits of your labor and the views you choose today.

## Love your design

For the care you take in choosing your vacation homesite, and the building expenses, make sure the design warrants the effort. A not-so-great design will create a not-so-great experience. Englund suggests driving around the vacation setting you covet. You will see, he says, more “invisible” homes that were built without sufficient design thought than one-of-a-kind dazzlers that stop you in your tracks. An ugly home only gets uglier with age. A pleasing, interesting home design will draw you to it weekend after weekend, year after year. Make it worth the drive, the time and the expense by ensuring your dream getaway home has everything you desire.

Now that you have the tools to help you plan your second home, it is time to get moving. The sooner you start building, the sooner you can start your vacation! 🏠

Sources: Mark Englund, president, LifeStyle HomeDesign Services; “On Show,” by Tracy M. Ruff, managing editor, *Log Home Living*®, March 2002

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*Make it worth the drive.*