At Camp Mudjeekee in Wisconsin, states a 1927 brochure, the emphasis is on “happy, safe adventure.” The “log cabin camp for girls” on Lilly Bay featured a dining hall and three “pioneer” cabins. Each of the sleeping cabins, according to the brochure, boasted an “open fireplace” and “quaint, comfortable interior.” The camp ceased operation in the 1930s, a victim of the Great Depression. But the log cabins still stand, anchored by a beautiful new one belonging to Michael and Cynthia Drewek.

Michael is the third generation of Dreweks to vacation at Mudjeekee. For him, it’s like attending an extended family reunion. “I still look forward to seeing my friends that I grew up with at Camp Mudjeekee when they come with their families – the great-grandchildren of the original owners.”

Good news, bad news

In time, Michael married Cynthia and they had two children of their own. But as the extended Drewek family grew, White Birch’s interior went from “comfortable” to cramped.

The good news: Mudjeekee’s former dining hall came on the market in 2005. The bad: It was offered as a teardown. Converted into a residence for the original camp owner, Mary Higgins, upkeep was neglected after her death. A leaky roof had
HOW TO GET THIS LOOK

“Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver and the other gold.”

The popular girls’ camp song applies to cabins, too. But when it’s time to bid farewell to an heirloom cabin, do as the Dreweks and keep as much “gold” as possible.

“Cynthia was sad to tear down the old house,” says Michael. “So she came up with using parts that were salvachable.” The Dreweks’ house was heavy with all manner of handcrafted trim—panel doors, casings, and more. “One is silver and the other gold,” says Michael. “She’s a great example of planning ahead.”

Calling on local builder Charles Schmitt of GIS Design & General Contracting (Casco, Wis.) to patch the roof, Michael and Cynthia eked out 9 years there.

Cabin dreaming

For the last 5 years in the old dining hall structure, the couple dreamed of replacing the drafting, stick-built cabin with a retreat in keeping with Mudjekkee’s pioneer spirit. They clipped pages from magazines, listed resources, and photographed cabins they liked both nearby and back home in the Denver area. Everything went into a journal. “That helped us a huge amount in designing the place, and also [with] the interior design,” notes Cynthia.

A friend in Colorado, who also owns a Wisconsin retreat, suggested StoneMill Log & Timber Homes. The Knoxville company builds log and timber frame homes across the continental United States. StoneMill’s Appalachian-style cabins resonated with Cynthia, who hails from Nashville. (That’s where she met Michael, who was completing a surgical residency at the time.)

“One of the things that attracted the Dreweks to our company was a product we have specialized in for 42 years,” says Sales Director Mathew Sterchi. “The traditional, hand-been flat log with dovetail corners and chunked joints.”

The Dreweks liked the Elk River 2 and the Rose Hill standard plans. But neither offered the four bedrooms they needed to accommodate guests, as well as a teenage son and daughter. In April of 2013, Stone-Mill designer Remington Brown was tasked with incorporating elements from both plans, along with the couple’s wish list, into a custom design.

Though client and designer never met face to face, numerous phone calls, screen shots, and photographs were exchanged over the course of a year. “Cynthia was exceptionally detail oriented,” recalls Brown. “She’s a great example of planning ahead.”

Time to build

Construction started Memorial Day weekend of 2014, with Schmitt as general contractor. After his crew removed the old house and built a new foundation, Stone-Mill’s crew, Creekside Construction, got to work. Creekside assembled the log and timber components and installed rigid insulation between log courses and under the standing-seam metal roof. The two-story shell was completed by the end of June. Schmucker Log Home Restoration, an
“My grandfather left us a legacy. Our goal was to keep it within the family.”

The emphasis at Michael and Cynthia’s new Camp Mudjeekee retreat is still on happy, safe adventure. The couple keeps family and friends entertained with a “well-balanced program” similar to that listed in the 1927 brochure. Archery and basket weaving may have gone by the wayside, but a lot of pastimes are, at heart, the same.

A typical day starts with a walk on the beach — certainly the favorite pastime of the family pet, a yellow field Labrador Retriever. “Jesse loves being up there,” laughs Cynthia. “He retrieves in the water.” Then there’s swimming and boating. Son Austin, 18, and daughter Paige, 15, join in on the fun. Depending on weather conditions, taking to the water involves surf kayaks, paddleboards, windsurfers, sailboards, PWCs. “Lake Michigan varies tremendously based on direction and speed of wind, from glassy smooth to waves like an ocean,” explains Cynthia.

As for the off-water game plan, the family plays a lot of badminton in the cabin’s front yard. This summer, everyone is practicing for the Olympics — the Mudjeekee version, that is, not Rio. Like the original campers, the Dreweks enjoy outings and excursions. Lilly Bay is 5 miles from the city of Sturgeon Bay in Wisconsin’s Door County. Located on the Door Peninsula stretching into Lake Michigan, the county boasts 300 miles of shoreline. Today, Door County is a premier tourist destination with a thriving cultural scene. “It’s a unique place, with cute Victorian villages,” says Cynthia. “There’s a huge number of artisans, lots of galleries and art work.”

The Dreweks also support Door County’s performing arts. Northern Sky, a family-oriented outdoor theater that stages original works, is a favorite. The family also loves Peninsula Players, a popular lakeside theater with strolling gardens overlooking Green Bay.

As well as antiquing and art, Door County is known for cherry orchards. Every year, the clan goes cherry picking and makes pies and crumbles with the tart fruit. Then there’s the spectacle of traditional Door County fish boils. “It’s a big production,” says Cynthia, describing how huge kettles of whitefish and potatoes are heated over an open fire. “The kerosene makes huge flames, and the water boils over and spills out. When we have people from out of town, we share that.”

When you add bonfires on the beach, stargazing, and s’mores to the program, well, cabin living just doesn’t get any better than this.

For information, visit the Door County Visitor Bureau web site doorcounty.com
Amish family business outside Green Bay, did the chinking and staining. Choosing colors from Perma-Chink’s array of products was “one of the hardest, most stressful decisions,” Cynthia says, only half in jest. “It makes a huge impact.” Ultimately, they went with medium gray for chinking, and a chestnut stain.

Schmitt had the interior of the 2,500-square-foot cabin finished by the middle of November. Like the Elk River 2 model, the great room projects forward, overlooking the water. The main level is an open plan, with a master suite on the south end balanced by a screened porch on the opposite end. Three bedrooms occupy the second floor.

**Design & décor choices**

Because the cabin is on the beach, Cynthia wanted a floor that could: 1. Stand up to sand, and 2. Not show the grains inevitably tracked inside. “We have slate in Colorado, and it’s very durable,” she says. Rather than square tiles, Cynthia opted for an irregular pattern to create a natural look.

Interior eaves in the great room and bedrooms are trimmed with boards salvaged from a barn in Green Bay. The same barnwood wraps the kitchen island and the area below the great-room fireplace.

There’s a barnwood look in the master bath shower, too, only there it’s ceramic tile. A vertical mosaic strip made by Cynthia, her mom and sister accents the tile. “We spent the weekend gluing and enhancing stones from the beach,” she says.

To bring the outside in, Cynthia chose slate flooring for the main level in earthtones of brown, blue, tan and green.

“They were going for lasting,” she continues. “I want this place to be a 300-year-old house that will survive the elements.” — Cynthia Drewek

Fran Sigurdsson enjoys lakeside living with her family at “Camp Sacandaga” in New York’s Adirondacks.