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Building On Family

A gathering place on the Lake Michigan shore

Big Cormorant Lake Retreat

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On Belmont Lake**

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Building on Family

This photo courtesy of Doug Edmunds

A gathering place on the Lake Michigan shore

by Wanda Perkins • Photography by Joseph DeMaio



The spacious kitchen features custom birch cabinetry, heated slate flooring, granite countertops and professional-grade stainless steel appliances. The family-sized dining area features a 14-foot custom table constructed from a massive slab of black walnut that comfortably seats 25. Architectural beams frame the view of the great room and its wood-burning fireplace.

During intermission at a weekend soccer tournament, Pat walked by a real estate agent's office and noticed an appealing home for sale on Lake Michigan. He investigated on his own. Finding the property in Wisconsin, he called his wife, Louise. "If you don't come up here," Pat informed her, "you're not going to see the house I'm going to buy!"

Louise drove up the lane to the lake home. Quietly taking in the majestic beauty and serenity, her eyes locked with Pat's. "I told you so," he smiled.

They enjoyed 11 years in that original 1930s home. But as their family of four boys and four girls grew – adding spouses and grandchildren – they wondered, "How are we going to continue to gather here?"

"It's not unusual to entertain 21 people and seven dogs," Louise says with a smile. "We knew we needed a big house, but we wanted it to feel like home."

Pat and Louise visited with a neighbor who referred them to Richard Sherer, owner/principal at Deep River Partners, Ltd. in Milwaukee. Sherer grew up on the same lake.

"Designing their home came easily for me, having lived down the beach while growing up with eight siblings," says Sherer. "The way-of-lake living resonates deep inside me, and sharing in this design has brought great joy."

Meeting with Sherer and Deep River project architect/designer Nick Blavat, the couple considered possibilities of remodeling or building a guesthouse. In the end, they

opted to build a new home.

In July 2009, the old home was torn down. New construction began in August with completion in February 2013. Designed in an eclectic contemporary and rustic style, the three-story lake home features 33 rooms with six bedrooms, six and a half baths, a game room, theater, exercise room and dual master suites.

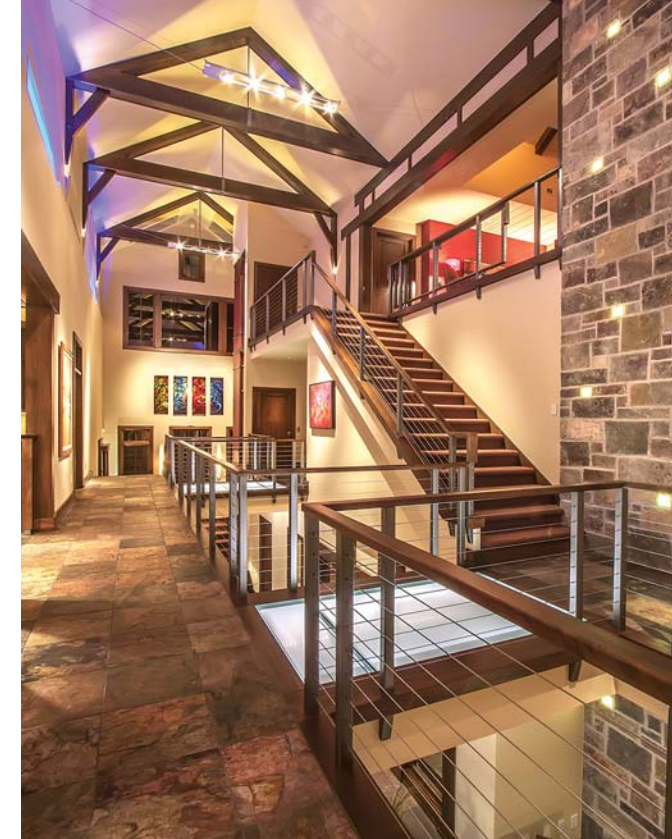
"We updated their home to create a mountain feel combined with a contemporary aesthetic," Blavat says. "Medium-stained cedar board and battens, earthy stone veneers and a gray metal roof blend with exterior environment elements. Inside, colors and finishes were selected to let nature, art and the vibrant spirit of family reside."

Perhaps the most captivating design feature is the river and pond in the atrium. Calming water sounds flow from a boulder near the foyer, drawing the focus to magnificent views of Lake Michigan. Framed by glass bridges on upper floors, the atrium provides exciting views and a calming focal point.

Sherer initially proposed creating a river between a guesthouse and the original lake home. Even though plans moved forward to construct a new home, Pat still desired to incorporate a river. Sherer assured him that they could put one in the new home.

"The river concept promotes a connection to the lake and a blurring of the line between inside and outside," explains Sherer. "It instills a physical separation between public living and private sleeping areas."





Perhaps the most captivating design feature is the river and pond in the atrium. Calming water sounds flow from a boulder near the foyer, drawing focus to the magnificent outdoor views. The upper floor of the atrium, with glass bridges to other areas of the home, comes to life at night with all the perfectly placed accent lighting. Originally designed as a screened porch, the sunroom is adjacent to the dining area and is a welcoming place to enjoy meals or play cards.

Their spacious kitchen features triangular architectural beams and abundant natural light from upper windows. Custom birch cabinetry by A Fillinger, Inc. in Milwaukee complements heated slate flooring, granite countertops and professional-grade stainless steel appliances. Plentiful counter space for Louise's kitchen helpers was a must.

"Our kitchen is the core of our home," Louise notes. "Everyone can fit in it, and they usually do!"

During the construction, Pat recalls the kitchen seemed huge. "We could dance in it!" he told Louise. "Why didn't we put an island in?"

When the kitchen was completed, Deep River and the contractors presented Pat and Louise with a gift in appreciation of their hospitality and Louise's home-cooked lunches – a parquet wood-topped island with metal legs on wheels that she describes as "the perfect command post for me."

The family-sized dining area features a 14-foot custom table constructed from a massive slab of black walnut that comfortably seats 25. Craftsman Eric Laftner created the table base and finished the table in place. The table branches out to a handcrafted bench, an extension of the slab the designer and owners couldn't bear to waste.

"Like our expanding family, our table reminds us who we are as a family – to give thanks and appreciate each other," says Louise.

Over the table hangs a paper chandelier featuring an interactive means of sharing family images and memories on vellum.

Expertly-styled lighting throughout their home by Klein Lighting blends artistic elements with ambiance.

The kitchen, dining and great room are open to relaxing lake views. Directly adjacent to the dining area is a south-facing sunroom which was originally designed as a screened porch. A window seat offers a welcoming place to enjoy meals or play cards.

Planning for the home's interior furnishings prompted many stories of family history and taking stock of Pat and Louise's existing pieces, said Deep Rivers' interior design director Trace Burger, who completed interior finishes with colleague Susan Sherer, retired partner at Deep River.

"The Civil War chest was wonderfully suited as a library coffee table," Burger says. "Antique glassware and photos were revived with repaired or new frames, and paintings gifted to the couple for their hospitality were hung in places of honor."

Common areas where family and guests could gather were essential in the planning process. Getaway nooks and window seats offer comfortable spots for reading, napping or quiet reflection. Four fireplaces provide cozy warmth: a wood-burning fireplace in the great room and gas fireplaces in the master bedroom, sunroom and office.

Pat's favorite getaway is his office. With windows facing the woods, it presents a quiet retreat. A family portrait hangs on the wall behind his desk.

French doors in the master suite access a private deck overlooking an upper and lower terrace. A fire pit space – outlined



French doors in the master suite access a private deck overlooking wonderful views of Lake Michigan.

by large boulders – protects against Lake Michigan’s winds. Peter Kudlata of Flagstone Landscaping in Cedarburg, Wis., recalls working with various grades and elevation changes.

“We incorporated huge rustic outcroppings,” Kudlata says. “They were utilitarian and also provided a wonderful base for the home to sit upon. Natural plantings complement the setting.”

One family-favorite room is the theater. Ten electrically reclining red leather chairs are comfortable enough for grandchildren to lounge overnight. Hanging on theater walls are movie posters: *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Little Mermaid*. Pat’s favorite, *The Godfather*, hangs outside the theater.

The third floor features a sleeping loft plus two bedrooms. A gang-style bathroom means no waiting in line. Two additional pull-down Murphy beds create additional sleeping spaces, and a ladder to the upper sleeping loft provides grandchildren with an eagle’s-eye view.

Robert Perlewitz of RP Custom Homes in Mequon, Wis., was the general contractor for the project, managing all phases of construction for Louise and Pat and procuring materials and specialized labor.

“Since they lived a distance away from the home site, they weren’t able to watch daily or weekly progress. It was a pleasure to share regular milestones throughout the building process as well as a lasting friendship with them,” Perlewitz says. “It’s not often contractors have an opportunity to see the fruits of

their labor. Pat and Louise generously treated everyone to a family-style gathering and personally thanked all those involved in making their dream home a reality.”

There was definitely a transition between builders, architects and homeowners during move-in day as relationships were formed. “The team came up with an architectural vision, and it came to life because of their craftsmanship,” Louise recalls. “Then they gave our home back to us.”

They cherish family time and enjoy playing card games and assembling puzzles. Louise enjoys community volunteering, vegetable gardening and attending literary classes. Pat prefers outdoor activities - pattering on the tractor, maintaining the beach area and feeding the birds.

Their lake home offers the ideal mix of water, woods and respite they’d always dreamed of finding. “There’s something spiritual about the lake,” Louise concludes. “It’s calming. It puts you in your place and takes care of any existing ego, like you’re in the presence of God. It’s good to be reminded of how small we are. That makes life’s issues go away.”

Their decision to purchase the initial property was purely emotional. Looking back, Pat and Louise agree it was one of their best decisions ever. When it comes to their growing family, bigger is definitely better.

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