

INTRODUCING AUDREY

*A friend to every cottager - especially those on islands
- she's helpful and keeps her odors to herself*

REMEMBER THE PLAY called "The Little Shop of Horrors?" Marie called out at a gathering of lake association executives. I nodded in vague acknowledgement. "Remember the plant, Audrey, that keeps growling 'feed me, feed me?' Well you must come and meet *my* Audrey," grinned Marie. "Maybe you'll even help me feed it." Was that a dark, sinister leer? Have I been reading too much Stephen King?

Now, I had strange introductions and meeting a man-eating plant wasn't on my list of "must-do's". But Marie Thomson is a dynamic interior designer who also happened to be the environment chairperson for Kushog Lake Property owners Association, so that makes her credible, right? I accepted her invitation to meet her Audrey but insisted on dragging my 6'2" and strong husband along . . . I wouldn't be the "catch of the day" for Audrey.

by
JEAN ANTHON

Marie's son met Ted and I on the shores of Lake Kushog to boat us to the water-bound family cottage. I was to find out that having no road access was the reason Audrey had been adopted by Marie and Doug Barnard. As gracious hosts, Marie and Doug offered us a hot drink but, rather than settle down in their friendly, comfortable living area, invited us to join Audrey "out back". The tension was mounting.

Audrey was petite, clean and generally quite attractive - as compost toilets go. The perspiration dried and heart rate normalized. I had always wanted to check out an Audrey but was unable to find a resident in Haliburton who operated one. Audrey's owners were most enthusiastic about the new family member.

"We had just had the Cottage Pollution Control Program done on the Kushog Lakes and we knew our septic system needed upgrading," said Marie. "It was going to be a very difficult and expensive to boat over the tons of soil and materials for a typical septic tank installation plus the removal of so many trees to get to the site and for site preparation. A holding tank was not allowed because there is no logical removal by boat, so we had to check out alternatives. By chance, the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations sent some information on composting toilets. We researched all the environmental and cost benefits, crossed our fingers that everything would work out and went for it."

Audrey has proven to be a dependable member of the household. Installed in the late fall of '90, the system has had typical cottage use . . . weekends plus several weeks including guests with children. "No problems," assures Doug.

What makes Audrey so special? Cost: the system including all piping, vent, toilet etc. costs

less than \$1,500. (Septic systems can cost up to \$6,000.) Grey water (from sinks and showers) has to be accommodated in a government-approved leaching pit but costs are usually small.

Appearance: It takes little room under a building so land doesn't have to be bulldozed out. The toilet in the bathroom is usually low flush style with ceramic bowl.

User-friendly: Once installed (a handy person could do it), maintenance is easy to follow and it can be used in winter.

Environmentally safe: No chemicals are used and no pollution is produced. The residue is the normal work of nature and can be used in gardens.

Okay, everyone wants to know: does it smell? I poked and prodded Audrey every way I could imagine and only when I demanded a demonstration of how Audrey's "digestive system" operated was I able to get an olfactory sensation. But Audrey was reluctant to cooperate, a modest creature who only gave in for research purposes.

Marie explained: "There are several models including one with the composting drum as part of the toilet right in the bathroom. But it is large. We couldn't fit it into our tiny washroom and actually didn't like the thoughts of the waste being visible to the user. Our option was a regular flushomatic-style toilet using less than 1 pint per flush and connected by gravity feed to the WCM (water closet multrum) situated below the floor level on which the toilet is mounted. The WCM can be located at some distance from the low flush toilet as long as there is a 3 4 ft. clearance somewhere under the dwelling to permit its installation. The fiberglass and stainless steel construction makes it resistant to exposure to the elements."

Doug added that their building is just inches above the bedrock and found it best to offset the WCM and build a pit. "We're building a wooden shed around the unit to ensure full protection from falling trees etc. Because our system uses water, it can handle a very high capacity

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A Book is a Gift that Lasts a Lifetime

Audrey does her part

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of 6-8 people in cottage use and 3-5 people in residential use. For short periods, this number can be doubled."

Electricity is required to operate a fan, heating element and thermostat to dry off fluids. The WCM is the only flush toilet system that does not require a septic field or holding tank. However, it gets "hungry".

"That's why we called it Audrey," laughs Marie. "Actually, the manufacturer does recommend that you consider the system a rabbit. It enjoys raw kitchen wastes (vegetables, green leafy material, bread or grass etc.) but you wouldn't feed it coffee or other cooked waste. Like a rabbit, it benefits by using bedding material — peat moss, dead leaves and soil. Like all good composting systems you need organic carbon (peat moss), nitrogen (human waste), and a catalyst (organic kitchen waste and bread).

Rabbits need exercise, so every weekend a drum is rotated 3 or 4 turns, using a simple handle. This aerates and mixes the contents. Once a year, usually in the spring, you get to collect rich compost by releasing a lock, turning the drum in a counter-clockwise direction. The compost will fall into a drawer below and you simply pull the drawer out, walk to your garden, dig in the earth-like substance (non-polluting and natural) and wait for the tomato plants to grow.

The only company that manufactures this little wonder is 'Sun-Mar' of Burlington, Ont. "It is truly a Canadian product, something else I favoured," said Marie. There is actually a long history of composting toilets in North America but few to be found in Haliburton.

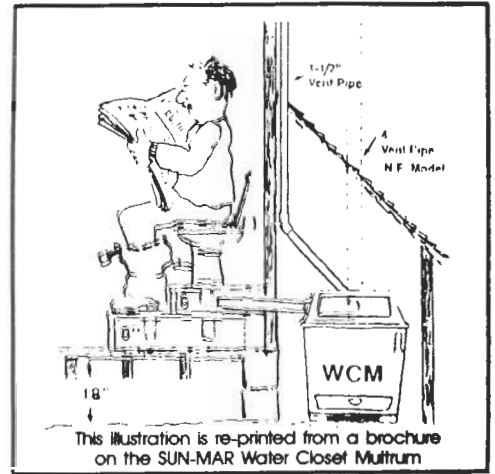
The units are classified as CLASS ONE systems by the Ministry of Environment but might not be approved for all situations. Contact the Kawartha-Haliburton Health Unit

regarding regulations in your area. They can be reached at 457-1391. Then you can ask your friendly neighbour hardware store or plumber about 'Audrey'.

After two cups of coffee, I was prepared to donate to Audrey's insatiable appetite. Above the call of the loon on nearby Kushog Lake and the gentle drone of dragonflies, I'm sure I heard "Feed me, feed me".

From this shore, Jean.

Jean Anthon is a Mountain Lake cottager and former president of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations.



This illustration is re-printed from a brochure on the SUN-MAR Water Closet Multitrum



Kushog islanders Marie Thompson and Doug Barnard and Jean Anthon have 'high tea' with Audrey, a composting toilet

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