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FEATURE
HOME

Paring
Down and

*Thinking
Big*



the
Taunton Home
on
Green Lake

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photos by **Nine18 Photography**



"We now have 10 grandchildren and they're all within a 15-mile radius. So the joy for us is just sharing that with them. They all like the water. We enjoy the lake, the beauty of nature, the loons — and watching other people enjoy it."

Julie Taunton - homeowner

When Bill and Julie Taunton decided to build their forever home on the shores of Green Lake near Spicer, they knew they wanted their new house to be as close to the water as possible. To accomplish that goal, they needed to stay within the original cabin's footprint — and to make every inch of space count.

The couple wanted a comfortable place where they could welcome their extended family. Their son Tom, and three daughters, Nikki, Kelly, and Abby, and their families all live nearby. This meant that grandma and grandpa's house needed to function as a low-key summer hangout from the start.

"We now have 10 grandchildren and they're all within a 15-mile radius," says Julie. "So the joy for us is just sharing that with them. They all like the water. We enjoy the lake, the beauty of nature, the loons — and watching other people enjoy it."

Julie and Bill are active, outdoorsy people who love kayaking, camping and exploring the region's state parks. In addition to serving as an extended family gathering place, this dwelling would be the couple's primary, year-round residence. They wanted room to store the gear and clothing they'd need in order to spend all four seasons in Minnesota lake country. The couple aimed to create space to pursue hobbies and provide a place to enjoy the beauty of nature.

It would also be smaller than a typical dream house on the lake. This was intentional from the start.

The Tauntons had read Sarah Susanka's best-selling book, "The Not So Big House," and it made an impression. The couple realized they didn't want to invest in building and furnishing spaces they wouldn't utilize often. They didn't want to fuss with cleaning

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Kelli Wegscheid - Harmonious Architecture

and maintaining rooms that would sit empty. And they wanted to use every corner of their new home wisely. This philosophy led them to architect Kelli Wegscheid, the owner of Harmonious Architecture in Perham.

“We wanted to downsize and we wanted a cottage feel,” explains Julie. “Bill was perusing the web and he came across Kelli’s website. We liked her philosophy of using the amount of space you have the best way possible, because we knew we weren’t going to have a basement with a special room to store things in that you never look at.”

Wegscheid created a three-bedroom home with two bathrooms and a powder room. It provided ample living and storage space for the couple, as well as room to store camping gear, kayaks and Julie’s seasonal deco-

rations, a cherished hobby. There’s plenty of room for guests and space for solitary pursuits and outdoor living.

“Because of the proximity to the lake, the main part of the house had to remain in the original footprint,” Wegscheid explains. “We were able to rework the original footprint to make it grand and beautiful, and then add on a small amount of additional space. The original footprint became public space, which allowed the great room, the dining room and the kitchen to be much bigger. Then behind that, we added a whole master suite, a nice big bathroom, a washer and dryer on the main level, along with a garage, which they did not have before.”





"It's the upper-level connection between the original footprint and the bonus room above the garage upstairs," explains Wegscheid. "So instead of having a long, skinny hallway, we added a dormer there and created a nook that had real purpose."

Julie can work on her projects when she wants to and just walk away when she's done. In fact, Bill and Julie can leave the entire second floor alone when they want to. Wegscheid says that's a real benefit for a couple who lives on the lake year-round.

"I think it's really exciting for people to have luxury main-level living," she says. "So when it's just the two homeowners it doesn't feel like it's an overwhelming house. They can kind of close off the whole upstairs when no one is there with them. Everything on the upper level is secondary space to their main level living."

Once the layout was determined, the couple began the building process. Chuck Groff of Charles Construction, LLC in Spicer came on board in the fall of 2013. The project broke ground shortly thereafter. The only challenge was the weather.

The 1,900-square foot main floor also includes a cheerful sunroom with doors that open onto a convivial grilling and dining zone on the deck. Wegscheid also added a generous pantry for stocking up on essentials, a half bath and a much-needed mudroom on the main floor.

Extra-wide doors, broad showers and smooth floors are striking aesthetic choices. They make the home easy for all ages to navigate.

"We did build everything as accessible as we age," Julie explains. "Everything for us is on the main floor and that was intentional."

The upstairs spaces include two bedrooms and a bonus room over the garage. There's also a clever nook that allows Julie to explore her many artistic pursuits.

"I would call it my sewing room/work area, where I can leave my projects out until I am able to return to them," explains Julie. "I have been busy making baby quilts. In the last couple years, I started exploring the world of watercolors. I leave some of my stuff out as a reminder that, yes, I can do this at this stage of my life."

Julie told Wegscheid she was hoping for a creative space, but knew space was a concern. But a quick collaboration with Dain Peterson of Peterson Woodworking in Willmar (who provided the counters and cabinets) transformed a pass-through space into a useful studio.

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"We built it in one of the coldest and windiest winters," remembers Groff. "Equipment froze up frequently, but we pressed on to keep the project going."

While Groff and his subcontractors were working away, the Tauntons continued to refine the little details that would make their house a home. They came to Wegscheid early on with a three-ring binder of ideas. They used that strategy to organize their thoughts for the rest of the home as well.

"We just really started looking at magazines and driving around," says Julie. "When we saw something we liked, we'd cut it out and create a three-ring binder. One was labeled 'kitchen,' one was labeled 'exterior,' one was labeled 'fireplace.' If you know your taste, it's kind of surprising to me how this stuff all comes together."

It worked so well, they didn't need to hire a decorator. Guests are impressed with the final product.

"It's a really great blend of light colors and dark wood tones so that it doesn't get too dark and heavy," says Wegscheid. "I like how the dark wood accents of the window and the door trim are pulled together with the kitchen island. The current trend is a white backsplash and white cabinets. That's a lot of white. Having an earth tone helps tie that light and dark together."

The contrast between dark and light throughout the home provides a sense of balance and ease. But in the great room, the white-washed pine takes on architectural prominence. The pine ceiling soars, intersecting at dramatic angles, like in the nave of a church. But because the wood is so light, the effect is airy, almost effervescent.



A wall of windows looks out over the lake. More sunlight pours in through clerestory windows on either side of the rough-hewn fireplace. The sunshine and sense of lightness provides a counterpoint to the room's mantel, which is a striking, rustic centerpiece.

"It's the focal point of our whole kitchen and living room," says Julie. "We're so happy every time we sit in front of it. Our son-in-law has a tree service and he said, 'Bill, you should do that mantel. I've got this big slab of red cedar.' So there's a little family history there too."

This particular son-in-law, Ben Bradford, (husband to Nikki and owner of Crow's Nest Tree Service in Spicer) isn't the only son-in-law who contributed to the home's design. Abby's husband (and his Spicer-based business) was a big help, too.

"Our son-in-law Scott Martens of Green Lake Paint helped Bill with the finishing of the mantelpiece, as well as the interior and exterior painting and staining of the home," Julie explains.

The home's exterior timber accents and colorful flowers provide a touch of cottage charm. The brick paver patio and path to the water add another timeless touch.



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Dan Caskey, of Caskey Concrete Inc., in New London, created the stamped concrete border on the driveway as well as the stamped concrete by the front door. He started the stamped pavers as well. But Bill soon took over.

"Dan Caskey got Bill started on the paving and then he (Bill) finished it," says Julie. "He did our other paver patio outside our bedroom. And he did all the initial boulder work along the shoreline. He likes to have a project!"

While Bill worked on the exterior and landscaping, Julie was adding thoughtful interior touches. Many of the home's most distinctive accents — including a church pew in the entryway, a beautiful bentwood rocker and a trunk from 1866 — are antiques. Many came



from auctions near Rice Lake, Wis., mementos from the days soon after the couple married. Others, like the hutch and the trunk Julie uses as a coffee table in the great room – were sourced from artisans from a former co-op in New London.

The couple didn't purchase many new items for their home. Instead, they worked more on getting rid of items so they could move into their new space with only the things

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they used and loved the most. Julie says the experience was liberating – and that anyone can do it.

"Start purging what you haven't looked at in a very long time and get rid of it," she recommends. "It's very freeing, because in the back of your mind you're always thinking, 'Ugh, I should get out that box of photos or I should get out that box of Christmas things that I haven't pulled out in a year. And the beauty of it is you start saying, 'Do I really need to buy that?' 'Do I really need to hang onto that?' It's easier said than done, but it really does feel good."

Only the things that Julie and Bill used or treasured made the cut. When they moved in on Labor Day weekend in 2014, they knew they would be able to spend their time with family and enjoy the experiences they love without being encumbered by things. Downsizing paid off in a big way, and the family has a beautiful space to enjoy lifetimes of meaningful memories. ~L&H