

From dump to dwelling

Hard work and optimism turns a crumbling summer home into year-round haven

by Mary Ann Mohring
special writer

It Craig and Mary Misener, of Oxford, had been required to come up with a list of assets prior to being approved for a mortgage when they bought their "fixer upper" on Stoney Lake, it would have looked something like this:

- A million friends
- A great sense of humor
- A lot of hope

Fortunately, the unique young couple had all of the above when they bought the old cottage with the swayback roof, untin-

ished walls, deteriorating frame and decrepit steps that would lead them down the path to their new home.

Over the last 10 years, they completed a renovation which transformed the crumbling one-bedroom cottage in Oxford, where Craig lived as a child, into a modern home, tucked away and overlooking a clean inland lake.

Originally, they simply expected to fix it up cosmetically -- not rebuild it.

They bought the house in 1981 for \$30,000 after a very long, discouraging search. Craig's mother recognized the swayback roof in an ad and called him,

suggesting they go reminisce.

"The house was very dull and plain. And somehow, we talked ourselves into it," Craig muses.

Because appearances can be deceiving, "dull and plain" quickly became the least of their problems. The ceiling hung too low, the walls were made of compressed cardboard and there was no insulation.

So while we were still bringing down boxes, Craig's tearing the walls and ceiling down and throwing them out the back window.

"When we finally got everything down here between Friday and Saturday and we go to take a shower and there's no pipes," Mary remembers. "We went to turn the water on and nothing came out."

Craig made a reconnaissance search. "I got up in the crawl space and was tracing the pipes along and right where the shower had been built, they just stopped," he explains. "I never tried the water when we were checking out the house."

So the pair accepted their lot, were grateful to the lake and Craig's mother who lived in town and offered her shower, and quickly got to work on bigger projects.

They soon found the home's most attractive feature, its location, was their biggest obstacle. Built into a very steep



pitched hill, the only access is by way of 90 ten-inch steps. The stairs, which were falling away underneath, became Phase I.

They designed a three-tiered terrace with vulcanized wooden steps that wind through the land, blending naturally with the environment, down to the lake. But because of the treacherous incline, and limited access, they couldn't get a landscaper. Undaunted, they put the word out among their friends and eventually Bob Denton, a local brick mason, agreed to the job. Six days and \$8,000 later, they were 90 steps closer to paradise.

"It's so nice to come home to after work," Mary insists. "In the summer time it's like two different worlds. With all the

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