

GREAT LAKE STORY

Chapter One

The McCullough Residence, Gun Lake Project Summary by Mike Schaap, President Mike Schaap Builders, Inc., Holland

Part One: Beginnings

Before walking Mike and Karen McCullough's new property, I'd only heard about Gun Lake: The ski boat I'd bought in Grand Rapids at a show had come from Matteson Marine in Shelbyville. And I knew some pretty nice doors supplied by my millwork company, Benchmark Wood Studio, were now at home on Gun Lake, too.

Our family cottage is on an inland lake west of Gun. Having grown up in Holland and lived in the region since, I'm anchored to "our" lake by years of tradition. (Days Cindy and I spend here now with our three kids, their spouses and our first grandchild may be our best.)

So my first personal experience at Gun Lake was walking out past a small house to the sweeping, rounded point of the McCulloughs' sizable new site – 320 feet of sandy frontage, aligned with a wild island.

You could already feel spectacular views from every room.

The panoramic lot had enamored Mike and Karen the first time they saw it from a friend's boat. With their oldest daughter just starting college and youngest not far behind, the couple had begun searching for a cottage near their home in Middleville.

But soon after they purchased their lot, their visions of a "cottage" began evolving into plans for a new year-round residence. "The property was so unique and rare that we wanted to put our home right there," Karen said.

But where would they go from here?

"I like to think this is like driving at night," I told them. "The farther you go, the more you see, and the clearer things become."

What Matters Most

Southwest Michigan's largest all-sports lake looks like a butterfly. Loosely shaped by coves and bays, its 2,680-surface-acre wings spread into Yankee Springs Recreation Area, a four-season state park.

Recreation found here, as well as on Gun Lake's channels and islands, has made it a vacation haven since the late 1800s.

It's where Mike McCullough grew up.

"Boating, snowmobiling, skiing – I didn't do half the things I do now until I met my husband," said Karen, who was brought up in suburban Southfield. "When I first met my husband and started

dating, we'd come to Gun Lake every weekend. He still had many childhood friends living in the area, and it just became our home."

The McCulloughs spent their first decade of married life on Gun Lake in a small house they had built from a home plan book. As their daughters grew, so did their family's love for the outdoors. But their need for space indoors grew, too, and the McCulloughs left Gun Lake before their kids began middle school.

Mike and Karen built a spacious home in Middleville's countryside, where the family had plenty of space to "play" with dirt bikes and four-wheelers. They also built a cottage on Lake Michigan in Manistee as their family getaway. But over the years, "getting away" became harder with their teenagers and schedules.

The youngest of 10 siblings, Karen inherently puts function over form, and family above all else. "Do you want to know why we picked you to build our home and Jeff Visser to design it?" she asked. "You both brought us into your personal offices, instead of conference rooms. And family photos were the first thing I saw."

Ethics, faith, trust: We began the McCulloughs' journey home on these wings.

Great Lake Story is a continuing series chronicling enriching stories of waterfront homes and those that design, build and own them.

Builder Mike Schaap continues to share Mike and Karen McCulloughs' homebuilding journey on Gun Lake in the Summer Issue of Michigan BLUE. To learn more visit www.mibluemag.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY GARY W. ODMARK

