

Lake *and* Home Magazine

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A Lake Carlos Retirement Home

Functional living space has class and character

by Eileen Viergutz

Judging by the Ericksons' new home on Lake Carlos, the coupling of homeowners Wayne and Linnea Erickson with Ringdahl Architects of Alexandria proved to be a real win/win combination. The resulting "retirement residence" is both a functional and aesthetic example of creative design driven by and within limited lot space.

The lot, which the Ericksons purchased in 1970, is approximately 134 feet deep but measures only 75 feet wide along the lakeshore, widening slightly to 80 feet on the road side. The Ericksons and their architects

had their work cut out for them, given the large setback requirements from the ordinary high water mark of the lake and from the road on the opposite end, plus the 10-foot setback requirement on each side and an ordinance allowing no more than 25 percent of the lot to be of impervious material. But it appears the architectural team of Paul Ringdahl, Angela Jackson and Stephanie Howe, together with open-minded homeowners, were up to the task.

The Ericksons spent "years and years" collecting ideas, says Wayne Erickson, and desired to build a home incorporating those ideas, including space for family heirlooms, a

study/reading room which would display their book collection and artwork, plus convenience and functionality that would enable them to live in the home well into their "golden years." To that end, they first envisioned a rather sprawling one-level design. After a visit with Ringdahl and a review of the lot restrictions, it quickly became evident some adjustment was inevitable.

After giving the architects a few additional tips about their desires, such as "we like a liberal use of wood trim, inside and out," the Ericksons returned home (then in Nevada), leaving the architectural team to go to work. Drawings and ideas flowed eas-

ily back and forth between designers and owners. This collaboration produced a two-story home with all "required" living space for a couple on the main level: kitchen, living and dining rooms, master bedroom, bathrooms including a spacious master bath (with a walk-in, handsomely-tiled, two-person shower), ample closet space, and a screen porch facing the lake. Guest bedrooms and another bath are on the second floor, along with a loft/reading area/study with a grand view of the lake. Locating the study upstairs was one compromise the couple felt they could live with, even if stairs became a problem in later years. So was Wayne's "cigar smoking balcony," which is located off one of the upstairs guestrooms.

The exterior design of the 2,100-square-foot home blends readily with its surroundings, marrying well with its neighbors. There's no crammed-in-the-lot feeling here. (Another goal accomplished.)

Inside, despite the built-in space economies of the design, the end result includes: a large master suite, massive fireplace in the living room, an alcove for the family's upright piano painstakingly refinished by Linnea, room for two stoves in the kitchen, use of family antiques such as the claw-foot bathtub in the upstairs bath and a dining room chandelier from an old Alexandria home.

Two-toned kitchen cabinets built by Swedberg Wood Products of Alexandria are extra deep. Behind cabinet doors are pullout drawers. A large island is on wheels and moveable. (It does have a "brake," since Linnea didn't want it getting away from her.) And if you wondered about the two stoves, one is a functioning wood-burning cookstove from the family farmhouse on Lake Mary near

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Alexandria. A special nook was built for it in the kitchen, where it is surrounded by wall tile placed over cement board with an insulating air space in the wall behind to accommodate the heat from the range.

Looking toward long-term living in the home, the Ericksons decided to install a gas fireplace in the living room. This was a trade-off for ease of use in years when chopping and splitting wood may no longer be an option. The couple feels that, when they get too lonesome for the smell of real wood burning, they can always start up a small wood fire in the cookstove – just as Grandma did.

Early on in the Erickson project, Paul Ringdahl suggested bringing in Richard Hardine of Infinity Development as construction manager. The Ericksons, being absentee owners (they're now living in Dallas),

say this proved to be a wonderful working arrangement for them.

A construction manager differs from a general contractor in that he is not a contractor or builder. Rather, he manages the construction process, acting as liaison between owner, designers and contractors working on the house. Additionally, the construction manager makes subcontractor recommendations based on skill, professionalism and dependability. Hardine says that all of the subcontractors on this project worked extremely well together as a very cohesive team.

Hardine also shared with the Ericksons his knowledge about ease-of-use features in homes built with the disabled in mind or for the elderly who may become partially disabled in later years. Consequently, functional aspects of this home include non-slip

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tile floors, easy access to all space on the main floor (there are no steps between rooms on the main level and no "trip-edges" anywhere), a large master bath, and lever hardware rather than doorknobs on all doors.

The wide woodwork or millwork inside the home, described as a "sort of simplified mission style," fulfilled the owners' desire for lots of wood in their surroundings. The talented carpentry of Mark Janke in framing and trim carpentry is apparent. And there are a surprising number of closets in the scaled-down home, with various nooks and crannies put to use as storage areas.

This three-bedroom home consistently makes the best use of space, with the emphasis of its design on providing quality, functional space, as opposed to simply "space." Yet, in addition to its practicality, it is an appealing structure with a mix of styles and character, and a personality all its own.

The designers successfully incorporated many of the features the Ericksons liked about housing styles in various states where they have lived and worked. There are the gables and large overhangs typical of Seattle homes, the Southwest feel of Albuquerque in the design of the large ceramic tile in bath and floors, and exterior rockwork reminiscent of the Tahoe area. Architect Stephanie Howe sums up the mix and overall flavor of the Erickson home design as "contemporary casual."

The Ericksons can hardly wait to move in. As Wayne Erickson put it, "This house is a collection of where we've been and who we are." 4

Eileen Viergutz is a writer from Alexandria.

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