

Real Estate

The cautious development of a Laurentian lake

Gino Ramacieri views himself as a steward of the earth. Having recently bought the land around Lac St. Victor, one of the last undeveloped lakes in the lower Laurentians, Ramacieri wants to ensure it remains pristine and wild.

"Most lakes in the Laurentians are developed so that cottages have 100 linear feet of frontage on the water," Ramacieri said. "If we developed St. Victor that way, we'd have 200-plus houses on the lake. That's too many. We plan to sell between 30 and 40 lots."

Ramacieri grew up in the Laurentians and has watched lake after lake develop into busy, noisy places where motorboats and personal watercraft rule — a fate he wants to spare Lac St. Victor. "There are loons on this lake that are magnificent and the noise of motorboats would mean an end of them; loons don't stay where there's noise."

"Our bylaws prohibit the use of motorized boats."

Ramacieri bought a lot on Lac St. Victor, which is an hour's drive north of Montreal near Morin Heights, and built a house in 1990.

There are now nine houses on the lake, which measures 7½ kilometres in circumference. Until the mid-1950s, it had been owned by a family that had a logging operation; they sold it in 1954 to a man who subsequently developed various other Laurentian lakes, but left St. Victor wild.

Despite the nine houses on the lake, St. Victor has remained largely undeveloped.

Ramacieri, who spent 25 years running a ceramics business and a subsequent few years as music producer, says developing the lake in an envi-



COURTESY GINO RAMACIERI

One of the nine existing homes on Lac St. Victor in the Laurentians.

ronmentally respectful way is his current full-time work. Fearful that St. Victor would ultimately be parceled off into little pieces and become a motorboat haven, Ramacieri bought the land last autumn.

"I bought it and got involved in its development to preserve it," he said. "We'll continue to do this for the next 10 years."

Lots will be sold with a minimum of 300 linear feet of frontage on the lake and they'll extend back about 400 feet.

At \$500 per linear foot, that sets the selling price at a minimum of \$150,000 per lot, putting it out of reach for many buyers.

But Ramacieri believes there is a market for the land among aging baby-boomers, many of whom are desperate to find a quiet place in nature.

Glenn Miller, vice-president of business development with the Mouvement Desjardins and the business consultant for the St. Victor project, says the irony of many cottage areas is that they have become almost as noisy and polluted as the urban environments cottagers seek to escape. "On some lakes in this area, there are problems with weeds, which are caused by pollution," he said.

Miller, who owns a cottage on the adjacent Lac Notre Dame from which he commutes during the summer to his Montreal job, says he plans to build a home on the less developed St. Victor. "The bylaws that have been created to protect the lake prohibit the cutting of trees. Residents will not even be able to cut weeds along the shoreline because that creates a problem with erosion," Miller said.

Other bylaws will prohibit the use of motorized watercraft and seaplanes and create strict regulations for the location of septic tanks. Moreover, cottagers will not be permitted to cut

down trees in order to create expanses of lawn around their homes.

"The whole key of the bylaws is to control development as it moves forward," he said, adding that homes will also have to be set sufficiently far back on the lot to prevent them being visible from the lake. "We want the buildings to blend in with the beauty of the place," Miller said.

Beauty is in abundance on St. Victor. Ramacieri says moose, fox, partridge, deer and falcons can often be seen. And because of the lack of development, the lake was used in the filming of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the movie based on Mordecai Richler's novel, because it looks like many Laurentian lakes looked before the post-war building boom.

Ramacieri says the project is being sold by word-of-mouth. "We've had some inquiries from people who have bought on lakes in the past 15 years and who are now sick of the noise from motorboats during the summer and snowmobiles during the winter," he said.

"Our clients are people who care about preserving the lake."

"We want it to remain a preserved area, like a provincial park that people live in."

"It's a jewel of nature. If I had the means, I wouldn't develop it at all."