





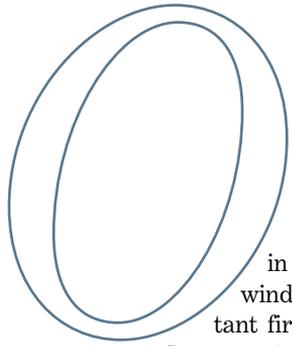
Family Connections

BY JANET UREN PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON KING



||| **Above:** The cottage-like profile of the Fullers' house at Britannia deliberately echoes the roofline of the old yacht club at Britannia, which was long ago destroyed by fire. Owners Simon and Lynn Fuller opted for vibrant colours on the home's exterior so that it wouldn't look cold and grey in the winter months **Left:** Simon and Lynn look down from the widow's walk, a great spot for storm watching **Far left:** A balcony overlooks a grand two-storey dining room and great room lined with white pine, which was harvested from the Fullers' farm

When Simon Fuller designed and built his house at Britannia on the Bay, he drew on family traditions and on his own passion for the river to create a unique and wonderful setting for family life



n a winter night

in 1916, a little girl pressed her face to the attic window in a Centretown home and watched a distant fire raging on Parliament Hill. Carol Fuller saw flames racing up the tower of Centre Block. She heard the bells toll at midnight, just moments before they went crashing down into the heart of the fire. In the morning, her father took to her to see the smouldering ruins. Only the Library of Parliament was untouched, she remembered.

Ninety years later, Carol Fuller returned to the Hill to celebrate the Peace Tower restoration. She went there as a living link with Ottawa's history. Her grandfather, Thomas Fuller, had designed the original Centre Block of Parliament in the 1860s and later served as the Dominion Chief Architect. Her father — Thomas W. Fuller III — occupied the same position from 1927 to 1939, having already worked for more than four decades in the public service. Both men put their mark on Canada's architectural identity. Carol's brother, Thomas G. Fuller IV, took another road. In 1939,

he founded the Thomas Fuller Construction Company. "Go into construction," his father told him. "There's no money in architecture." Today the firm is managed by Thomas Fuller's four sons. Simon Fuller is the youngest of that generation. A few years ago, when he decided to build a house at Britannia, he set out to add to his family's legacy. The result is a great sprawling, tower-topped, steel-frame house that looks out toward the site of the original Britannia Yacht Club. Indeed, the large octagonal skylight atop the Fuller house was shaped as a deliberate echo of the old clubhouse, which burned to the ground in 1918.

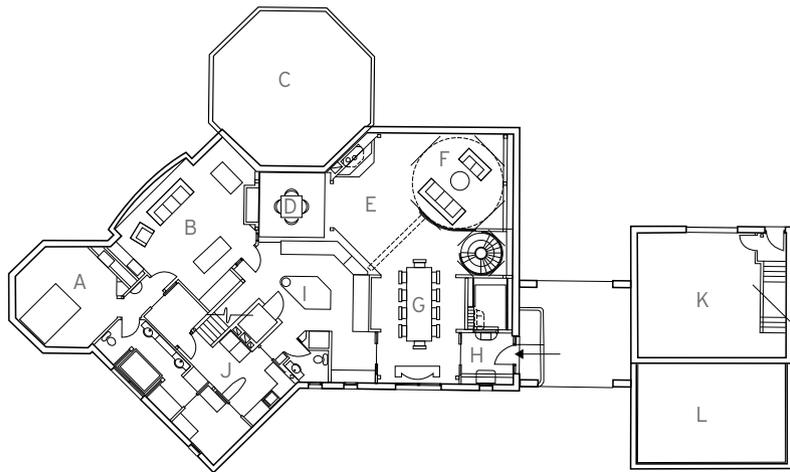
Oddly, this brand new house looks completely at home on the banks of the Ottawa River — as though it has always stood here — and perhaps that is because it is so firmly rooted in history and family tradition. The house is a kind of architectural memorial to three generations of Fullers and to their lives in the riverside community at Britannia. "My grandfather first summered here in 1906," Fuller explains, "and we have been here ever since."

Below left: The open-concept kitchen lies at the heart of the house — what Lynn calls "command central." From here, there is a clear view of the great room and living room and, through the eating area, into a large screened-in porch **Below right:** Beside the kitchen is a breakfast nook where the family gathers for meals. The intricately patterned floor and ceiling once graced the floors of the Library of Parliament, which was designed in the 1860s by Simon's great-grandfather **Right:** The focal point of the great room is a massive riverstone fireplace. Above the mantel is a painting of the *Black Jack*, a former tugboat that Simon's father converted into a brigantine tall ship





Britannia has been a paradise



MAIN FLOOR

A Master bedroom **B** Captain's cabin **C** Screened porch **D** Breakfast nook
E Great room **F** Sitting room **G** Dining room **H** Foyer **I** Kitchen **J** Laundry
K Workshop **L** Boat storage and workshop

Below left: A glass panel in the floor of the great room opens into the garage below, where a prized 1952 MG BGT lives. It was last driven by the Fullers on their 1999 wedding day. Below right: Like the Fuller family itself, the boats move inside in winter. During the cold season, three occupy the rafters of the main living area. Simon, who lived most of his childhood on the water at Britannia, wanted to enjoy his boats even when the river was frozen solid. The old ship's wheel to the right of the small, circular sitting room allows the floor to rotate so that people lounging on the comfortable leather couches can enjoy changing views. The room is edged with ships' lockers that serve as both window seats and toy boxes. Right: Furnished with nautical antiques, the office was designed to look like the captain's cabin in a tall ship, with slanted transom windows and "portholes"

for Fuller children over the years. When Simon was a boy in the 1970s, he and his siblings spent long, sun-drenched summers in and out of the water and sailing on the Ottawa River. Today the river still holds a central place in the Fuller cosmos, and Simon has literally shaped his house around the theme of cottages and boats. Every fall he takes a skiff and a rowboat off the river and lifts them into the open rafters of the two-storey living room, where they are lighted like works of art. In the gallery above, the ceiling arcs over a canoe that is suspended there like a big cedar-strip chandelier. "I wanted them around us, to be appreciated," says Fuller, "even in winter."

Boats are not the only nautical reference. Thick, twisted rope is set into the walls, and handrails on two sets of stairs are made out of old, weathered sweeps. The study, with afternoon light pouring in through windows set like those in the stern of an old sailing ship, looks more like a captain's cabin than an office. It was built that way to house the family's collection of naval antiques. The painting above the river-stone fireplace in the living room is an even more explicit reference to the Fullers' long connection to the river. It shows a square-rigged brigantine, the *Black Jack*, which Simon's father converted in 1952 from the hull of an old steam tug — originally built in 1904 and abandoned at the end of the logging era.

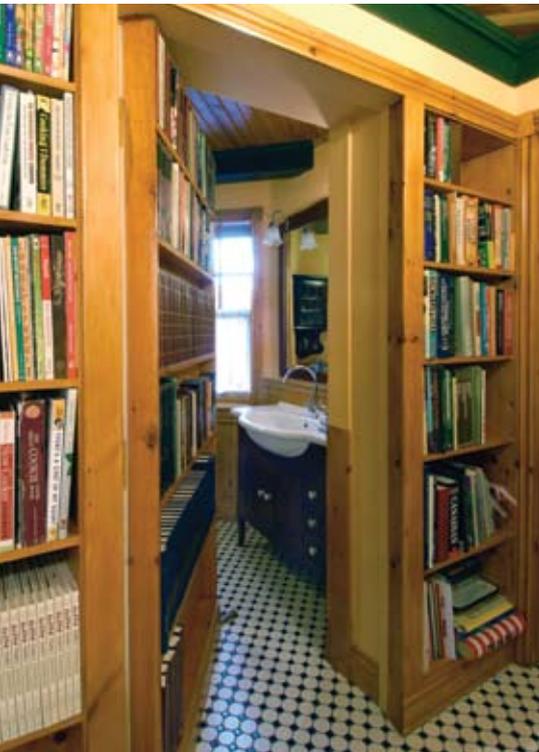
"My father grew up on the Ottawa River when it was still being logged," Fuller recalls. "As a kid, he used to sail upriver and down along a 25-mile stretch. He was a real river rat." Thomas Fuller drew on that experience when he joined the Royal Canadian Navy in 1939. Seconded to the British Navy, he commanded flotillas of motor torpedo boats in seas that included the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. "He was known," says Fuller, "as the Pirate of the Adriatic. Other vessels carried torpedoes and sank the enemy. He carried commandos and, Nelson-like, captured them intact. He was imprisoned briefly in Greece and actually managed to escape in the German admiral's barge."





NAUTICA
1983
SAILING CLASSIC
AUTHENTIC & TRADITIONAL

SOUTHERN FLEET COMMAND



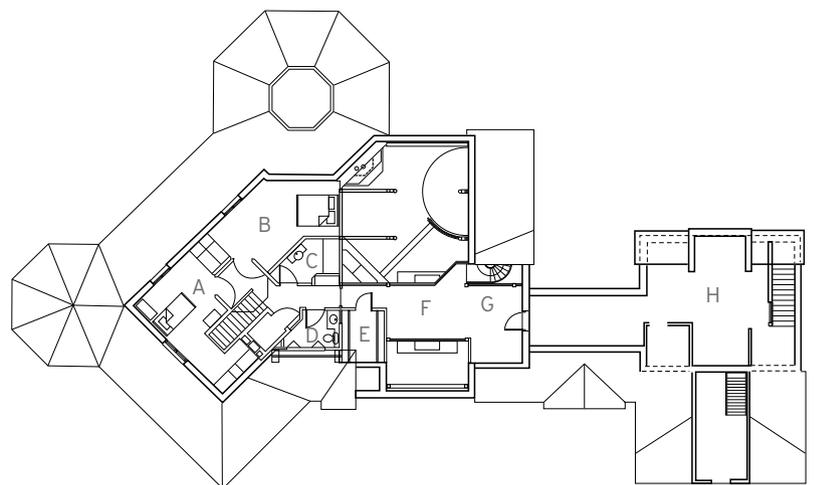
That wartime story

seems very distant from tranquil Britannia, where the Fullers summered for so many years. And when municipal services arrived in 1968, they built a permanent house. Simon was just a baby then. He was an interested teenager when Thomas Fuller set out to design and build a brigantine on the beach below where the new house now stands. He named the vessel the *Fair Jeanne*, in honour of his wife. Today the *Black Jack* and the *Fair Jeanne* are flagships of the Bytown Brigantine sail training program. The Fullers, in their youth, had the great and wonderful privilege of messing about in boats and, at the same time, growing through challenge and adventure. They wanted to give other youngsters the same opportunity.

It is not only boats that Fuller values in the Britannia heritage: it is the shoreline itself, with rugged trees clinging to rocky banks and growing slowly and tenaciously over many generations. "There were seven large deciduous trees on the property when we decided to build," he recalls. "Six of them are still here. These are old trees. They may well have been here when Champlain came by in the 17th century. We designed the house around them. The one tree that we couldn't save, we sawed up and used as material for a mantel and thresholds inside the house."

Thanks to those ancient trees, the house is cool and shady in summer; and in winter, when the leaves fall, the sun feeds warmth into the house. Fuller also took thought for the wintertime when he painted the house green and red outside. "The river can be bleak in winter," he explains, "but the house is not."

Below: A floor plan of the house illustrates the repetitive use of the octagonal theme, borrowed from the design of the old yacht club at Britannia. It appears not only in the skylight that tops the building but also in the master bedroom, the porch, and some windows **Above left:** Simon incorporated many whimsical touches while designing the house, including ships' lockers that double as toy boxes and an underground tunnel connecting the home's two sides. The Fuller children are particularly delighted with three secret doors, including this one, disguised as bookshelves **Above centre:** An antique sideboard from Lynn Fuller's family has been converted into a vanity in the master ensuite **Above right:** The nautical theme is carried out in all kinds of detailing, like this lifebelt, which has been turned into a mirror frame in one of the smaller bathrooms



SECOND FLOOR

A Bedroom B Bedroom C Bathroom D Powder room E Closet
F Balcony over dining room G Future elevator shaft H Nanny's suite

About the time Simon Fuller began to plan the new house, the family firm was hired to help restore the Library of Parliament. The richly patterned floors of the Library were slated for removal, and the Fullers acquired them, lifting entire sections and incorporating them into the new house as floors and ceilings. These floors were not original to the Library — they belong to the 1950s restoration — but they do vividly evoke the spirit of Thomas Fuller in his great-grandson's house.

The interior finishing of the house is also reminiscent of the Library — a cottage version — in that it is entirely lined with knotty pine, which the Fullers cut on their farm in South March. This is where Simon and Lynn lived, in a century-old farmhouse, when first married. It was an experience that helped define what Lynn Fuller wanted most in the new house. “I asked Simon to make the kitchen into the heart of the house,” she recalls. “The kitchen in the old farmhouse was isolated. In the new house, we wanted it to be visually integrated into the other rooms.”

Though Lynn Fuller was expecting a child at the time, she spent hours on-site at the top of an elevated platform, moving around the perimeter of the house-to-be and consulting on the placement of windows. Both she and Simon wanted to frame perfect views of the river and to funnel the soft sound of summer waves into the house.

The Fuller house looks rather large as you approach it from the drive, but that impression is deceptive. The living quarters are little more than 3,000 square feet. Perhaps the impression of size comes from the way the house sprawls sideways, across a central porte cochère, to form a second, smaller wing. Here there is a large workshop, boat storage, and a nanny's apartment.

It is obvious that Simon brought a high degree of technical knowledge to bear on this project. He checked and rechecked every detail. He built a scale model and used it to measure the amount of sunlight coming through every imagined window. In the Library of Parliament, he laid down full-size patterns on the floor to make sure that they harmonized with his own floor plans. He incorporated state-of-the-art insulation and energy efficiency into the house. Thinking about a barrier-free future, he pencilled in closets that can be converted into elevator shafts. He specified heated concrete floors, dark green in colour and magically warm to the feet in winter.

It took four years to design and construct the house, and clearly the Fullers had a lot of fun incorporating the family heritage and passions into its fabric. The result is a house that bubbles with whimsy in the form of hidden doors and secret rooms, an underground tunnel from workshop to house, toy chests built to resemble ships' lockers, and a child's bedroom with a “playhouse” nook for the bed. And in the tiny circular sitting room, when Fuller could not decide how to place the furniture, he installed an old ship's wheel and a mechanism to rotate the floor and create a veritable slide show of changing views.

This is the house that Simon Fuller built. True to the creator's Britannia heritage, it is a house full of sunlight and brimming with fun. In keeping with family history, it is framed in rich woods and fitted out with architectural antiquities. The man who built this house shaped it as a reflection of two great loves — boats and history. Most of all, he shaped it to express his love of family. Though built on a grand scale, the house has an intimate feel to it. It was designed not as a showpiece but rather to shelter, delight, and nourish a family.

END



Above: A fire burns in the master bedroom. The view shows a fine stand of ancient cedars between the house and the banks of the river **Right:** Custom Spode dinnerware, used for special occasions, features an image of the *Fair Jeanne*. Like so many pieces in the house, it carries forward the nautical theme **Below:** An old starboard sweep (oar) has been turned into a stair rail leading to the ground floor. The port sweep is featured on another set of stairs

