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Beauty and efficiency on Alexandria's Lake Ida

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meets

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Beauty and efficiency distinguish this Lake Ida home

by Nancy Leasman • Photography by Bryan Wendland





A floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace divides the windows in the great room. Hand-hewn Tennessee pine 2-by-12s were carefully finished with three coats of paint to create the Ponderosa patina.

If Ben Cartwright and Frank Lloyd Wright poured a couple of brandies and sat down together to design a home, the result could very well be the Ponderosa-like dwelling on the peninsula extending into Lake Ida north of Alexandria. Since Cartwright is fictional and Wright died in 1959, the home's owner, Nancy Anderson, engaged Ringdahl Architects of Alexandria to bring her vision of the Bonanza-Usonian home into existence.

A fan of the television show "Bonanza" since she was a little girl and more than a little taken with Ben Cartwright's oldest son, Adam, Nancy set about building her dream home in 2005. Her first husband, Bill Anderson, owner of Midwest Sign & Screen Printing Supply Co., had died suddenly the year before. Nancy, who had been on the board of directors, drew on her inner strength and took over as CEO of the business, which now has nine locations and 170 employees.

Sensing the ephemeral nature of life and relationships, she was determined to live her dreams. She bought the 100-by-240-foot lake lot not far from Theatre L'Home Dieu, where she spent childhood summers with her five siblings as her father, Paul Peterson, acted in the theater's early productions. With respect and concern for the environment, Nancy planned the retreat she would one day call her permanent home.

"I wanted it to look like the center was the original house and the rest was added on," she says. She was instinctually following Wright's Usonian concept of a service core built around a large stone hearth with a strong visual connection between the interior and exterior spaces. With that model in mind, she went online and fired off two emails to local architects. Paul Ringdahl responded by the next morning; the other one never did.

It was just as well, since she knew right away when she met Paul that his team was the right one to build her home. She worked primarily with Angela Jackson, who has been with Ringdahl Architects since 2004. Angela received bachelor's degrees in architecture and environmental design from North Dakota State University. She received high honors for her thesis on sustainable design and brought her environmental awareness to Nancy's project.

Diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis and facing a future with possible physical limitations, Nancy also valued Richard Hardine's understanding of universal design concepts. Hardine provides construction



The kitchen, tucked under the loft, adjoins the great room.



A wine storage area is lit with red and white wine bottle light fixtures.



management for Ringdahl Architects through his company, Infinity Development.

Nancy's team came up with a home both Cartwright and Wright would have liked. Hand-hewn Tennessee pine 2-by-12s, carefully finished with three coats of paint to create the Ponderosa patina, line the great room and clad the exterior. Four-by-12 dove joints on the corners emanate strength and permanence.

"The walls are 2-by-6 with foam insulation in the walls and roof," explains Paul. "The in-floor heat with water heated by a boiler produces high efficiency." The house is built on a concrete slab since it sits only a few feet above the lake's water level. The floating 3/8-inch teak floor radiates the heat from the in-floor tubes. Small-duct, high-velocity air conditioning located high on the walls circulates efficiently as warm air rises and the cool air falls. Five zones control the heating and cooling throughout the house. A separate heating system laid under the galvanized standing seam steel roof conducts heat to the surface and reduces snow build-up in the Minnesota winters. H windows and doors actually close tighter when the wind blows, sealing the home's energy efficient envelope.

Before the building project was completed in 2007, one more person joined the team when Nancy married Rick Block. With an information technology background, Rick is credited as the thinker and problem solver. He came up with novel ideas like the dual temperature controls for the dual shower heads in the master bath. Located outside the spray zone, the handles are preset and can be turned on before stepping into the shower.

The master bath is a marvel of colored glass tiles simulating a wave washing over the room. With frosted glass windows on the land side and a wide open view across the bedroom to the lake, the bathroom shimmers with the light of the Caribbean enhanced by Hirschfield's "Sweet Grass" paint on the walls, a blue-green glass basin and LED lights glowing under the kick plate of the cabinets.

"Colors shouldn't stop you or hold you in rooms; they should feel like part of the environment," says Paul. "If you have a good view, you should have big windows." He also suggests foregoing window treatments if privacy isn't a concern.

This uncovered window treatment philosophy is carried out in the great room as well as on the motor-driven windows high on the 28-foot great room wall. The room's southeast exposure illuminates the room along with more LED lights and



The master suite is a marvel of colored glass tiles simulating a wave washing over the room.



looks out on the rip rap and rain garden instead of a sandy beach. The rain garden prevents runoff and drains through the boulders of the "dry" riverbed that runs along the east property line.

A floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace divides the windows of the great room. Opposite it is the kitchen, which is open to the great room; the Silestone quartz bar conceals the more mundane cooking duties from the living area. The kitchen's rolling island, a spice drawer and pot drawer designed to fit the largest cooking pot are features of the room where meals are collaborative undertakings. A well-stocked pantry, partially concealed by three leaded glass entry-style doors hung on rolling barn tracks, shares space with the washer, dryer and novel pull-out drying rods. Just beyond the laundry area is the dog wash room. Dexter, the couple's shiny black Labrador/Borzoï, gets his beauty treatments there.

A wine storage area on the other side of the kitchen is lit with red and white wine bottle light fixtures. Rick likes the reds while Nancy has a penchant for whites, her current favorite being Veuve Clicquot from France. A humidor inside the wine refrigerator stores a selection of cigars, a vice Nancy enjoys occasionally. The three-season porch doubles as a smoking room since the French doors close off the room from the rest of the house. An antique cigar press hangs on one wall, continuing the theme of the room.

Rick and Nancy's shared book-lined office is conveniently located just off the great room. Nancy's passion for labyrinths – she's a certified labyrinth facilitator – and Rick's combined enthusiasm for photography and drive-in movie theaters are evident here. Their obsession for movies is also apparent in the half-dozen big screen TVs throughout the house and the one-of-a-kind bonus room above the garage: The popcorn-and-movie-reel carpeted "theater" sports a novelty 1950s Cadillac seat and tire "side table," along with drive-in speakers adapted as wall sconces. Richard Hardine found the seat in Texas and helped Nancy plan the room as a surprise wedding gift for Rick. He's worked in the drive-in movie industry for 34 years, currently at the Cottage View Drive-in in the Twin Cities suburb of Cottage Grove. Rick's private drive-in room is accessed via a fold-down metal stairway.

While Rick is enjoying an old-time movie, Nancy is apt to be outside, only a short distance away, following the grassy path of her concrete-lined labyrinth. The unicursal path of peace was



The grassy path of the concrete-lined unicursal path of peace labyrinth. Rick's movie-themed bonus room above the garage.

designed by Lisa Moriarty and blends the Baltic and Chartres Paths, noted sites for members of the Labyrinth Society, of which Nancy is a member. Contemplative benches are located opposite each other outside the labyrinth's circle. The adjacent flower garden displays abstract metal sculptures of two dancing women. Nancy has hosted two labyrinth seminars and will offer more in the coming years.

Another of the couple's pastimes is evident in the home's upper level. An Olympic-size pool table (Nancy says Rick is the better player of the two) stands center stage in the area at the top of the stairs and overlooking the great room. Matching guest bedrooms, one on each end of the game room, have built-in window seats, private baths and soundproofing, which afford visitors their own Lake Ida retreat experience. Glass block transoms over the bathroom doors bring light into the rooms.

Room 208 (as noted on the floor plan and retained as a convenient reference) holds the electronic brains of the house. All audiovisual, security, data and phone systems are controlled from this small upstairs room, making the home a wonder of comfort and conservation.

The couple's one regret is that they can't spend as much time as they'd like in this dream home that suits them so well. But that will change when the sale of their St. Paul home allows them to take up permanent residence on the boot-shaped peninsula in Lake Ida. That will also allow them to pursue another dream: to buy the equipment and do a winter drive-in movie and restaurant just off Interstate 94.

Pour the brandy and get out the cigars.

Nancy Leasmanis a writer from Long Prairie.



Lake Ida
Douglas County

Size	4,426 Acres
Max Depth	106 ft.



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