NOVEMBER 2026

HOME IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

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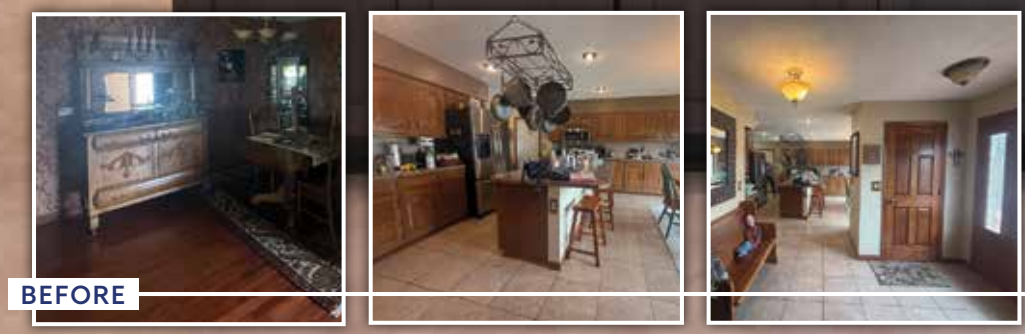
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Begin with a plan

By Shane Goodman | Publisher





Ever opened boxes containing folded pieces of paper thick enough to qualify as a medical textbook? I think they are called instruction manuals, but I am not sure. I have never actually read one.

Home improvement projects have a predictable pattern. First comes confidence. I open the box, spread the parts across the floor and take a quick look at the picture on the outside. I have seen enough. The instructions go into a pile, the tools come out, and construction begins.

Then I discover that the holes do not line up, the bracket is backward and the piece I installed 30 minutes ago needs to come off. Somewhere along the way, I realize I have used the wrong screws, misplaced a part and created a problem that did not exist when I started.

The frustrating part is that most of this could be avoided by doing the one thing I resist most: reading the instructions before I begin. A few minutes of preparation could save hours of backtracking, frustration and searching for tools I was certain I owned.

I would like to tell you I have learned my lesson. But I have another project coming up, and I am already pretty sure I know how to do it.

In the meantime, enjoy this issue filled with ideas and inspiration for improving your home. Just remember that even the best projects begin with a plan. ■

ON THE COVER: The Eikes' new kitchen features an island, a custom-designed walnut wood hood above the gas stovetop and Shirley's one requirement: a double oven. Custom kitchen cupboards tie the cabinetry to the hood with walnut trim along the tops and bottoms of the cupboards.

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Three generations, one vision

Ron and Shirley Eike transform their Lake Panorama home and outdoor spaces.

By Karen Kelly

Ron and Shirley Eike have enjoyed life at Lake Panorama since 1999. Before purchasing their current home, they owned two other lake homes. In 2025, after deciding to downsize, they put their second home on the market.

After concluding that condo living didn't match their lifestyle, the Eikes purchased the property that would become their third lake home. They closed on the new home on April 1, gutted both floors, made several additions and overhauled the landscaping before moving in on Sept. 29.

The Eikes chose the property because they liked its location. The back of the house overlooks the golf course, while the front offers a glorious view of the lake. In addition, the house had "good bones" and a floor plan that would allow them to create the "easy, one-level living" they were seeking.

To facilitate the process, the Eikes did considerable planning. They were intentional and focused on their goals and hired local contractors with whom they had previously worked. Ron indicated they used local contractors whenever possible while still meeting their Oct. 1 move-in deadline.

Gary Goepfert, owner of Trimline Construction, was selected as the general contractor. Timberview Construction of Adel, owned by Parker Evans, was hired to build an addition for the great room and covered patio. Joshua Eike and Jack Eike, co-owners of Wood Duck Landscapes, planned and executed the landscaping.

"We were very pleased with all of the contractors," Ron said, adding that using contractors they had worked with previously made the design process go faster because they already knew the Eikes' preferences. Many of the design features were nearly identical to those in their previous home.

As the Eikes planned the interior changes, their goal was to create a space that fit their needs. Shirley emphasized their home is "not for show. It's useful."

Her favorite space is the new kitchen, which features



Extensive excavation was completed to make the Eike property as level as possible with as few stairs as possible. Photo courtesy of Joshua Eike, co-owner of Wood Duck Landscapes

an island, a decorative hood above the gas stovetop and her one requirement: a double oven. Contractor Gary Goepfert built the custom-designed walnut wood hood. He also designed and constructed the custom kitchen cupboards, tying the cabinetry to the hood with walnut trim along the tops and bottoms of the cupboards.

The focal point of the kitchen is the 10-foot-long island, which provides ample seating and additional storage with extra cabinetry underneath. Keeping with the goal of ease of use and functionality, the soft-close cupboards also have pullout shelves. A pop-up outlet on the island provides power for small appliances and includes built-in phone chargers. The quartz countertop is ideal for entertaining and baking. All the kitchen countertops feature the same quartz as the island and were installed by Gary Fox of Fox Countertops.

The flooring throughout the main floor is engineered walnut hardwood, which is more durable and easier to maintain than traditional hardwood flooring.

The Eikes painted the living room and added new walnut woodwork. A new electric fireplace, surrounded by stone fascia, was installed with a walnut mantel



Photo courtesy of Sunset Realty

custom-built by Trimline Construction. A new walnut and decorative wrought-iron railing was installed around the stairs to the basement.

By removing a half wall, the Eikes created an open-concept floor plan upstairs. They also added a great room at the back of the house that leads to the new covered patio overlooking the golf course.

Ron's favorite features of the great room are the windows, which provide a beautiful view, and the gas fireplace, which has stone fascia extending to the ceiling. Trimline Construction fashioned a custom mantel from a plank taken from a Guthrie County bridge. The vaulted cedar plank ceiling blends seamlessly with the permanent cedar ceiling over the patio.

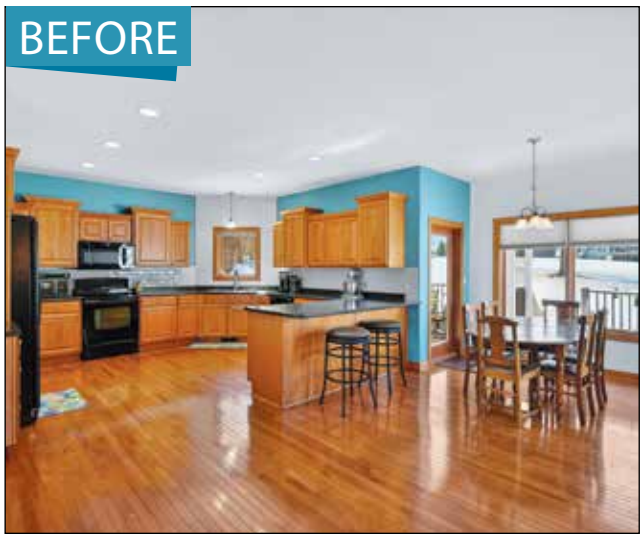


Photo courtesy of Sunset Realty

Off the kitchen, the spacious laundry room also includes a desk and office space for Shirley. The primary bedroom and bathroom are also on the main floor.

The bathrooms, incidentally, were the only rooms in the house that didn't receive a complete makeover. Because the Eikes liked their layout and design, repainting was the only change they made.



The Eikes' new kitchen features an island, a custom-designed walnut wood hood above the gas stovetop and Shirley's one requirement: a double oven. Custom kitchen cupboards tie the cabinetry to the hood with walnut trim along the tops and bottoms of the cupboards.

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The Eikes added a courtyard with seating and a lake view. Photo courtesy of Joshua Eike, co-owner of Wood Duck Landscapes



The Eikes added a great room at the back of the house that leads to the new covered patio overlooking the golf course.

Downstairs, the Eikes added a third bedroom to accommodate visitors. A special feature throughout the home is the custom-designed closet interiors installed by Trimline Construction. Custom rods, shelves and drawers improve storage space and functionality.

Inside the lower-level French door, the Eikes added a bar that is convenient when entertaining on the courtyard patio. Trimline Construction also created the custom-designed hickory bar cabinetry. Engineered hickory hardwood flooring complements the bar.





Outdoor living made easy

Even more challenging than the home remodel was the outdoor renovation. The Eikes wanted to achieve the same "ease of living space" outside that they had created indoors. Outdoor living is equally important to the couple, who spend much of their time at the lake outside.

On the day the Eikes closed on the property, Ron, a self-described tree-hugger, planted some of his favorite trees. They included an autumn gold ginkgo, fall fiesta sugar maple, Shawnee brave bald cypress, Black Hills spruce and slender silhouette sweet gum. The trees further enhance the existing trees on the property and along the golf course.

Ron said his philosophy is, "Life under a tree is always a shade better."

Ron said their requirements for the outdoor space included a grand front entry off the driveway, landscaping that capitalized on the lake and golf course views, a courtyard with seating and a lake view, and as much level space as possible with the fewest stairs.

Because the Eikes liked the driveway, they made no changes to it. However, they wanted to create a front entry that was level with the drive. The landscapers' first task was to remove the small porch and front entry, the narrow front sidewalk and the lower-level retaining walls. This was followed by extensive excavation and earthmoving to achieve the look Ron envisioned.

The Eikes were intentional when designing the front of their home. Ron wanted a water feature because he found the sound of running water soothing. He also chose to plant a rose garden along the front walkway so visitors could smell the roses as they approached the front door. The combination of the water feature and the fragrance of the flowers is intended to relax guests.

For the wide, curving walkway in front of the home, the landscapers chose Grand Vantage concrete pavers from Country Materials for all the flat surfaces.

"We used stone textures and wood grain textures to give a rustic 'lake cabin' feel," Joshua Eike of Wood Duck Landscapes said.

The water feature is at the corner of the house closest to the driveway, with the lush rose garden filling the space between the home and the walkway. Ron chose colorful, fragrant varieties of roses, including his favorite, the Kashmir red rose. Small bushes flank the opposite side of the walkway.

The retaining wall in the front yard, like all the structural retaining walls on the property, is made of Rosetta Hardscape Grand Ledge, which has the appearance of a natural limestone outcropping. In front of the retaining wall is a level, grass-covered yard.

At the back of the house, the Eikes access their covered patio through the French doors in the great room. The patio is made of composite decking material suggested by Parker Evans of Timberview Construction. Evans also added a space for the grill outside the covered portion of the patio, a feature the Eikes particularly appreciate.

The covered patio provides a fantastic view of the golf course and privacy from passing traffic. The Eikes use the space for everything from entertaining to having lunch or drinking their morning coffee.

The courtyard patio extends from the basement walkout and features a fire pit and seating. It can also be accessed from the upper-level covered patio by way of the few steps on the property.

Like the front walkway, the courtyard is made with textured Grand Vantage concrete pavers. Raised flower beds around the perimeter were created using Country Materials Tribute Smooth retaining wall blocks. Currently, the beds are filled with vibrant mums and



other fall plantings.

An avid gardener, Ron enjoys changing the annuals in the beds each season to create an ever-changing display of colorful flowers. From this vantage point, the Eikes can enjoy the lake view. They particularly enjoy using the space to watch the sunrise over the lake.

Ron noted that the unusually wet September was actually advantageous for his landscaper. The excessive rain runoff allowed them to see exactly where additional drainage tile was needed.

When the Eikes realized runoff from their property was creating a drainage problem for a neighboring property, their landscaper worked with the neighbors to add a new wall and drainage system along the property line to redirect the runoff toward the lake. Ron commended Jack Eike's expertise in grading and drainage, which helped provide superior turf appeal.

An interesting twist to the Eikes' outdoor makeover is Ron's history in the landscaping business. In 2002, he founded Wood Duck Tree Farms, which grew into a wholesale nursery supplying landscapers in several states. Eventually, Ron sold the company to new owners in Iowa City. This led to the development of Wood Duck Landscapes, which Ron started to take on small landscaping jobs for friends around Lake Panorama. They knew of his love of plants and his extensive knowledge of varieties that would not be eaten by the local deer population.

According to Ron, when his son Joshua joined the company, his knowledge of hardscapes and ability to look at a property and create a plan for outdoor living spaces allowed the business to take on larger projects. Eventually, Ron sold the company to his son, Joshua Eike, and grandson, Jack Eike.

Ron said being part of three generations working on this project was exciting. He said it was special to collaborate with his son and grandson and draw on each generation's expertise. Ron and Shirley agreed that it is rewarding to see the scope of the large projects their son and grandson have completed around the lake through the years.

One of the tools Wood Duck Landscapes employed was technology to create 3D renderings of the project design. Ron explained that Joshua can enter hardscape details, such as the stone products and types of plants they want to use, to create a color, scaled 3D visual of what the finished landscape will look like. This is a great advantage when property owners are making design choices. Ron said they worked through four versions of the 3D renderings before arriving at the final design.

In the multigenerational collaboration, Ron, known as the plant whisperer, was responsible for the plantscaping. Combining his knowledge of plants that thrive in the local climate and repel deer, his access to suppliers offering specialty plants not available through area nurseries. With the help of artificial intelligence technology, Ron was able to design aesthetically pleasing plantscapes using annuals, perennials and shrubs. The 3D renderings of his gardens allowed him to refine and perfect the plant selections to achieve exactly the look he wanted.

The Eikes said their goal was to make outdoor living as easy as indoor living, and they believe their landscaper achieved that goal. The outdoor space is used daily as an extension of their indoor living space.

Their favorite time to enjoy the outdoors is before dinner, which they refer to as "wine time." Drinking their morning coffee while watching the sunrise over the lake from their courtyard is their second favorite activity.

When asked what they would do differently if they could change anything about the renovations, the Eikes simultaneously replied, "Nothing." ■





Room for everyone

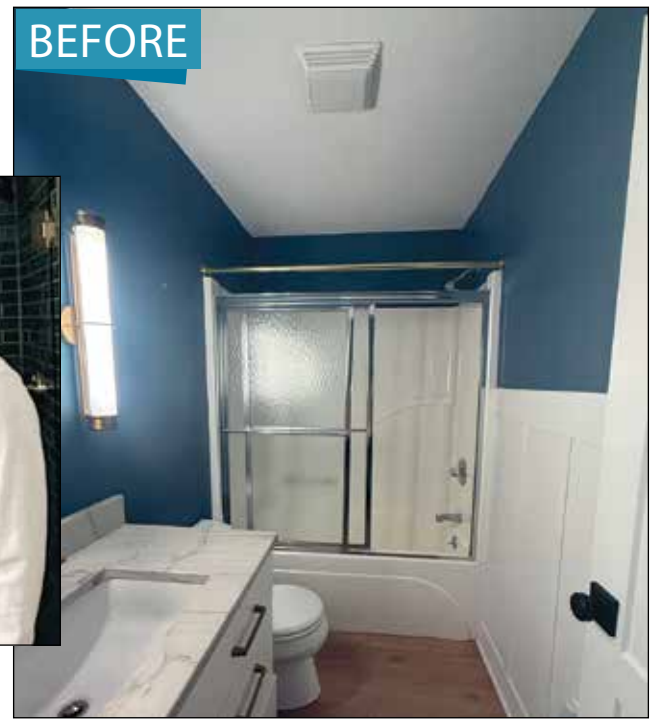
Bathroom renovations give the Strehles functionality and distinctive style.

By Karen Kelly

Josh Strehle had just completed his residency and landed a job at Guthrie County Hospital and Clinics when he and his wife, Valerie, began searching for a forever home at Lake Panorama. Valerie recalled they wanted "something we could put love and money into" as their young family grew and their needs changed.



When they moved into their home on Jones Cove in April 2015, the Strehles had a newborn son. These days, Josh still works at the GCH Clinic, while Valerie works from home for Workiva, a global cloud-based software-as-a-service company. Their family now includes Drake, 11; Cooper, 9; and Vivyan, 7.





The main floor bathroom, used primarily by daughter Vivyan, features emerald-green tiles in the shower along with gold fixtures for a luxurious feel.

To accommodate their growing family and frequent visits from family and friends, the Strehles have renovated their home to create a more open floor plan. According to Valerie, they have now made changes to virtually every space in the house. As they have made improvements, the Strehles have focused on creating a timeless look through neutral color palettes and materials that flow seamlessly throughout the residence.

Recently, they decided it was time to update the bathrooms, which were original to the house, built in 1998. They hired Laughery Construction, owned by Kevin Laughery, to remodel the basement bathroom, which Drake and Cooper share. Laughery has completed most of the other renovations in the Strehle home.

Because the basement bathroom is used primarily by the boys, they chose to give it a man-cave look with colors and fixtures that evoke the outdoors and nature. The original tile flooring was replaced with new luxury vinyl plank flooring. Durability and ease of maintenance were important considerations, given the amount of water brought in from the lake and the frequent use of the shower.

The wall behind the sinks was covered in shiplap and painted sage green. New mirrors were hung above each sink, and new lighting with a more masculine look was installed. Black plumbing fixtures further enhance the man-cave vibe.

The most impactful change was removing the original sink and vanity and installing a double-sink vanity. Because the boys share the bathroom, the additional sink makes the space much more functional and gives each of them a designated area. The vanity countertop is quartzite, which the Strehles had acquired during an earlier project.

When remodeling their kitchen, the Strehles chose quartzite for their countertops. Because it is a 100% natural material, they decided to purchase two slabs and store the extra material for future renovations. This ensured consistent coloring throughout the house. That decision has allowed them to create a harmonious look by using the quartzite on the kitchen island, in the bar area, in the bathrooms and around their wet bar.

To add to the functionality of the new double vanity, each boy has his own drawers beneath the sink. The top drawers have notches for toothbrushes and toiletries, while additional cutouts accommodate the plumbing and maximize storage space.

Valerie observed that the new flooring adds consistency because the same flooring is now used throughout the house. The old tile was cold and not functional for the family's needs. The bathroom updates have not only made the home's overall aesthetic more harmonious but also eliminated some tension between the brothers. With each boy having his own space, there are fewer disputes as they get ready for school.

In December 2025, the Strehles decided it was time to update their main-floor bathroom, which is also Vivyan's primary bathroom. The bathtub was replaced with a tiled walk-in shower. Although the family has favored timeless colors in most of its remodeling projects, Valerie decided to have a little fun with color this time.

Working with her designer and college friend, Emily Kaldenberg, owner of Emily Lee Interior Design,

Valerie chose vibrant emerald green tile for the shower walls and black-and-white tile for the shower floor.

Valerie commented that Kaldenberg and Laughery work well together on projects. Kaldenberg sources the necessary materials, while Laughery brings her design ideas to life.

One thing Valerie said she failed to consider was how much time it would take to install the small individual tiles throughout the large shower stall. Because she admits she is not a patient person, Valerie appreciates Laughery's ability to keep her timeline expectations realistic. She also appreciates that he takes the time to do things correctly rather than cutting corners.

To avoid a cluttered look, recessed shelves for soap and shampoo were built into the shower's half-wall, which was also covered in the same emerald, green tile. Another special feature is that the shower drain is tiled as well.

Gold shower heads, faucets and fixtures provide a striking contrast to the bold tile. A new white vanity is topped with the same quartzite used throughout the house. Its drawers feature the same notches as those in the basement vanity. Above the sink, a mirrored medicine cabinet is flanked by modern tube light fixtures that provide additional illumination. Cabinets beneath the sink offer ample storage.



The Strehles wanted their downstairs bathroom to have a masculine vibe as well as a double vanity for their sons.

Valerie said the entire family likes Vivyan's bathroom. Not only is the new bathroom modern and visually stunning, but an unexpected benefit of the tiled shower is its outstanding acoustics for an unnamed family member who enjoys singing in the shower.

Valerie credits Josh with offering advice that has contributed to the success of their renovations. When they purchased the home, she was eager to begin remodeling. Josh, however, suggested they live in the space first to see what worked and what didn't before making major changes.

Valerie said that approach has allowed them to take their time and make thoughtful choices that work well for their family. ■

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A lake house transformed

Auens update inside and out for impact and functionality.

By Karen Kelly

When Jim and Deb Auen decided to purchase a vacation home, they were looking for a "lodge-looking" house that would be close enough to their home in Carroll to allow them to use it often but far enough away to feel like a true vacation retreat. In 2005, they found what they were looking for in a lakefront home on Lake Panorama.

The home featured natural pine walls, ceilings and flooring. As a bonus, a mounted moose head on the wall, affectionately named Marty, came with the place. The location also appealed to them because Burchfield Cove is wide, and being on the east side made it easy to access by car.

The original landscaping featured a steep hill covered in bushes with steps made of landscape timbers and gravel leading to the lake. By 2025, the Auens were tired of spending their lake weekends tending to the yard and realized the aging landscape timbers needed to be replaced. They faced a decision: make some major improvements or begin looking for a different vacation home.



The updated kitchen features new white cabinets and an island topped with Taj Mahal quartzite, which also was used for the countertops. To add interest and light, glass-front, lighted cabinets were installed above the sink.

Because they liked the location — and the house was the ideal size for them — the Auens decided to move forward with a renovation. Their main objectives were to make the property as maintenance-free as possible and add a large, covered deck. Initially, the plan was to improve the landscaping and remodel only the main floor.

"As most renovations go, one thing led to another, and we ended up renovating the entire house," Deb said.

To get the process started, the Auens began brainstorming with Tom Schmitz, a designer and good friend from Carroll with whom they had worked on other projects. Schmitz's suggestion to paint the pine walls and ceilings white led to what Deb described as a "huge, long, angst-filled decision" because, once they started painting the wood, there was no going back.

"After much thought, cautiously, we took a leap of faith and agreed to do that," Deb said. "We are so happy that we did. Tom's knowledge, creativity and experience made this home into what it is."

The Auens hired Billy Donovan, owner of Donovan Construction, as the general contractor. Donovan renovated the home's interior, added the "must-have" covered deck and oversaw the landscaping.

Throughout both levels, the walls and ceilings were painted white, which the Auens said made the biggest impact. The upstairs pine flooring was sanded and stained a dark color. Sadly, the Auens had to rehome Marty the Moose, which now hangs in Donovan's shop.

The updated kitchen features new white cabinets and an island topped with Taj Mahal quartzite, which also was used for the countertops. To add interest and light, glass-front, lighted cabinets were installed above the sink. New appliances and backsplashes completed the kitchen makeover. Both the upstairs and downstairs fireplaces received cultured stone facings and new mantels.

In the primary en suite bathroom, Donovan removed the bathtub and moved walls to make room for a large tile shower, a double vanity and a large linen cabinet. The downstairs bathroom was gutted and updated, and the laundry room received new cabinets and flooring.

Downstairs, replacing the tile with luxury vinyl plank flooring gave the lower level a warmer feel. Jim's bar makeover included a new wet bar and refrigerator. Deb



credits Jim with choosing decor for the bar that is both cozy and meaningful.

Jim, who grew up in Carroll, has worked at Auen Distributing for 45 years and is currently its president. Originally from Norfolk, Nebraska, Deb retired as general manager of an Anheuser-Busch distributing business in there. The memorabilia on the wall behind the bar reflects the couple's careers.

Azek decking, which provides the look the Auens wanted with minimal maintenance, and Westbury railing were used to construct the 20-foot by-14-foot covered deck.





The original landscaping around the Auen home featured a steep hill covered in bushes with steps made of landscape timbers and gravel leading to the lake. The couple wanted less maintenance and a more functional outdoor space including a covered deck.

Power screens that can be raised and lowered according to the Auens' needs make the space even more usable. The narrower section of the deck is uncovered.

Below, the patio extending from the walkout French doors has become much more functional with the addition of a roof beneath the deck.

Wood Duck Landscaping was hired to complete the outdoor work.

"Josh (Eike) looked at the backyard and knew immediately what needed to be done to make the walk to the lake easy and beautiful and require far less maintenance," Deb said.

The outdoor design focused on the Auens' desire for low maintenance while blending in a more rustic look to complement the home's exterior. Rosetta Hardscapes outcropping products, durable materials designed to look like the side of a mountain, were used for the retaining walls.

To add beauty, the landscapers installed landscape fabric, oversized river rock and deer-tolerant plantings. For a beautiful lighting effect that also provides safety and security at night, Eike used professional downlights from



FX Luminaire mounted in the trees surrounding the staircase.

"Billy was so easy to work with. He worked hard to make all our wishes come to life, and he made many suggestions along the way that were great," Deb said.

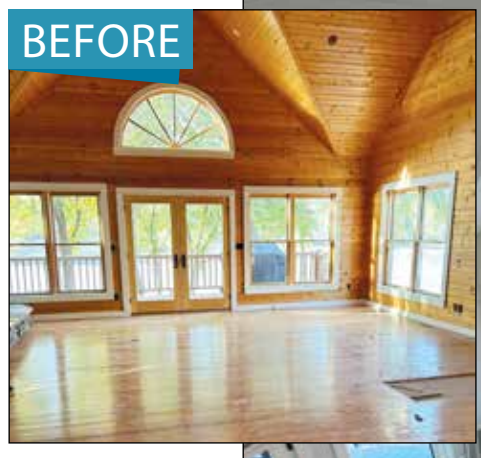
The couple was thrilled that Donovan and Eike completed the project in six months, Deb said. Having the work done over the winter was perfect timing for the Auens, who like to use their lake home most weekends during the summer.

The Auens said their favorite way to enjoy their renovated space is sitting on the deck with music and a fire while watching the boats go by. They said their project "couldn't have turned out any better." The covered deck and the patio area below have given them much more functional space.

"Honestly, all the renovations have given us more time to relax rather than having to do chores," Deb commented.

That extra time allows the couple to enjoy their season tickets to Iowa State football and basketball games, spend time with their two sons and play a little golf.

The Auens' advice to others planning an extensive renovation is simple: "Plan well and have great contractors." ■



The most dramatic change to the interior of the Auen home was painting the wood on the ceilings and walls white. Photo by Karen Kelly



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A move that was meant to be

Browns' remodeling project turns into home filled with craftsmanship, antiques and room for entertaining.

By Karen Kelly





The new bar and family room is where the couple enjoys entertaining and watching football. The space was created by converting the garage into living space. Photos by Karen Kelly

In 1994, Dave and MJ Brown built their forever home at Lake Panorama. In 2018, on a whim, the Browns decided to look at another house on Panorama Drive that had been on the market for several years. Before they had even toured the entire house, Dave made an offer.

He said that, although the house was not decorated in their style, he thought it had "good bones" and offered great views. Just like that, the Browns bought a second home on the golf course. Initially, the plan was to remodel and flip the house. However, Dave, who travels extensively for work, left MJ in charge of the remodeling. MJ pointed out that Dave neglected to give her a budget. By the time the renovations were complete, they loved the house so much they decided to sell their other home and move into the newly renovated property.

MJ is responsible for the casual elegance of the home's design. She called on her sister-in-law to source fabrics and drapery hardware and enlisted Mardi Russell for additional window treatments.

For the extensive renovations, the Browns hired Trimline Construction, owned by Gary Geopfert. MJ, who enjoys working with a builder who listens to her ideas and finds ways to implement them, said it has been wonderful to work with a contractor who isn't all boards and nails but also has an artistic eye.

The stunning walnut and wrought-iron staircase inside the front entry was custom-built by Geopfert to create the perfect place to display an antique chandelier the Browns have moved to four different houses. Made in the 1880s, the solid brass fixture weighs between 200 and 300 pounds. It originally hung in the Chicago Casket Company and later the Baldwin Piano Company before being gifted to the Browns.

MJ replaced the wallpaper throughout the home with terra-cotta-colored paint. She and Dave like the color so much they have used the same shade in every house they've lived in since 1983, as well as in all their music stores. The oak finishes were painted, and crown molding was added throughout the house. Brazilian black walnut hardwood floors on the main level were chosen to highlight their extensive antique rug collection.



MJ and Dave Brown enjoy the extra living space after the garage was converted. Photo by Karen Kelly

Down the hall, MJ's favorite room in the house is the French powder room, which features a one-of-a-kind vanity Geopfert crafted from a repurposed antique dressing table, along with an antique mirror. In the family room, another of MJ's favorite places to relax, a wood-burning fireplace is flanked by custom millwork cabinetry designed by Geopfert.

The spacious kitchen features custom cabinets and a large island. In addition to a pantry, the kitchen has a separate appliance pantry. Both are tucked behind matching vintage doors with specialty glass fronts. The former small laundry room off the kitchen was converted into a coffee bar, while a much larger laundry room was created to meet MJ's specific needs.



The spacious kitchen features custom cabinets and a large island. Photo by Karen Kelly

Because the laundry room is on the main floor, MJ wanted a clothing chute that Geopfert created from the primary en-suite bathroom on the second floor. The large laundry room also has a wall-mounted television, giving MJ, an NFL football fan, a place to iron clothes while watching a game.

Upstairs, the Browns have two guest rooms and a primary bedroom with an en-suite bathroom. The primary bedroom and bathroom are painted to create the illusion of striped wallpaper. The bathroom presented a challenge because of the plumbing's placement, but Geopfert was able to remove the original jetted tub and replace it with a sleek walk-in shower, a soaking tub and a double-sink vanity.

Two years after purchasing the home, Dave decided they needed a larger garage, leading to another round of renovations and an addition. The original garage was converted into a large family room that includes a bar with quartz countertops and a black slate fireplace.

Having enough space for a grand piano was important. Dave has been in the music business since his grandfather, founder of Critchett Piano and Organ Company, hired him as a teenager to work as a janitor. In 1959, Dave began selling pianos and organs before taking over the company in 1968. MJ joined the company in 1970 as secretary to Dave's mother. She retired as vice president of finance after a 50-year career.

The Browns credit Geopfert's cabinetry craftsmanship, along with innovative lighting by Kevin Berger, owner of Berger Electric, with making the space so unique.

A solarium flooded with natural light connects the family room to the new garage. It serves as Dave's oasis, where he enjoys his morning coffee and newspaper.

The new three-car garage accommodates ample cabinetry to house MJ's extensive Christmas decorations and Santa Claus collection. It also includes an exercise area, golf cart storage and a bedroom for their cats. Geopfert was called upon to create a challenging staircase leading to another level above the garage. That space holds a billiards room, a game room and Dave's office.



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MJ's favorite room in the house is the French-style powder room, which features a one-of-a-kind vanity made from a repurposed antique dressing table, along with an antique mirror. Photo by Karen Kelly



The Browns removed a large jetted tub and replaced it with a sleek walk-in shower in an upstairs bathroom. A double-sink vanity and soaking tub were also added. Photo by Karen Kelly

Both Browns relish the privacy of their yard along the golf course's fifth fairway. Since moving from their previous home on the lake, Dave has planted 34 trees on the property, while MJ has developed striking flower gardens in the front and back of the house. More recently, they added a large patio and fire pit, which has become the perfect place to enjoy the sunsets.

The Browns have lived in 12 different homes during their nearly 50 years of marriage, and both agree that Panora is the best place of all to call home. ■





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From tired to terrific

A redesigned landscape brings new life and function to a lakefront property.

By Karen Kelly

Deb Corrao describes her husband as an "avid house hunter" for most of his adulthood. Mark Corrao grew up in a family that owned a lake home, so having a lakeside vacation home to enjoy with his own family was a dream of his. Mark works in the wholesale automotive field, while Deb is a technology consultant. They have a 16-year-old son and a dog.

In September 2019, the Corraos looked at a couple of houses at Lake Panorama and "fell in love" with the one they now own. Initially, the only changes they made were painting and replacing the carpet.

Lake Panorama felt like an ideal location. The two-hour drive from their primary home in Omaha was close enough to make frequent trips easy but far enough away to feel like a true vacation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when they simply needed to get out of the house, the Corraos chose to spend time at the lake, hanging out together, enjoying the water and playing cards.

For the first few years of owning the lake house, the family focused on enjoying their time at the lake and being outdoors. As the years passed, however, Deb grew tired of pulling weeds in the front yard, and Mark became frustrated with the dead grass each spring where the boat dock had sat during the winter. They also weren't big fans of the sandy beach along the lake.

Mark and Deb wanted to rejuvenate the outdoor spaces where they spent so much time while minimizing the maintenance required to keep them looking good.

When they contacted Joshua Eike, co-owner of Wood Duck Landscapes, they knew what they wanted to change but weren't sure exactly how to improve the property. They told Josh what they wanted and needed, and he presented them with design options.

The street-side landscaping required constant attention, offered limited parking and lacked the appeal they wanted. The lakefront side, they said, "just looked tired." Mark wanted to make sure the improvements retained character, while Deb was concerned that replacing the sandy beach with rocks would make the area look cold. Both wanted a renewed outdoor space that offered function and character while flowing seamlessly with their lake home.



Along the shoreline, the Corraos opted to replace the sandy beach with rocks.

Because the goal was to create a lower-maintenance outdoor space while refreshing the property's appearance, the Corraos chose durable materials and easy-care plants that were beautiful, hardy and resistant to browsing deer.

For the project, Eike suggested materials from the Rosetta Hardscapes line because they are naturally beautiful, easy to work with and cost-effective. The concrete block and paver products are designed to resemble natural stone and flagstone.

"I wanted to do this so that we were very rustic next to the water and everything fit in with the environment," Eike said.

Because the Corrao family uses the lake nearly every weekend during the summer, Eike and his crew worked during the offseason to have everything ready by summer. Work began on the street side while the lake's water level was lowered.

In front of the house, Eike and his team added retaining walls, created four additional parking spaces, installed new stairs and planted greenery suited to the lake environment. The plantings included black-eyed Susans in honor of Mark's mother, whose name is Susan. After the landscaping was complete, Mark installed custom lighting on the street side.



On the lake side, the first change was replacing the sandy beach with rocks along the shoreline. Mark also requested a linear row of rocks between the grass and the boulders along the shore to simplify lawn care and trimming.

A large, curved seating area was created near the water using Rosetta Hardscapes materials. Since its completion, the Corraos said the area has become their favorite space. The family enjoys boating, skiing, wake



The Corraos updated the front of their home by adding retaining walls, new stairs and plantings. The changes created additional parking space as well.

surfing and tubing, and they appreciate having a place to relax so close to the water.

The boathouse also needed attention and received a makeover. Customized Home Solutions was hired to repair the lakeside siding, replace the roof and install new doors and gutters. Inside, the updates included cabinetry, a refrigerator and a granite bar. An accordion window above the bar, along with a granite bar on the exterior, allows Mark and Deb to open the window and use the space both inside and outside when entertaining.

Outside the boathouse, the red-rock patio was replaced with the same flagstone used in the lakeside seating area. Eike installed lighting to highlight the stone's beauty and make the space more functional in the evenings.

Eike also renovated the shoreline behind the boathouse. Mark and Deb credit their next-door neighbors, Dave and Deanie Thomas, with the lush plantings on the far side of the boathouse. Mark said they can't move or sell the property because their neighbors are so excellent.

The small-town feel and sense of community, along with a feeling of privacy, are among the things that make Lake Panorama special to the Corraos.

The couple advise others undergoing landscaping projects to have an idea in mind but remain flexible. They also recommended working with someone local because local craftsmen understand what works in the lake ecosystem.

"I would love to say we had a grand plan when we started," but the design evolved as the project moved forward, Deb said, adding they are happy with the results and wouldn't change a thing. ■

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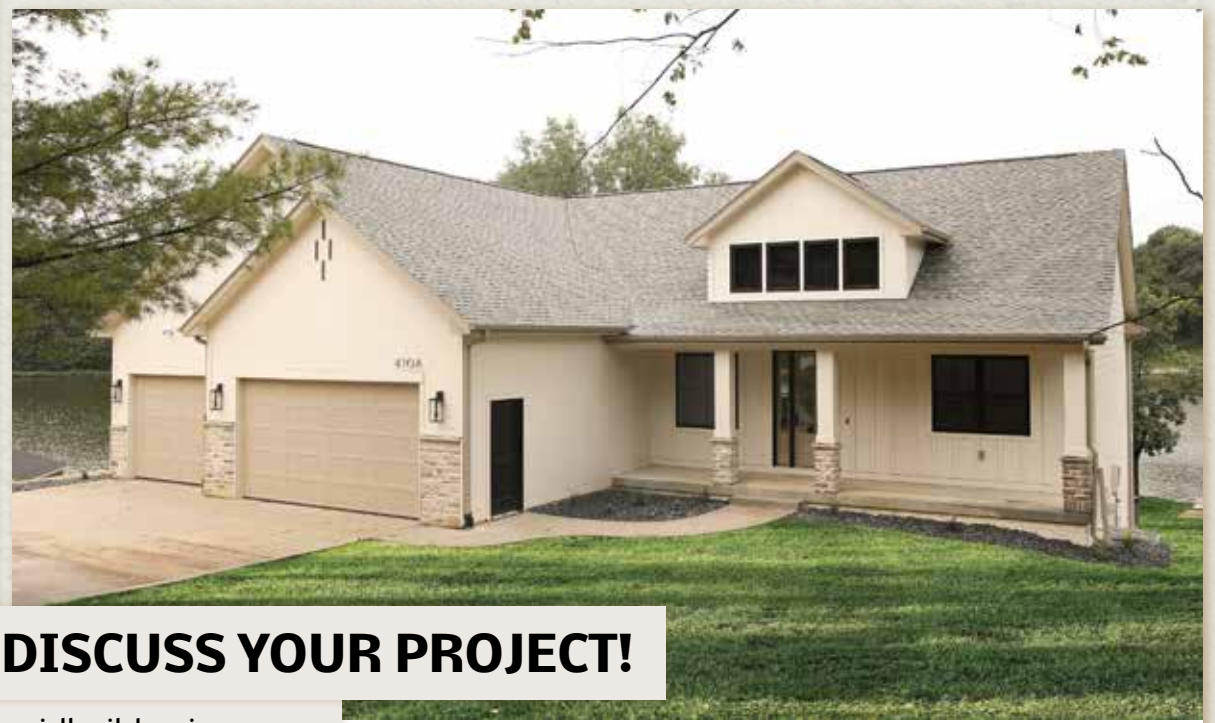






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