

# House Hunting in Canada: Weathered Steel on the Shores of Nova Scotia

With remote workers flocking to its bucolic shores, the rapidly growing Atlantic province of Canada isn't 'looked at as the poor cousin anymore.'

March 2, 2022

**International real estate**

## [A Perch Above the Atlantic in Nova Scotia](#)

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**By Marcelle Sussman Fischler**

## **A House in Three Parts in Nova Scotia**

**\$2.95 MILLION (3.75 MILLION CANADIAN DOLLARS)**

This 2018 property, known as [Smith House](#), sits on just over two acres in the village of Upper Kingsburg, on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, in eastern Canada.

A modern nod to the region's rural vernacular style, the two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom home is spread over 2,800 square feet in a trio of structures — known as the day pavilion, the night pavilion and the gatehouse. The site, which faces 233 feet of deeded Atlantic Ocean coastline to one side and a salt pond to the other, is reached past a flock of sheep, highland cattle, gardens and gated pastures.

"When you get to the front door, you've already experienced half of the architecture because it's about how you arrive," said [Brian MacKay-Lyons](#), the architect, who lives on the neighboring farm and whose family has resided in the region for generations. "It's about the landscape; the building is a secondary thing."





The two-bedroom, two- and-a-half-bathroom home is spread over 2,800 square feet in a trio of structures — known as the day pavilion, the night pavilion and the gatehouse. Engel & Volkers Nova Scotia Halifax/Doublespace Photography

Built on land that long ago accommodated a Mi'kmaq community and later an ancient Acadian fishing village, the minimalist gable-roofed structures have Corten steel cladding. Their arrangement on a granite plinth forms a series of courtyards that block the wind and welcome the sunlight.

“Triple-glazed glass doors envelop the building, all the while having a sense of privacy and peacefulness,” said Alexandra Vallee, a real estate adviser with Engel & Völkers Halifax, which has the listing.

A connected foyer, living room, dining room and kitchen runs the length of the 20-foot-wide, 1,910-square-foot day pavilion. The primary bedroom suite is in the 16-foot-wide, 550-square-foot night pavilion. Living space and a sleeping loft occupy the 12-foot-wide, 315-square-foot gatehouse, which sits atop a stone wall parallel to the road, screening an east-facing entry courtyard. Each structure has natural ventilation and heated floors.

Exposed black steel structural beams add a sculptural dimension to the day pavilion, with a polished concrete floor and a circular-cut ash plywood ceiling. A Caesarstone-topped island with a Miele cooktop and a dining bar runs nearly the 28-foot length of the kitchen. Cabinetry covered in white ash boards conceals a Bosch dishwasher, a Miele refrigerator and a Marvel wine refrigerator. A trap door leads down a staircase to a wine cellar with uplit stone walls.

The dining room has a long live-edge table crafted from local trees. Beyond, the great room has a 16-foot stone fireplace with a massive mantel. The room is cantilevered over the edge of the granite plinth, with ocean views through windows on three sides. The home's custom furnishings are included in the sale.

Across a courtyard in the night pavilion, the bedroom's walls and vaulted ceiling are white-painted shiplap, with a wood floor and window seat. The suite includes a skylit dressing room and a white marble bathroom with a sunset view to cliffs beyond.

Exposed black steel structural beams add a sculptural dimension to the day pavilion. The dining room has a long live-edge table and Atlantic Ocean views through large windows. Engel & Volkers Nova Scotia Halifax/Doublespace Photography

The gatehouse shed has walls with bare studs, with a wood stove and a daybed under a pair of large wall-mounted antlers. An outdoor barbecue and pizza oven are built into a low stone wall outside, and a hot tub is built into a granite paver patio.

The property — one of several dozen designed by Mr. MacKay-Lyons as part of a new village on the site — is a 10-minute walk from Hirtle's Beach and Gaff Point, a 4.3-mile hiking trail in a nature reserve on a narrow peninsula jutting into the Atlantic. Restaurants, cafes, bakeries and shops are nearby in Rose Bay, LaHave and West Dublin, across the LaHave River.

The property is 13 miles from the port town of Lunenburg, a planned 1753

British colonial settlement and a UNESCO World Heritage site, with colorful buildings along its waterfront and restaurants, distilleries, breweries, artisans and distinctive shops in town. Big box stores are 20 minutes away in Bridgewater. Halifax, Nova Scotia's capital and largest city, is a 75-mile drive, and Halifax Stanfield International Airport is 80 miles.

## Market Overview

The pandemic has boosted Nova Scotia's housing market, which had been humming along for years.

An initial standstill lasting a few months was followed by "a stampede of people" from Toronto and other urban Canadian centers, said John Duckworth, broker and co-owner of Duckworth Real Estate. "Properties were being picked off at a tremendous speed," he said, many sold sight unseen.

Donna Malone, president of the Nova Scotia Association of Realtors, noted that Nova Scotia has offered a laid-back, low-density environment for remote workers. "Large family homes, which had been a bit depressed, became popular with buyers, as did waterfront properties," Ms. Malone said.

With 40 percent of demand coming from other Canadian provinces, the median price of a single-family home has soared — from 234,900 Canadian dollars (\$183,546) in 2020 to 289,900 Canadian (\$225,790) in 2021, and now 340,000 Canadian (\$265,669) in 2022, Ms. Malone said.

The great room is anchored by a 16-foot stone fireplace. The home's custom furnishings are included in the sale. Engel & Volkers Nova Scotia Halifax/Doublespace Photography

She added that waterfront homes range up to about 4 million Canadian (\$3.15 million), depending on location, condition and size. Cottages can range up to 1.5 million (\$1.2 million), and fixer-uppers start at 100,000 (\$79,000), Ms. Malone said.

In January, as inventory dwindled, “prices pushed even higher,” with house sales declining by 16.2 percent and prices rising by 23.2 percent year over year, said Ms. Vallee of Engel & Völkers. On the South Shore, where Smith House is located, prices rose 56.1 percent.

With multiple offers on many properties, what’s left is “a very limited inventory from one end of the province to the other,” Mr. Duckworth said. In December, Nova Scotia’s population topped 1 million for the first time, with nearly 6,000 newcomers [arriving](#) between January and April of last year.

“Historically, the movement was from Nova Scotia to Ontario and west,” Mr. Duckworth said. “A lot of people who live in Toronto are from Atlantic Canada.” Amid the pandemic, “they came back to where they were brought up and buy a place for half of what they sold their house in Toronto. I guess we are not looked at as the poor cousin anymore.”

Foreign buyers and Canadians relocating for professional reasons often opt for condominiums close to Halifax’s growing technology sector, four universities, and the eastern Canada government center. Prices range from about 240,000 to 2.5 million Canadian (\$190,000 to \$1.95 million), Ms. Malone said. In smaller condo markets throughout the province, prices range up to about 500,000 Canadian (\$390,000).

Others seek acreage or a place near the coastline or one of more than 3,000 lakes. South of Halifax, Chester, a yachting community, picturesque Mahone Bay, historic Lunenburg and Kingsburg, with two beaches and five lakes, lure buyers. Annapolis Valley, a scenic farming area with vineyards, attracts those seeking more cultural offerings.

The main bedroom suite is in the 16-foot-wide, 550-square-foot night pavilion. The bedroom’s walls and vaulted ceiling are white-painted shiplap, with a wood floor and window seat. Engel & Volkers Nova Scotia  
Halifax/Doublespace Photography

Many Europeans are drawn to Cape Breton, at the eastern end of Nova Scotia, Mr. Duckworth said. It has some of the most affordable housing in

the country, with a median price of 173,250 Canadian (\$135,344), compared with 290,000 Canadian (\$226,550) on the South Shore and 479,900 Canadian (\$375,000) in Halifax, Ms. Malone said.

Land prices have “pretty much doubled in less than two years for individuals buying lots,” Mr. Duckworth said, noting opportunities “are not there” for developers to buy, subdivide and sell.

## **Who Buys in Nova Scotia**

According to agents, many buyers come from Britain, the United States, Germany, Holland, Austria and Switzerland.

Oceanfront and ocean-view homes and land also have been sold to buyers from Turks and Caicos, Gibraltar, Kazakhstan, Dubai, Singapore, Bermuda, and the South Pacific, Mr. Duckworth said.

Demand for housing is also driven by international migration. According to the Canadian premier’s office, in 2020, the top five source countries for landed newcomers in Nova Scotia were India, China, the Philippines, Korea and Britain.

An outdoor barbecue and pizza oven are built into a low stone wall outside, and a hot tub is built into a granite paver patio. Engel & Volkers Nova Scotia Halifax/Doublespace Photography

## **Buying Basics**

There are no restrictions on real estate purchases by foreigners. Purchases are made in Canadian dollars.

Property transfer tax is municipal, with buyers paying 1 to 1.5 percent of the purchase price. On Nova Scotia’s South Shore, the tax is 1.25 percent.

Buyers must retain a real estate lawyer, with legal fees running up to about 2,000 Canadian (\$1,575). The seller pays the commission, typically 5 percent of the sales price, though negotiable.



Home inspections, including the “quality and quantity” of well water and on-site septic systems, are recommended in areas that don’t have municipal systems, Mr. Duckworth said.

With 35 percent down plus the cost of mortgage insurance, non-Canadians can obtain mortgages up to 65 percent of the purchase price.

## Websites

- Nova Scotia official tourism: [novascotia.com](http://novascotia.com)
- Nova Scotia Association of Realtors: [nsrealtors.ca](http://nsrealtors.ca)
- Government of Canada: [canada.ca](http://canada.ca)

## Languages and Currency

English; Canadian dollar (1 Canadian dollar = \$0.78)

## Taxes and Fees

Annual taxes on this property are estimated to be around 12,000 Canadian (\$9,400).

## Contact

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