

Title

Oliphant - Branches from the Bruce

Review Date

Nov/Dec 2003D&D

Top Review

Branches from the Bruce on Bay St. in Oliphant is a bed and breakfast tucked among tamaracks and cedars. When we arrive, proprietor, Cliff Bilyea emerges from the woods in his gardening garb. He strolls with us along the stone pathways and speaks of the 25 acres that he and his wife, Lorraine, acquired five acres at a time. He points



out this year's project: a three-hole putting and chipping green edged by forty-five different grasses. I wander the trails and the property with its delightful assortment of hummingbird feeders, arbours and trellises. Stone benches and lounge chairs invite visitors to sit. Stone from Georgian Bay quarries, some of it up to a ton and a half, supports the waterfall cascading into the pond. A tree house and a cabin Cliff calls "the bunkie" provides its own ambience. A recently finished deck, crafted of local white cedar adjoins the house and upper veranda with Lorraine's English-style garden. We relax at the enamelled wrought-iron picnic table and admire the magnificent three-storied octagon house. The cedar shakes gleam in shades of glowing sienna. Sixty-eight windows look out on the woodland. Lorraine saw a photograph in an architecture magazine and contacted the architect. They went to Chicago to view his house, bought the plans and three years ago, constructed and adapted this dream home. At its centre is the great room 18 feet across, 16 feet high. Decorated in an eclectic manner, it sports elegantly casual couches, an Indonesian bench and a fireplace of split local stone.

Bottom Review

A second-floor mezzanine with a seating area overlooks the great room. We peek into the Peacock room with its two double beds, pullout couch and ensuite decorated in burgundy and green jewel tones. In our Anniversary Suite, an ultramarine room with windows on two sides looking out over woods and pond, I settle in a swivel arm-chair to read comments in the guest book. Someone wrote, "Hilton on the Huron". I like that. Someone else said, "We hit the jackpot." We go up the staircase to Cliff and Lorraine's loft office on the third level with its full-surround treetop view. Lorraine says that every year they go into the woods for their own Christmas tree. The first year's tree was so tall they had to lay it down to decorate. I imagine snow falling on cedars. At night, we soak in the outdoor hot tub softly lit with solar lights. This stone-encircled tub is currently entered into a Canadian spa competition. Later I relax in the queen-sized bed and awake to sunshine over cedars and silence. From our bank of windows, I see a fat dove resting on quarried rock, and then, a blue jay in the pines and flashing gold fish amidst the lily pads. I smell luscious aromas and hear Cliff and Lorraine cooking in the open- concept kitchen that they installed with a commercial stove. Breakfast at nine is an amazing presentation: Fresh eggs nestle in a phyllo blossom surrounded by a delicate mornay sauce. I stop and take a photo. Mangoes, freshly ground coffee, home-made cinnamon buns, sausage and potato pancakes complete the array. They encourage two night stayovers and they "partner with four or five restaurants for meals." Cliff feels a B&B host must "know and understand his area." They certainly do and I thank them for sharing.

Footer

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