


It's My Trip in a Box



While the Sunset Cabin on Ontario's Lake Simcoe was designed to afford leisurely views of the water at dusk, one is compelled to take more than a sidelong glance at the tiny retreat itself.

The best thing about vacation is not the range of choices offered—where to go, which restaurants to try, which hotel to stay in—but the limitations imposed. Our wardrobes are cordoned off to what we can cram in a suitcase, our libraries limited to a couple of books, and our toiletries stuffed into a Dopp kit. The fewer choices we have, the more freedom there is to do what we're supposed to be doing on vacation: nothing much.

These carry-on-size vacation houses demonstrate this ethos. Through striking design, they illustrate relaxation through restraint, liberation through limitations, and the luxury of living a life (or at least a holiday) distilled. ▶



As the Griswold family taught us in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, sometimes you need a vacation from the vacation itself. The owners of the Sunset Cabin in Lake Simcoe, Ontario, could relate. "They were having up to 15 overnight visitors at a time," explains architect Michael Taylor of Taylor Smyth Architects in Toronto. "They wanted an escape, a little place near the water where they could watch the sunset from their bed."

They also wanted to have minimal impact on the natural environment in the process. "We built it like a piece of furniture," says Taylor. Working with a local Toronto wood mill, he and his team prefabricated the one-room wooden sleeping box and then dismantled it. They then shipped all the parts and put it back together onsite in under ten days.

The result is a 275-square-foot wood-and-glass box that hovers lightly above the lakeshore. The walls with views are composed entirely of glass, augmented with an exterior horizontal cedar screen that both braces the structure from twisting and filters bright summer light. At night, the effect is reversed—electric interior light illuminates the cabin like a lantern. Window cutouts in the cedar screen fulfill the couple's single request: a bedside view of nightly sunsets.

By virtue of the limited space, the interior is minimalist—all of the surfaces are constructed of birch veneer plywood including the built-in cabinets. The east façade opens to a cedar-screened outdoor shower and chemical compost toilet; the west side opens to a small deck, which, at grade and unimpeded by handrails, spills out to the horizon in an infinity-pool-like effect.

"Another benefit of being close to the lake," explains Taylor, "is that you can now see the property—the wilderness—in a whole new way. New sounds, new views, foxes on the lake in wintertime—the kinds of things that they never knew existed before." ▶

Sunset Cabin Lake Simcoe, Ontario

A foundation of two steel beams atop four concrete caissons allows grass to grow freely beneath and all around (above), encouraging the illusion that the whole place is gently levitating. Getting up early while on vacation is wholly undersatnd-able considering the view from the bed (right).

