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# Home Is Where Your Art Is

A GARDENER  
AND AN ARTIST  
FOLLOW THE  
LIGHT

Writer **Manya Kaczkowski**

Photographer **Jerry Luterman**

There's a gallery of sorts, deep in the woods of River Hills, a lovely indoor/outdoor home belonging to a family of artists, gardeners and cooks. The homeowners, native to the area, have spent the last decade or two living and working in other areas of the country. Finally, they've returned, roosting once again in Wisconsin, replanting their roots, nourishing them liberally, and letting creativity flow.

The living space for such a family is critical, and not only for basic needs such as privacy and space. It must be a home that perfectly suits their lifestyle; one with breathing room for gatherings of family and friends; one that allows for creative expression; one that brings nature to the forefront.

Three years ago, they found the home, nestled into the woods at the end of a long winding driveway, where wild-life is abundant and it seems impossible that Milwaukee is only minutes away. The setting — and the home — held promise, but the prospective homeowners shied away at first. It wasn't really big enough — the couple had five children — and hadn't been touched since the 1980s, so there were a great many things needing attention. In addition, the formal living room, accessible only from the front hall, was cut off from traffic flow, the kitchen was pint-sized, and there wasn't a good place for casual dining.

But they were smitten with the golden light pouring into the sunroom. And the home simply could not be more



The bright, award-winning kitchen is a chef's dream come true, with ample storage for cookbooks and supplies, and plenty of space to prepare gourmet meals.







private, with a mature tree surround and a hidden creek in the back. There were plenty of bedrooms, plenty of baths, and eventually, the artist and gardener mentalities won out. They bought the place, and hired Richard Sherer, principal at Deep River Partners Ltd. Architects and Designers, to help them with the home's redesign. Paul Davis Remodeling functioned as general contractor, and the outdoor living space was designed by Flagstone Landscaping.

### GOURMET PARADISE

They got to work in a meeting with Sherer, providing details about their needs. "We have a complete programming and assessment phase before we put pencil to paper," says Sherer, "where we look at lifestyle and functional issues. We want to get at what makes them tick, what brings them joy, and where we can be of the most help."

Ironically, although the light from the sunroom had attracted the homeowners, it was the first thing to end up on the chopping block — it leaked, and was extremely hot in the summer. Instead, the adjoining kitchen was redesigned into a larger, much more functional space, receiving as much light as the former sunroom, thanks to a "clear story" above — a ceiling stretching skyward, with porthole windows and plenty of open space for the sky to fill the room.

Below is a sort of cook's Shangri-La, with lots of room to get creative. Abundant drawers — some double-deep — and lots of cupboards, along with plenty of extra-hard soapstone counters, provide space for every tool, and the Boos black walnut-topped island is the perfect place to rinse and chop heirloom tomatoes from the large kitchen garden outdoors. Amenities include an ice machine, a four-burner Wolf stove with a double-wide griddle, a Viking hood, a water cooler and a recycling center. The adjoining entertainment nook has a double wine cooler, more counter space and storage for glasses and fine china. And a nearby closet is dedicated to platters — dozens of them, in every shape, size and delightful pattern.

With the amount of time the family spends cooking, a tile floor would have been too hard; instead, the original oak floorboards were matched, and a large checkerboard pattern was stained onto the wood, giving it a warm, slightly whimsical effect. The sunny yellow walls, meanwhile, change hue throughout the day, depending on the light effects from outside and the multiple indoor soft lighting options.

Just off the kitchen, the home is centered around a newly designed curved dinette space, where the family takes most of their meals. The shape of the room was inspired by a round dining table — an unusual seven-seater. "A circular shape has a strong center," says Sherer. "We used this to promote a sense of organization to the scheme. The dinette is the central space from which the kitchen, family room and dining room radiate."



The couple enjoys most meals in the new dinette, just off the kitchen (opp., top). Niches flanking the dining room (opp., bottom) are lit from below. The female homeowner created a mosaic mirror for the foyer (this page).





The homeowners used to live in Texas, and this metal star (opp.) helps remind them of their former home. The redesigned yard includes a circular brick and bluestone patio, a water fountain (below) and a vegetable garden (bottom).





Each room has a sight line to the outdoors, and traffic patterns are easy and uninterrupted. "Responding to the couple's love of nature and the outdoors, we created an environment that blurs this separation," says Sherer. "Wrap around corner windows in the kitchen provide panoramic vistas, windows above your head give a three-dimensional wrap of the sky and treetops around you, and the screen porch becomes a gentle in-between gathering space..."

### GORGEOUS GARDENS

That screen porch carries on the almost seamless transition into the back yard. Inside is a large entertaining bar and Grand-Turbo barbecue grill, special-ordered straight from Texas, and floor-to-ceiling windows with a commanding view of the patio and flower gardens. Outside, a curved water fountain, built-in round fire pit, and a lovely arcing "wall" of creamy white hydrangeas surround the circular bluestone-and-brick patio. "We responded to the architecture of the house," says Peter Kudlata, owner of Flagstone Landscaping. "It's a little more formal, a little more structured."

And simply lovely, from the pruned circular lilac "trees" to the curving lannon-stone wall, hidden from the patio, but accessible on a stroll through the yard. "The grade was an issue, with a huge dropoff—10 feet," says Kudlata, "so we needed to raise that up." Several large stones are artfully stacked at interesting vantage points along the wall. "Those were put in to create surprise seating arrangements," he explains.

Raised flower beds complete the more formal side of the arrangement, while tall sunflowers beckon from the vegetable garden across the yard. "Found" art — faces, decorative metal gates, etc. — adorn the garden fence, and homegrown veggies find their way from turf to table all summer long.

### ARTISTIC SENSIBILITY

Back inside, the lower level holds an art studio. Most of the artwork on the walls of the home was created by family members: paintings, chalk pastels, mosaics. Small groups of like objects can be spotted: a few finials on a rolling tea tray, several glass birds resting on a fireplace mantel, a dozen or so small paperweights on one corner of a coffee table. Echoing the indoor/outdoor theme, there's a golden sun on the kitchen wall, a star on one fireplace mantel and a sunspray on another. And surrounding everything is nature — there's not a window treatment in sight.

The home reflects the sensibilities of the owners — thanks to the careful consideration given upfront. In addition, Paul Davis won the 2009 National Contractor of the Year award for the project, and Deep River Partners was awarded the *Milwaukee Home & Fine Living* 2008 Best Kitchen Design award. "We created an environment that reflects their persona," says Sherer, "providing a place that brings the outdoors in while providing all the functional aspects of a great cooking, dining and entertainment experience."

