



PHOTOS BY ROYAL LE PAGE BROWN REALTY

Built by architects for architects. The exterior is clad in sandy-coloured brick to reflect the sandy loam of the surrounding tobacco fields.

Brick paths intersect in the courtyard.

HOME OF THE WEEK / MODERN OASIS IN THE COUNTRY

BY JANE GADD

What: A strictly non-rustic country compound, designed by a family of architects.

Where: 57 Vittoria Road, St. Williams, Ont.

Amenities: Four bedrooms, four bathrooms, entertaining kitchen, separate living and dining rooms, studio, courtyard, walled garden, enclosed swimming pool, 49 acres of hayfields and forest.

Price: \$1.46-million

Taxes: \$4,907

Agents: Linda Bonadeo-Boll of Royal LePage Brown Realty in Simcoe and Karen Wherry of Chestnut Park Real Estate in Toronto.

The property: About one hour southwest of Hamilton, a swath of tobacco fields, ginseng huts and long sandy beaches marks the increasingly populated north shore of Lake Erie, known fondly by residents as "Ontario's South Coast."

Long Point, the internationally recognized biosphere reserve of sand dunes and wet lands, is here and so is the gaudy British-style resort town of Port Dover.

A few kilometres inland, the rich agricultural expanse of Norfolk County bristles with experimental new crops that governments hope will eventually edge out the disgraced smokers' weed.

As well as ginseng, there are peanut farms, hothouse flower operations, fields of organically grown cabbages and corn; the challenge is to find something as lucrative as tobacco.

Settled in the early 1800s, the area was thriving and prosperous long before city people started moving there to build vacation homes and, increasingly, homes in which to enjoy a retirement rich with opportunities for recreation.

The little town of Vittoria was the capital of Upper Canada before York was. European settlers, especially United Empire Loyalists from Britain via the United States, brought farming expertise and master craftsmanship with them.

Vittoria Road, a dead-straight country line flanked with fields and the occasional patch of forest, is the last place you might expect to find a strikingly modern, virtually minimalist piece of architecture.

But here it is, at the end of a gravel road lined with linden trees, behind the hump of a bridge over a little creek.

This is a home built by architects for architects — and the rural location has more to do with the freedom to build what you want than with any yearning for the charm of country life.

Heather Dubbeldam, an up-and-coming young Toronto architect,

and her architect father and designer mother are the brains behind this startling property.

It consists of a bracingly modern, L-shaped house, a courtyard of intersecting brick paths, potted plants and wooden pergolas, a walled garden of vegetables and wildflowers with an expansive potting shed, and a walled swimming pool area with tanning decks and a pool house.

"Restrained minimalism" is how Ms. Dubbeldam characterizes the style of the house.

The exterior is clad in sandy-coloured brick to reflect the sandy loam soil around it.

Inside, all the walls are white and all the floors are light grey.

The window frames are metal and minimal; the lighting is mostly fluorescent and screened by stainless-steel rectangular boxes; the bathrooms border on stark, with institutional-style walk-in showers, white marble benches and mirrors that are vertical rectangles rimmed in stainless steel.

There are no wood tones, no floral patterns, no unruly sprays of flowers.

Even the artwork on the walls of the principal rooms are black-and-white photographs, most taken by Ms. Dubbeldam herself.

Her parents (who don't want their names published) helped design

and build the home in 2001 and have lived in it ever since.

They are now selling it because their grown children don't visit as much as they'd hoped.

The home is almost scarily neat and tidy and clean, and that's by design.

The goals of the design were for low-maintenance (so window ledges are white marble that won't trap dirt and the pale grey baseboards and plate rails are too flat to allow dust to settle) and a high degree of energy efficiency (heat is pumped from 4,000 feet of pipes buried under the back field, and cooling is virtually all achieved by natural air circulation from clever window placement).

On the outer faces of two arms of the L, a thin line of high clerestory windows that open lets in light and breeze but not heat. On the inner faces, another line of clerestory windows provide a through-draught, and side-by-side rooms are fronted with walls of glass that overlook the courtyard.

There's no basement — the family felt it would just become a junk tip — and the house sits on a concrete slab. The floors throughout the main level are poured grey concrete, with radiant heat from the underground pipes.

The upstairs hallways and the bedrooms are carpeted, but the use

of a pale grey, no pile, commercial weave makes the floors look much the same as those downstairs.

All the rooms are square or rectangular with high ceilings and minimal texture.

In the living room, the fireplace is behind glass doors and beneath a stainless steel mantel.

In the kitchen, two islands are topped with pale blue laminate edged with stainless steel. The built-in cabinets are white and without handles to enhance their wall-like appearance.

"Granite would be too decorative for us," Ms. Dubbeldam's mother says.

"It's a special property, and won't be appealing to everyone because it's so modern," says Ms. Dubbeldam, who cut her teeth working on projects for the prestigious Toronto architectural firm Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg before launching her own company, Dubbeldam Design Architects, in 2003.

Her influences, she says, are mainly Europeans such as Briton John Pawson, who practices a sort of "restrained modernism... minimalism, but not quite."

Her design for a room at the trendy Gladstone Hotel recently won an award from Canadian Interiors magazine.

jgadd@globeandmail.com



Interior walls are white and all the floors are light grey. The window frames are metal and minimal. The kitchen islands are topped with blue laminate edged with stainless steel and there are no handles on the cabinets.

