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From Simple to Sophisticated: A Summer Cottage Becomes a Stunning Home



Jay Merchant Builders transformed this modest 1924 cottage into the multi-level, sophisticated summer home it is today through a drastic remodel that combined their expertise with the vision and talent of the architect, landscape designer and homeowner. Its timeless appeal blends seamlessly with the surrounding landscape; it includes frontage on cerulean blue Elk Lake, and its extensive gardens including a waterfall, a stream and a pond are often mistaken for a public park.

When homeowners Pam Shaw and Chris Winnie purchased their retirement property, their idea was to downsize. "Our vision was not for a big house, I never had a desire for that," says Pam. "But when you get a house on a lake – 'if you build it, they will come,'" she

adds with a laugh. Their expanding family, which includes seven grandchildren, was the impetus for the renovation. Throughout the remodel, they tried to retain the spirit of the original cottage. "We loved parts of the old cottage. We could have torn it down, but we wanted to honor it," says architect Ken Richmond. The archaic knob and tube electrical system was replaced, and rafter and collar ties were left exposed as an architectural detail. "In a remodel of a historic building, such as this home, you inherit certain aspects and work with them," Ken adds. The 1500 square foot, one-bath cottage became the 6000 square foot, six-bedroom, three and a half bath home it is today in two phases.

In the first phase of the remodel, the original cottage's four small bedrooms, separated only by bead-board, were reconstructed into three bedrooms with actual walls. All the rooms were reinvented; the living

room became the kitchen, and the 1920's style screened-in porch was carved out of a storage room. To avoid obstructing the lake view with kitchen cupboards, a custom-designed cherry wood plate rack for dishes and glassware was suspended by cables from the old roof. A floor to ceiling pantry is accessible with a Putnam wood rolling ladder. The adjoining formal dining room is part of the original structure and overlooks the cottage garden. A cozy sitting room off the dining room with a corner wood burning fireplace features painted raised wood paneling that was salvaged from an old church.

The beadboard sheeting that originally lined the inside of the roof had been hidden by a false ceiling; in order to preserve it, a new roof was built atop the old one. The open ceiling provides a loft in each room, where family antiques and heirlooms are displayed. The beadboard which previously separated all the rooms and lined all the walls was removed and stored for future re-use. In the same spirit of re-purposing, the builders used antiques from the family collection, and incorporated them into renovating the cottage. A bed headboard and posts became fireplace surrounds, and antique French doors from their collection were installed. Wooden panels were reconfigured and used on the den walls below a chair rail, and antique stained glass windows from Chris's father's collection were installed. A stained glass window depicting a swan is featured in one of the bathrooms, along with an antique claw-foot tub and a vintage buffet repurposed into a vanity.

In phase two, the existing garage and cottage were connected by a potting room and atrium. For the potting room, Jay made a custom cupboard with roll-out shelves for containers of bird seed and potting soil; the 1924 concrete double sink was salvaged from the old cottage and is used for potting purposes. The room has two small garage doors that enable the transfer of equipment between the front and back yards. "It's a specialty garage which we refer to as a 'potting parlor,'" says Chris. Next to this is the custom atrium, which is the focal point of the home viewed from the street. Its tiled floor is pitched to perimeter drains with custom cedar grates, and its separate climate control provides the heat and humidity necessary for growing plants.

The main entry of the home features a niche containing a large antique sideboard, and leads to the living area. Painted coffered ceilings and a wall of windows overlooking the lake are featured in the great room. A fireplace and sitting area on the opposite side of the great room face the front gardens. Shades of soft green, blue, and yellow flow between the rooms, and antiques and upholstered furniture offer a warm and inviting place for entertaining guests or enjoying the views. Painted beadboard wainscoting, white trim, five panel doors and natural finished hickory floors are found in nearly every room in the home, along with a variety of antique corbels.

The master suite's floor to ceiling windows and deck overlook the lake, and the built in headboard is inspired by a ship's berth. In the master bath, a separate shower and water closet area are sectioned off with glass panels, and the lake side features a free standing tub and vanity area. Upstairs, Jay created custom bunkbeds that sleep six grandchildren, and a library stores Pam's garden book collection. An office area with a unique corner window frames a view of the garden and is where Pam plans the next phase of her expanding gardens.

A frustrated gardener formerly limited by a small city lot, this property has allowed Pam to live out her gardening dreams. Shade gardens, sun gardens, and water gardens are just some of the features Pam developed with the assistance of landscape designer/nursery owner Terry Bertrand and his partner, Gordon Coy. Terry creates harmony by working with the land, not against it. "You shouldn't fight nature, because it's a battle you can't win," he says. Collaborating with Pam made him





OPPOSITE PAGE:

TOP: Open ceilings and extensive windows add to the home's airy feeling. MIDDLE: Antique wrought iron fencing is incorporated into the stair spindles. BOTTOM: The walkway between the atrium and the main cottage holds an antique sideboard fitted with a sink.

ABOVE: Dishes and glassware are stored in the custom cherry wood hanging rack suspended by cables from the rafters over the kitchen island. LEFT: The concrete double sink from the original cottage was used in the potting room.



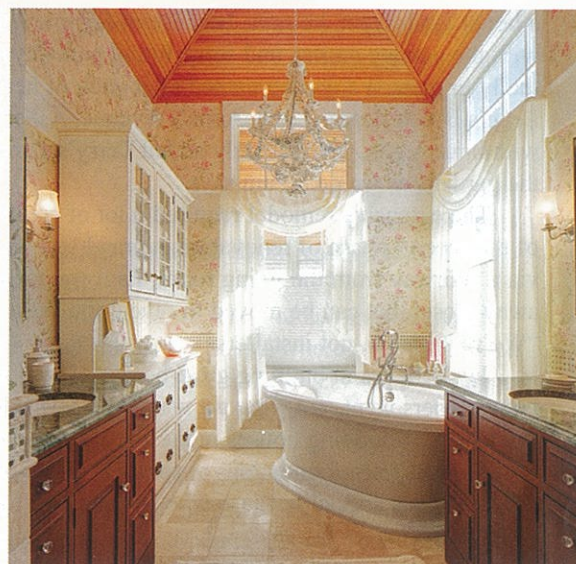


OPPOSITE PAGE:

TOP: The great room's comfortable conversation area is flooded with light from its floor to ceiling windows.

BOTTOM: Bead board sheeting from the 1924 cottage lines the open ceiling of the landing, with its built-in bookshelves and quiet reading area.

TOP LEFT: Rafter and collar ties were left exposed in the open ceiling. TOP RIGHT: Bunk beds with trundles underneath were custom made for the homeowner's seven grandchildren. MIDDLE: Windows to the deck overlook the lake in the lofty master bedroom with its custom built in headboard. RIGHT: Soaring ceilings, an antique buffet and a chandelier lend the master bath romantic cottage charm.



TOP : The atrium's custom window and climate control creates a vibrant room for plants and flowers. BELOW: The family's Portuguese water dog, Buffy, poses next to the potting room's hand painted bird seed containers resting on custom roll out shelves.



a better landscaper, he says, because of her encyclopedic knowledge of plants and flowers. Pam began with the cottage garden and some initial pathways and shrubbery. She added one garden each year eventually to include a garden named after each of her seven grandchildren: Jack's Track, Hannah's Hollow, Leah's Brook, Lucas Lane, Anna's Avenue, Asher's Alcove and Ben's Glen are individually designated with brass signs. "We recently added Terry's Tunnel for our beloved landscaper, who cares as much about the gardens as we do," Pam says.

The extensive remodel required a lot of creativity, which is nothing new to Jay Merchant. At the end of the second phase of renovation, a crawl storage space was added. Access to this area would have been via a stairway from the living room; Pam wanted a coat closet in the same place, so Jay designed a roll-away closet that can be moved to reveal the stairs. "These are the kind of things I'm known for," Jay says. "We're builders, not installers."

Jay believes in building great homes as well as good relationships. "We build the house that the homeowners want, not what we want," he says. He often completes transactions based on a handshake. Jay has been building houses in the Elk Rapids area since 1992, and there are no facets of construction he hasn't done, from foundations to roofing. He enjoys living in the area where he builds three homes a year. "This place is special because whether you're a local or moved here, unlike anywhere else, everybody wants to be here," Jay says. □