

## Anatomy of Le Shack

**H**ANK LOOYER introduced Art Thrun, Bus Duhamel and me to Le Shack about 40 years ago. “We need some new blood,” he said. Never mind that Bus was nearly the same age as Hank. Over 50 at that time.

Hank told us very little about the place, but I remember that Art, Bus and I didn’t know whether Le Shack was just that—a shack—or whether it was some fancy clubhouse with an understated name. Let’s put it this way: It was accurately named. Nonetheless we became instant dues paying members.

Le Shack—a private, cozy trout-fishing club located in Central Wisconsin—was a two-story converted farmhouse with a dozen beds and assorted chairs and furniture of

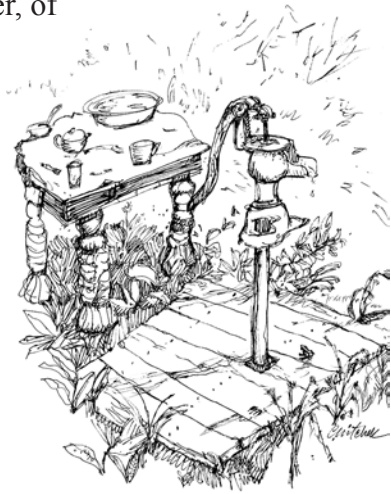
unknown vintage scattered about. There were two bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining room and a screened-in porch on the first floor. The upstairs was designed dormitory style and slept eight, but capacity was usually about 14 if one included the half-dozen resident bats that soared about at night; however, they were not a major problem since there were no vampires reported among them. Actually, some of us welcomed the bats, because if a mosquito dared to enter our sacred house through the Swiss-cheese window screens, a bat would quickly hone in on it. *Slurp*. Dead meat.

There was no running water, of course, but a squeaky, cranky hand pump delivered pure ice-cold water. Well, not exactly “pure.”

Occasionally, we’d pump water and a cute, little frog would plop into our pail. I named him Jessie. We’d release him, of course, and somehow he would make his way 25 to 35 feet below, to the source of our water supply.

I don’t know why he chose to live down there; perhaps he liked being pumped up through the pipe. Once we sent a member’s young son to fetch water and he was stunned when Jessie came up the pipe and belly-flopped into the pail. He never drank water from the pump again and brushed his teeth with Pepsi or Coke. *City slicker!*

For bathing? Well, most guys didn’t bathe if they stayed for only for a few days. For those who insisted on

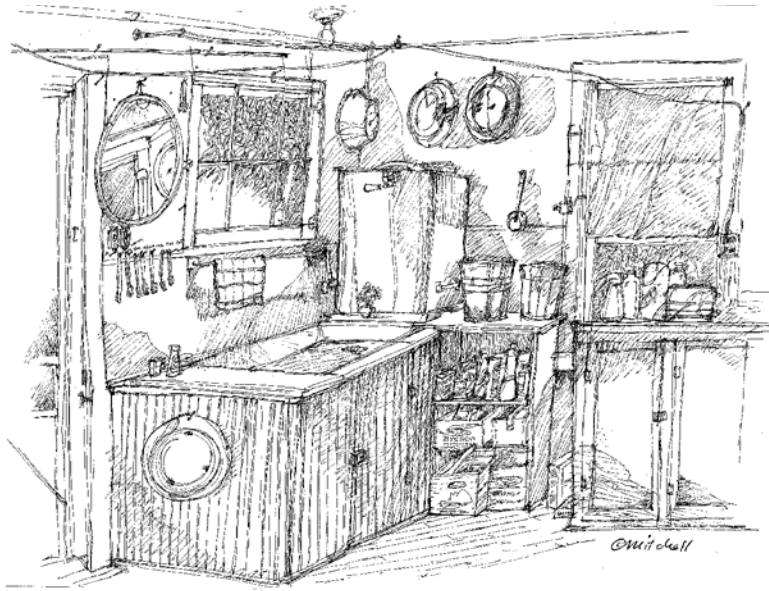


a daily bath there was a small creek about 70 yards from Le Shack. The mosquitoes at the creek (or “crick,” to use local parlance) hid in the trees or grass until we removed all our clothes, and then, on some indiscernible signal, the mosquitoes swooped on us from all directions and our only escape was to dive into the ice-cold waters of Bubbly Crick. The mosquitoes always won these skirmishes: Even if a few of them didn’t get a piece of us before we dove in, they knew that we couldn’t last long in those frigid waters.

Since there was no running water in Le Shack, we didn’t have an indoor toilet. We had an outhouse. A two-seater. Hey, company. We called it the Lilac Room. It wasn’t that bad.

(A harmless but sizeable snake lived nearby, and once in a while it would make an appearance and scare the “heck” out of some of us. One time, a newcomer to Le Shack saw this “monster” heading toward him, while he was using the “facilities,” so he picked up the big boulder that was used to hold the outhouse’s door open for ventilation and crushed the snake’s head. He proudly proclaimed his accomplishment to Hank and others and expected lots of praise. Instead Hank





was furious. That snake was harmless and had been there for several seasons. A pet of sorts. Oh, well.)

A dozen or so old battered fishing hats hung at the entrance of the dining room. These hats belonged to deceased Shack members. It's an eerie feeling to know that one day our fishing hats would also be displayed there.

While everything was run on a very casual, come-when-you-can, leave-when-you-must basis, we observed a ritual every morning if there were five or more members at camp. The ritual was called *Sol er oppe*. At sunrise everyone filed outside, and each member was handed a glass of rye and orange juice, usually prepared by Freddie Leu, Carl Johnson or Dick Korsgard. The rye, we were told, covered the orange juice and "protected its vitamins from escaping."

Everyone lined up, faced east, and held his glass with his thumb on top and little finger at the bottom, while the remaining three fingers curled in. Don't ask why. Tradition, I guess.

Bus Duhamel, a transplanted Canadian, bellowed *Sol er opppe*, a Norwegian fish poem, while the rest of us, in assorted stages of dress or undress, repeated each Norwegian line in unison. At the completion of the poem everyone had to finish his drink in one swoop. Chug-a-lug, we used to call it in college. If someone didn't do it right, or if someone developed the giggles during the poem—and this was often the case because nearby farm dogs barked or howled in protest—then the whole procedure had to be repeated. Duhamel was a hard taskmaster and once he was not satisfied until the fourth try. After that ritual, most members had difficulty aiming toast to their mouths—forget about tying a tiny Adams to a wispy leader, but since early morning fishing was not considered good, no one felt shortchanged.

The hefty breakfast of blueberry pancakes, eggs, bacon, coffee cake and other goodies prepared by the members steadied everyone. Except for one morning. Art Thrun insisted on preparing a special breakfast, which was so ghastly we termed it, “Thrun’s Tragedy,” or “Thrun’s Trash.” He was forbidden from ever cooking another breakfast at Le Shack for at least five years and was ordered to sleep in the screened-in porch for the rest of the year.

I joined Le Shack in the early 1960s. It was certainly affordable. Six dollars a night. We put the six dollars in a little purse in back of the front door. The six bucks not only covered the daily rate, but also essential groceries. If we were out of eggs, bacon, coffee or other staples, we'd take the money out of the purse and go to the grocery store.

“Yeah, but this doesn't cover any steaks or fancy stuff,” Hank warned us. “Just essentials. And put the receipts in the purse.”

I wasn't impressed with the fishing. It was (and is) the toughest brown trout fishing I've ever experienced. Because of my job in arranging international fishing trips all over the world, I did my "serious" trout fishing in Yugoslavia, Ireland, Argentina, New Zealand and elsewhere. I went to Le Shack to visit with the guys and because it was fun.

Dick Korsgard, the "Silver Fox," as I called him, used to sing the praises of Le Shack's fishing.

"Jim, where are you gonna find trout fishing like this? Dozens of streams all around us. *Wild* trout! None of this planted stuff."

Oh, he could get excited when he talked about Le Shack's fishing!

"Yeah, Dick, this is the best," I wasn't going to spoil his enthusiasm for these streams by telling him about some of my results on foreign rivers.

In 1990 we had a problem, a serious problem. We really didn't own Le Shack or the property; Hank Looyer had leased it through the decades from a local family. We lost the lease because the family's teen-age son wanted Le Shack for himself and his friends. You know, parties.

We had no place to stay.

Member Art Thrun learned that a small brick house across the river, not far from Le Shack, was for sale. It was a converted one-room schoolhouse. He bought it with his own funds, and we christened it Le Shack II. Art saved the club.

Compared to the old one, Le Shack II was the Ritz Hotel at Place Vendôme! We didn't have to go to Bubbly Creek (oops, I mean "Crick") for a bath and fight the mosquitoes. This place had a shower, hot and cold water, inside modern plumbing, wall-to-wall carpeting, overhead fan and no bats.

We moved the fishing hats of the deceased and a few other memorabilia to the new place. John Johnson, Russ Gaede, Ray Sauv  and Ole Johnson had died and new members Jim Burton, Danny Brugliera, Bill Wobbekind, Dick Dragiewicz, John Crowe and others joined the club.

Through the years, the daily rate “soared” to \$12 a day and this didn’t include buying groceries. Le Shack was not immune to the inflation. Only strong protests—mostly from me—kept Art from raising the daily fee to a hefty \$13. We settled for \$12.50 for several years. (I used the ploy that “13” was a very unlucky number).

After Art Thrun moved from Elgin, Illinois to Arkansas, the long driving distance prompted him to sell Le Shack



*ART THRUN*  
*acquired Le Shack II for us*

II in 2001. The new owner allows us to use it as before and has renovated the interior. Among the great improvements were the brand new, comfortable beds—better than just about any of the pricey hotels.

The rate has been increased to \$18 per night—probably the world’s best bargain in terms of fishing quality, convenience and location.

No one knows



*Le Shack II: Compared to the old Shack this was like the Ritz!”*

how old the original club was, because its locations and names have changed numerous times through the years. Hank remembered when the club was composed of Al Long, Earl Pease, Al Hopkins, Jimmy Thurmond, Parky Parkinson, Freddie Leu and himself.

“I think I was 30 when I first got involved in trout fishing in the area,” Hank told me when he 91, “I was among the youngest and the club was a going concern then. Different names, different locations. It’s possible that the club existed 90 years ago. Maybe more.”

The club was known as *The Shack* when I first joined it. Later it was renamed *Le Shack* by Bus Duhamel because it sounded “more exclusive.” Hey, this was an exclusive joint! We pointed out that it really should be called *La Shack*, because in French a house takes a feminine pronoun.

“Nonsense,” said Ray Sauv , who was of French descent. “There’s nothing feminine about this place. We’ll call it **Le Shack**, and let the French call their homes by feminine names if they want to . . . ”

Sadly, in 2005 the original Shack was torn down by the owners to make room for a new, modern house. Luckily we had Le Shack II but it would have been nice if the old Shack remained as a historical place.

### *The Sol Er Oppe Morning Ritual*



*Sol er oppe  
Den klare dagen  
Hanan hilser med vingeslag  
Oppe under merket  
Hånden på verket  
Alle er som en  
Skål til fisken*

# Short Casts

“MAYBE IT WAS 50 years ago when we decided to hold a New Year’s Eve party at the Shack for members and a few guests,” Hank Looyer began. “There were about a dozen of us. We fired up the pot-bellied stove and had the oven going, too, cause it was cold inside Le Shack and there was lots of snow outside. We all had our share of booze, jokes and laughter. We toasted the trout, the streams, the fishing season, the departed members, our wives, and ourselves. You know, we were having a good time, and since everyone was staying at Le Shack that night we didn’t have to worry about driving accidents.

“The party was going full blast well beyond midnight and one of the guests, Cal—I think that was his name—complained that we had run out of ice.

“So I tell the guy, ‘Geez, so just go outside and fill your drink with snow.’ So Cal went out, filled his glass with snow, comes in and reloads his glass with more Scotch and continues to drink.

“We all found our beds or slept in chairs, and the next morning we got up to have breakfast.

“Well, one of the guys went outside and sees where Cal evidently scooped some snow in his glass for his drink. He notices that Cal scooped up some ‘yellow snow.’ Now as you know, we didn’t have any running water or toilets so the guys would go out in front of the Shack and urinate in the snow.

“Well, when Cal finally got up and we told him about this, he got sick. So we then said that we were just kidding. We weren’t kidding, of course. He got himself some ‘yellow ice’ and drank it and didn’t complain at the time.”