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through its dormers, gables, bay windows, and main level circular room.

“It is about the end result and how satisfied and happy the customer or client is; that is what our design is about and our intent in designing,” said Kristy Raasch, designer and architectural drafter at Alexander Design Group in Wayzata, Minnesota. “Their house is an expression of them, so we really wanted to reflect their personalities and what they envisioned for the house.”

Alexander Design Group is a design firm specializing in custom residential and remodel work founded on a collaborative process with clients and local builders, and led by Kathryn Alexander, president and owner, and a team of design professionals and on-staff American Institute of Architects, or AIA, licensed architects. While the company primarily works in the Twin Cities region in Minnesota, Alexander Design Group has completed projects across the United States and has received a number of national awards throughout its nearly 35-year history.

“We strictly do custom residential architecture and ended up with a niche of doing a lot of waterfront properties mostly in the Minneapolis and Lake Minnetonka area, but we have done some oceanfront and now Lake Geneva, which we were excited about,” Alexander said.

“We really like to integrate the clients and work with them so that what we end up designing is more of an expression of their personality. As much as our niche is a little



Lake appeal

Text: R.J. Weick

Set on the Narrows of Geneva Lake in Walworth County, Wisconsin, this Lake Geneva cottage is the collective brainchild of Minnesota-based Alexander Design Group Inc., Wisconsin-based Lowell Custom Homes, and clients with an appreciation for detail and a concise design eye.

There is a careful intention paid to its location, where its lakefront-facing exterior presents dynamic architectural statement on par with its approach as its interior spatial

layout leverages views of the water through positioning and windows. Its composition of shingles, shakes, metal, and stone offer texturized layer for its timeless palette of blue and white exterior; while curvilinear details above the wooden garage door, entryway, and lakefront windows evoke the sinuous movement of water. In all, it strikes a New England-inspired stance befitting its surrounding environment with romanticism reminiscent of Queen Anne dialogue





and craftsmanship. Since then, the custom home builder, full-time AIA-licensed architect, and its team of project management and office professionals have developed an award-winning portfolio of projects as it works with clients in Walworth County in Southeast Wisconsin. Lowell, who initially began working construction throughout college and built schools in the Caribbean after finishing graduate school with a Master's in Education, built a reputation for high-end lakefront homes and for placing people, process, and personal design as equal import.

With Lowell Custom Homes' trademark of solid infrastructure, sound insulation, and affinity for old New England homes, the design-and-build team was an ideal match. Lowell also noted some of the other basic design elements hidden in the infrastructure of their custom homes comprise installing corkboard on the ceiling, creating four-and-a-half-foot-wide stairways, and striving for approximately five-foot minimum for hallways. The idea is to create homes that lend a sense of timelessness, and mitigate squeaks in floors and noise between rooms.

"We came into [the process] when the design plans were finished and the construction plans were fairly well-completed," Lowell said. "We worked with the architect to review some of the structural elements for the way we like to frame homes and the way we have specifics on our floor systems and our insulating; things like that."

The clients, family- and boat-oriented with two grown children, came to the table with definite design requirements, according to Alexander.

"We take all these pieces of the puzzle and have to put something together that is good design and the clients love, and we love," Alexander said. "They are empty nesters, so their lifestyle is their kids will come for the weekend and they will entertain. That was an important piece of it."

From the ensuite rooms facing the lake and bonus room above the garage to built-in elevator, the home was intended to not only take advantage of the lakefront property, but also grow with the family in time. It is designed with a balance to the functionality of spaces: coffered ceiling detail on the main level lends intimate warmth upon entering the home, while the double-island-kitchen with a pantry area and preparatory space—complete with an adjacent, arched-ceiling, stone-and-wooden wine cellar—can accommodate a large group of people.

"The thing now with the open concept is that kitchens used to be functional and now they are the key part of the living area. The kitchens are furniture pieces now, they make the home," Lowell said. "They have double islands where you could easily have 20

people in there without being crowded and it was all [the owners] vision transferred to the architects. We were able to add our little twist and execute, so everyone ended up with what they envisioned."

Entertainment spaces are located on the main and lower level, while the master and two ensuite bedrooms are located on the second floor, which is accessible by both stair and elevator. The bedrooms are bright and light, featuring more traditional accents, and serving as a backdrop to enhance rather than distract from the outside.

"You want to bring the lake in; you want to bring the outside in," Alexander said. "Even in this floorplan, there is a den right off the foyer with windows that peek at the lake when you are sitting and working there."

The connection with the exterior is further enhanced by the outdoor living areas at the back of the house, which Raasch noted becomes an important element in designing lakefront homes as the back almost turns into the front of the house.

"We really want the back to look just as nice—or nicer—than the front," Raasch said. "The exterior is pretty timeless. I think in 25 years you are still going to look at the house and it is going to remain beautiful."

A large outdoor patio from the den and kitchen area lead into a covered porch complete with a large stone fireplace and retractable screens, before a sprawling lawn leading down to the lake. The Phantom Screens two-track system integrated into the ceiling perimeter allow for the homeowners to select either a motorized vinyl or screen to protect users from the elements.

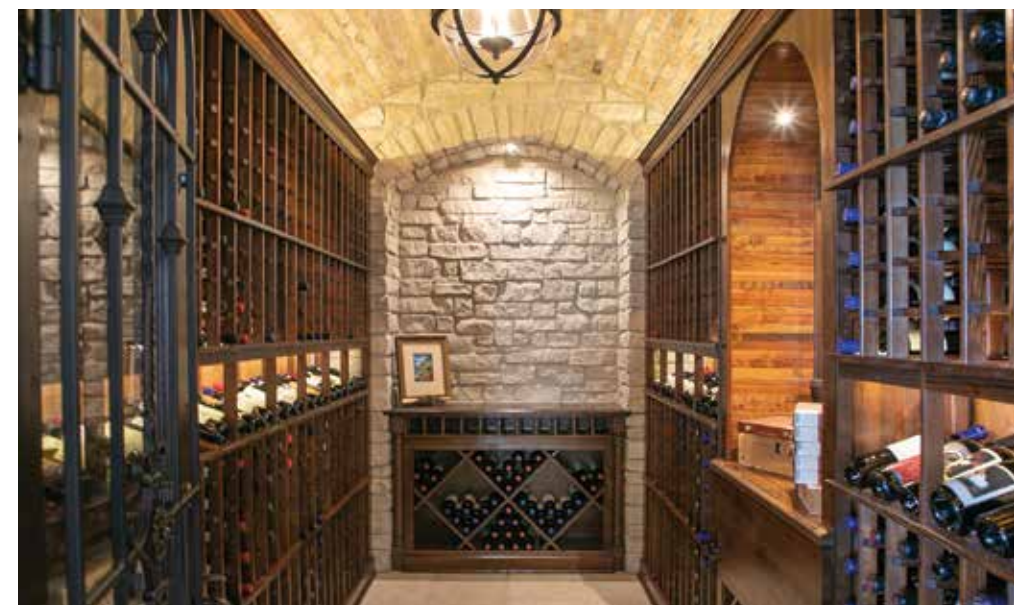
"There are infrared heaters in the ceiling and between that and the fireplace, it makes it a very convertible room for the seasons where it can just be a covered patio to a screened porch to a room that in October when the leaves are falling, you can still sit out there," Alexander said.

Alexander also noted the clients had an appreciation for the details and in the end, design is about delivering spaces—or a home—with an atmosphere of comfort.

"I always think of what we do as bringing all the logical and static portions, and combining that with creativity and creating something that feels really good," Alexander said.

For Lowell, owner engagement is encouraged on all their projects and in the case of this project, the collaboration among client, builder, and designer resulted in an end product that surpassed initial expectations.

"The owners were very involved," Lowell said. "They knew what they wanted, they knew what they didn't want, and between going back-and-forth, I think we were really able to hit a home run on it."



more lake-cottage, East-Coast-look, we really want the house to look and reflect their lifestyle and them," Alexander added.

Upon discovering the lot along the Narrows at Geneva Lake, the clients tapped the collaborative expertise of Alexander Design Group and Lowell Custom Homes to realize their vision despite the tighter lot lines—typical of many beachfront or lakefront sites—of a cottage that has a sense of sprawling New England grandeur at nearly 8,200 square-feet and three levels.

"The family had been in Lake Geneva for a long time, had another lake home, and they found this lot and loved it. They actually did a tremendous amount of research on design and hired Alexander Design Group," said Scott Lowell, founder and president of Lowell Custom Homes. "[The clients] saw homes Alexander had done, went to Minnesota to visit a couple of homes, and just fell in love with them. It is a very talented firm."

Lowell Custom Homes was founded in 1981 on a philosophy of personalized detail