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Honey Bee Island's Magic

Written by [Kim Lunman](#) posted on March 13, 2009 08:16

It can be said every island has its magic. But not every island has its own magician.

Honey Bee Island is the summer home of professional magician and illusionist Michael Laprade and his wife Janice of California. "This is what we refer to as our driveway," says Michael Laprade, steering his boat through the narrow passage of the U.S./Canada border on the St. Lawrence River by the Thousand Islands Bridge near Ivy Lea known as the International Rift. "Right now, you're on the Canadian side and I'm on the American side," Michael says to me as I take in the scenery from the passenger's seat.

Only a few minutes later we're pulling up to a dock with a canary yellow surfboard bench. There's a Honey Bee Island sign and a century-old cottage with a screened porch on the top of a small hill.

"Swimming here is like being in an aquarium," he says, pointing to the clear water.

Michael, a Montreal native and retired prison counselor, discovered the Thousand Islands when he returned to Canada in 2000 for his grandfather's 100th birthday.

"I didn't have a clue what the Thousand Islands were until I was 50 years old."

But the place soon cast a spell over the magician and his wife, Janice. He remembered first catching a glimpse of Boldt Castle on Heart Island in a magazine story on a flight to Paris three years earlier that captured his imagination.

A professional magician and illusionist, Michael worked at the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo, California. He met Janice, a dental hygienist, in California





Michael and Janice Laprade on Honey Bee Island.
Photo by Kim Lunman

and she became one of his stage assistants in his magic act. Now retired, the couple summer in the Thousand Islands. They winter in Brittany, France in another historic house they've renovated. Both are offered as rentals when they are not in residence.

The couple was having cocktails at the Gananoque Inn out on the grass during a visit in 2000 when Janice picked up a real estate guide. They came across an advertisement for Honey Bee Island and made an appointment to see the property.

"As soon as we saw the island, we said 'We're in big trouble.' We fell in love."

The object of their affection was long-neglected. The property's heirs had vacated the hand adzed log cabin for over two decades. Mice nestled in mattresses while dirty pots and pans remained in the kitchen.

The couple bought the property located near Ivy Lea in September 2000 but did not get the submarine cable installed for power and phone until June 2002. They started spending summers there in 2004 when Michael retired.

The renovation was a labor of love for the California couple. They transformed the cabin into an upscale retreat getting rid of yellow and turquoise walls in the process. "People will say to me 'You're Honey Bee,'" says Janice with a laugh. "And I'll say 'I'm Honey Bee but he's Honey Do.'"



They transformed the cabin into an upscale retreat



Photo by Kim Lunman

They added distinct touches to the 134-year-old cabin with a pink granite fireplace, including a brass honey bee knocker, deerskin curtains and naturally, a piece of Houdini's mansion. Michael went to the vacant Houdini property when it burned down in the Hollywood Hills many years ago and picked up some foundation fragments from the chimney for posterity.

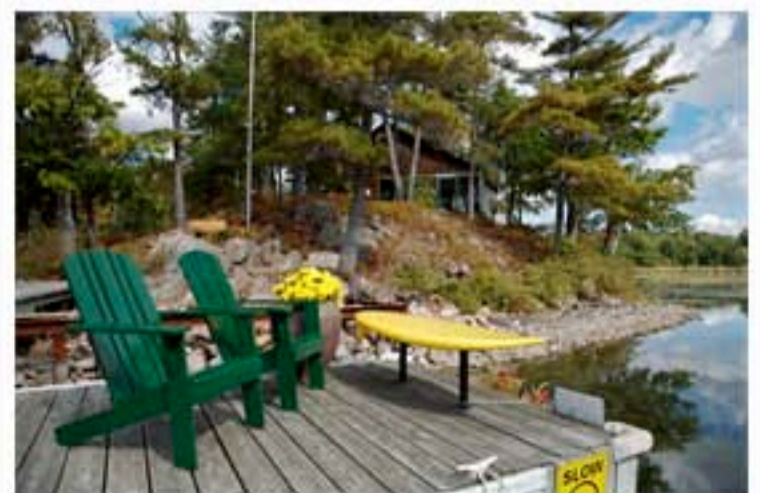
The couple has brought the historic property into this century. Now "it's a WiFi Island," says Janice proudly.

The first person the couple became acquainted with in the nearby area was the operator of the local landsite as they

dumped boat loads of debris. The island was first bought from the Crown a hundred years ago in 1909.

They love its seasons. "In California, fall is a date on our calendar," said Michael. "We love fall. This is where we want to be."

"This really is the heart of the heart of the Thousand Islands," says Janice.



A California surfboard finds a new role in the Thousand Islands



Michael, who performed at the private club for magicians called the Magic Castle of Hollywood, loves the tranquility of what he fondly calls "the Bee." An illusionist with the company Starfire Productions, Michael took two years to get his pyrotechnic special effects license to incorporate fire into his act.

He levitated people and even



Michael Laprade performs on Wizard Island, Oregon.
Photo by Starfire Productions

did so for a publicity shot on another island – Wizard Island in Oregon. “It’s not a trick. It’s real magic,” Michael says of his craft including pocket magic using coins and string in a pinch on the island to demonstrate the point. “You can almost suspend reality for



Coins, string and some island pocket magic. Photo by
Kim Lunman

a few seconds...there’s artistry behind it.”

The couple enjoys their island retreat. “Island people see opportunities and possibilities where other people see obstacles,” says Janice. “In this area, there’s story after story after story.”

Honey Bee Island’s magical transformation in the “heart of the heart” of the Thousand Islands is one of them.

by Kim Lunman, KimLunman@ThousandIslandsLife.com

Kim Lunman is an award-winning Canadian journalist whose work has appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Calgary Herald* and other newspapers. A team member of TI Life, each month Kim provides a new article.

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Comments



Comment by: Wendy Dlugos (Bath, Pa)
Left at: 1:58 PM Monday, March 16, 2009

I started coming to the islands with my now husband Mark, 30 years ago , and fell in love . We share a place on the Us side of the international rift,on Wellsley Island, with my husbands Aunt and Uncle,who built the cabin in 1952, Sister and Cousin. In all our many travels through the The channel I always admired the cute little log cabin on that island. I never knew a name for the island, but I always said I would love to own that place. I was so happy to see that someone had bought it and was fixing it up, after seeing it slowly deteriorate. You have done a wonderful job of "fixing it up". Love the surfboard bench! It's good to see someone there. And to meet our new neighbors. If you see our boat ,Addicted to Liquid, at the dock, stop on in! Wendy