

This charming new build was inspired by historic homes in the area. Thanks to the water, an expansive fire pit, and a wraparound porch, the family spends most of their time outdoors.



*Joy No. 10: Family Reunions*

# The Lake Effect

After a lifetime of trips to a charming Lake Michigan town, a Kentucky family finally takes the plunge and builds a summer retreat fit for all three generations.

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*family portrait*

Bo James (age 4),  
Ed James, Neal James  
(age 6), Chenault James,  
Louise Breen, Van Breen  
(age 7), Julian Breen  
(age 3), Mac Breen  
(age 3), and Willy Breen



Diner-inspired bar stools ([target.com](http://target.com)) add retro charm to the light blue (Rhine River by Benjamin Moore) island topped with Vermont Danby honed marble countertops ([vermontquarries.com](http://vermontquarries.com)).

**D**esigner Chenault James ([chenaultjames.com](http://chenaultjames.com)) knows better than almost anyone that the very best things in life involve family and come with age. Bourbon is in her blood—her father, Julian Van Winkle, founded Kentucky-based company Old Rip Van Winkle Distillery more than 30 years ago. And she and her sisters—they're triplets!—Louise Breen and Carrie Greener co-own Pappy & Company ([pappyco.com](http://pappyco.com)), a heritage clothing and housewares company inspired by the iconic bourbon brand.

As it turns out, the family who works together also likes vacationing together. The Van Winkles have spent summers in Harbor Springs, Michigan, for more years than Chenault can count. "My dad's family started coming here when he was a kid as a way to escape the Kentucky heat," she says. "I've been here every summer of my

life. It's been a special place for him to share with all of us."

After years of renting, her parents, Julian and Sissy, finally decided to build a summer home of their own—a property large enough for the entire family, which, in addition to the three sisters and brother Preston, includes lots of grandchildren (Chenault and Preston both have two kids, Carrie has two, and Louise has three), ranging in ages from 3 to 7 years old. So, Sissy joined forces with daughter Chenault to create a new build chock-full of charm and character. "Every time you get to town, it's like stepping back in time—you walk everywhere. Kids stay out playing—on their own!—until dusk. We wanted the house to capture that feeling," Chenault says.

Once they found a vacant lot—no small task in the historic village—the mother-daughter duo looked to the surrounding turn-of-the-century



The cypress wet bar was crafted by Chenault's husband, Ed, owner of Four Board Woodworks ([fourboardwoodworks.com](http://fourboardwoodworks.com)). Chenault tucked in vintage landscapes and botanicals above the cypress countertops.



White Dove Benjamin Moore

In the dining room, an iron chandelier ([niermannweeks.com](http://niermannweeks.com)) hangs from a ceiling adorned with tiles from a beloved local diner. Sissy filled an antique walnut hutch with Blue Willow dishware that she's collected through the years.

A bourbon barrel hoop ([pappyco.com](http://pappyco.com)) recalls the family business.



Cottage style reigns in the living room (left), with canvas cotton duck slipcovered furniture, flea-market-find side tables, and a coffee table that Chenault covered in burlap and painted. ■ In the powder room (above), Chenault converted an old sideboard into a vanity and lined the space in vintage Brunschwig & Fils wallpaper. ■ After dinner, the kids pile on the cozy sofa (below left) covered in weatherproof (and childproof) cotton duck fabric. Sissy found the nautical painting in Louisville at Barry Wooley Designs ([barrywooley.com](http://barrywooley.com)).



cottages for architectural inspiration, and then they went to work figuring out how to expand on a cottage-size footprint.

Luckily, Sissy had a pretty clear idea of what she wanted. “My mom had been designing this house in her head for years,” says Chenault. The result: a three-story, eight-bedroom, eight-bathroom retreat that boasts all the trappings of an old-school Lake Michigan home—gingerbread trim and X-shaped window sashes on the outside, paneled walls on the inside—along with plenty of present-day, can-accommodate-a-crowd amenities, like a kitchen that can easily “feed an army” and a huge room that comfortably sleeps every last one of the grandkids. (“We call it the bunk room, even though there aren’t really any bunks. It’s just a room full of beds—seven twins and a full,” says Chenault.)

In order to add more soul throughout the largely blank space, Sissy and Chenault brought in a smattering of reclaimed touches. Chenault’s husband, Ed, built all the kitchen cabinets, as well as a wet bar, out of weathered cypress. In the dining room, the ceiling tiles are especially meaningful—they once hung in Juilleret’s, a beloved local diner that shuttered a few years before. “It was a family-owned greasy spoon where everyone used to eat. Practically everyone in town had a charge account there,” says Chenault. “It was the place where kids hung out by themselves and ordered milkshakes. We love knowing we have a small part of that touchstone here.”

When it came time to furnish the home, the Van Winkles again looked to the past, relying on antiques to soften the edges of the mint-condition construction. Chenault says the

The outdoor dining room is ready for family gatherings thanks to a 10-person table from local shop Don Kelly Antiques ([kellyantiques.com](http://kellyantiques.com)). Chenault’s husband crafted the starburst mirror from old bourbon barrels.





Wide-set paneled walls in the master bedroom (above) mimic the look of old Lake Michigan cottages, which had no insulation and left wall joists exposed. "This room was the right place for that historic look," says Chenault. ■ A collection of antique hand mirrors (left) hangs above an old desk-turned-vanity.

house took "no time" to pull together, because she and Sissy had spent years shopping (and purchasing!) for a lake house long before they actually owned one. "My mom and I are the kind of people who, if we see something we like and the price is right, we buy it—regardless of whether or not we have a place for it," she says. "Decorating this home was really an exercise in clearing out her basement!"

While most of the furnishings were years in the making, the palette came together on the spot. Chenault

says she found herself drawn to the reds, whites, and blues by accident. "It just sort of happened before I even knew it. Maybe it's because we're always here during the Fourth of July," she says. "Blue obviously feels right here. You're surrounded by it, from the sky to the water." She chose red pieces for the vintage, retro feel the color provides but also mixed in aqua, green, and coral touches to prevent the scene from getting too old-fashioned or theme-y.

In the seven years since the Van Winkles first broke ground, their vacation home has, true to the family business, only gotten better with age. Of course, not all of the wear and tear is designer approved. "Most of our 'making a mark' involves nicks and scuffs from nine kids running around," says Chenault, adding that she wouldn't have it any other way. (Continued on page 98)



A set of vintage floral watercolors by M. LeClair in simple white frames (michaels.com) adds graphic punch in the guest bathroom.

Like the kids' personalities, no two headboards, sheet sets, or quilts in their room are alike. Originally planned as a third-story mechanical room, the steeply pitched space is a mismatch of beds placed anywhere they would fit.



Plus! No. 71-75

## “My Simple Joys of Summer”

A few of Chenault James's favorite things in Harbor Springs, Michigan

### SWEET TREATS ON THE PORCH...

I love the chocolate-macadamia nut cookies from Tom's Mom's Cookies ([toms momscookies.com](http://toms momscookies.com)).

### ...AND ROAST BEEF ON WHITE SANDWICHES ON THE BOAT

Gurney's Bottle Shop ([gurneysbottleshop.com](http://gurneysbottleshop.com)), a deli counter located in the back of a liquor store, has the best one. They make their own delicious bread and there's always a wait—but it's worth it!

### FOURTH OF JULY PARADES

There's a big one in Harbor Springs every year with a section for the kids to line up and ride their bikes. I rode in it when I was a kid! Just like the old days, we cover the bikes with plenty of crepe paper and flags.

### MACKINAC ISLAND FUDGE ICE CREAM

Get a scoop or two at Yummies Ice Cream (231-838-4069).

### WHITEFISH DIP

I stock up on it all summer long at Toski Sands Market ([toskisandsmarket.com](http://toskisandsmarket.com)).