



THE COTTAGE

HEALTHCARE DESIGN LIKE NO OTHER

Barrie Family Hospice of Elgin

Laura Sherwood
St. Joseph's Health Care Society

AUGUST 2025

In a world where healthcare often leans toward the clinical and sterile, a new model of end-of-life care has emerged—warm, welcoming, and inspired by the peace and comfort of cottage living. This is *The Cottage*, a 17,000+ sq. ft. hospice facility nestled in the woods of Elgin County. The project, led by St. Joseph's Health Care Society, reimagines what design and compassionate end-of-life care look like in Ontario. A connection to nature and hospitality are at the forefront of the cottage-like design, built on a foundation of excellence in care.

From the very first sketch to the final timber beam placed, *The Cottage* was envisioned as more than a building—it is a legacy. Cottages, after all, are places where families and friends gather, where nature wraps around you, and life slows down to focus on what matters most. Hospice, at its essence, shares that same mission: to slow time, to focus on presence, and to hold space for connection, comfort, and care.

The Hospice's cottage-like design achieves an unmistakable architectural identity—a place that is both welcoming and memorable. **Upon arrival, guests are greeted with a large timber beam (Douglas Fir) covered entrance, creating a sense of confidence in the wrap-around care that will be provided.**



Built for Connection

Inside, spaces are carved out not only for healthcare but for 'life' at life's end. Comfortable living rooms are separated by a fireplace that offers privacy between spaces while inviting warmth and gathering. A Rec Room provides family-friendly amenities like games, puzzles, and movie nights. The kitchen and dining areas include a Canoe Café, a harvest breakfast table, kitchen island, and separate family dining room—ensuring that nourishment, celebration, and togetherness are always supported. A rotating art collection can be found in the Reflection Room. More than a mini art gallery, this sacred space (for all faiths, cultures, and traditions) is also used for farewell ceremonies, prayer, and meditation.



Nature isn't just a backdrop- it's a design partner



Floor-to-ceiling glass, window benches, and outdoor patios bring natural light into every corner. **Families can roll cuddle beds out onto patios, enjoy the firepit (for ceremonies and s'mores), and enjoy moments of peace.** Even transitional spaces support this intention: bench seating in the hallways offers quiet rest stops, and zones like the spa alcove give families space to pause. These aren't afterthoughts; they are part of the Hospice's ethos: to care for body, mind, and spirit alike.

Leading the way in Theraserialization

Tucked into a wooded setting, *The Cottage* was sited intentionally to provide both privacy and tranquility, leading the way in theraserialization, a transformative approach to healthcare architecture that integrates therapeutic goals with serialized spatial design.

Rooted in biophilic principles, it emphasizes a seamless connection between indoor and outdoor engagement with nature.

By blurring the boundaries between built spaces and natural landscapes, theraserialization fosters emotional comfort and psychological recovery—key components of healing in clinical settings (especially Hospice).

In practice, this design philosophy manifests through transparent architectural elements like glass walls and open corridors, to maximize exposure to natural light and greenery. Research supports the efficacy of this approach, showing that access to nature can reduce stress and improve mood, enhancing staff well-being (which translates to better care) and an enhanced experience for residents and their grieving families.

Once inside, the sound and flow of the water wall creates a welcoming calmness, with anchoring stone walls and double-sided fireplace adding warmth, creating a feel that is far from institutional. **Large windows and patios dissolve the barrier between indoor care and the surrounding forest, inviting the therapeutic benefits of nature inside.** Even details like the cut-log donor wall were intentionally integrated into the design while also reinforcing the cottage theme.



More than a Building (Design with Soul)

The Cottage stretches what's possible in healthcare design. It is a model of theraserialization—where healthcare settings borrow from hospitality and nature to create harmony.

It is a space that *feels* like the cottage and *functions* like a healthcare facility. ***The Cottage* sets a new benchmark in holistic design—not just for what a hospice should look like, but what it should feel like.** A space for love and dignity.

Hospitality, Holistic, and Healing

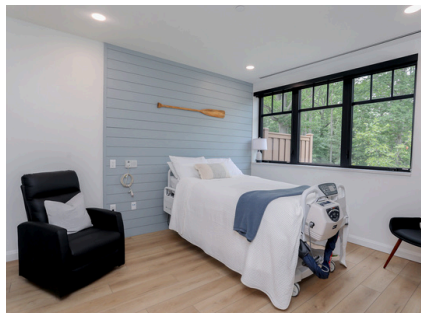
Each resident suite reflects one of the Hospice's guiding design principles: it must feel like a cottage, not a clinic. From shiplap, canoe paddles, homemade quilts, and wood mantels to display personal items, to large plank vinyl wood heated floors, and private patios, every detail reflects the essence of comfort.

Care has been designed with the family in mind, with a pull-out sofa in each room. Extended or larger families are invited to stay in the Cottage Bunkie—a space with an adjacent shower, laundry, and washroom, ensuring loved ones can be nearby. Each room includes custom millwork and storage, and a wood mantel to display photos or personal mementos. The room layout is separated by a half-wall, allowing privacy from visitors and family during periods of rest and/or care.

Oxygen lines have been discreetly concealed in bathrooms, and lighting is fully adjustable, allowing residents to customize their environment. Even stocking the rooms with care items can be done discreetly through a hidden door/cabinet that connects to the hallway, minimizing disruptions while enhancing privacy.

The Spa Room offers a therapeutic bathing experience, with Scandinavian wood-like tiles, a glassed-in accessible shower, and white plush robes—a hospitality experience rarely seen in healthcare.

Functional yet invisible infrastructure, such as nurse charting stations in corridors and concealed medication rooms, balances clinical needs with aesthetic harmony. This allows *The Cottage* to operate as a 24/7 care facility without ever losing its welcoming feel.



This project was made possible by the vision, generosity, and heart of the community it serves.

Project Team:

Lead Agency: St. Joseph's Health Care Society and Barrie Family Hospice of Elgin

Architect: ROA Studio

General Contractor: Graceview Enterprises

Project Manager: BES Construction Consulting

Interior Design: Valleyburn Properties

