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BY GINA CZUPKA
PHOTOS TODD BUCHANAN



Wayne and Karen Soojian

An Orono weekend retreat is reinvented as a luxury lakeside home

There really is something in the water in Minnesota. No matter how much we love our homes, there is something about the state's lakes that just makes us want to have a getaway not far from a shoreline. When Wayne and Karen Soojian moved their family—daughters Gabrielle, 20, and Jaymee, 18, and son Cameron, 14—to Minnesota

from New Jersey, they settled in Eden Prairie. They liked the area, but it wasn't long before that desire for a lake home surfaced.



Below: The elegant living room combines classic and whimsical pieces. Right: The seating area in the kitchen is a gathering place for the Soojians.



A Retreat, Then a Home

“We started looking for a cabin, but we couldn’t make a whole lot of sense of [driving] three hours each way for, really, eight good weekends a year,” Wayne Soojian says. With this practical mindset, the family continued to look for a fitting property, this time around Lake Minnetonka. In 2000, they found a 2,000-square-foot rambler. “It had the right number of bedrooms, and it was on the water,” Soojian says. “[It] was our vacation home, even though it was only 35 minutes away.”

In fact, the Soojians loved it so much that they knocked it down. An oxymoron? Not at all. They decided that it wasn’t enough to be on Lake Minnetonka for part of the time; they wanted to be there permanently. So, in 2002, they pulled down the existing structure and began building the beautiful home in which they now reside. They say that Lake Minnetonka is an idyllic spot to call home.

“I like the fact that there’s no commercial ... anything,” Wayne says. “It’s all mom-and-pop businesses, you know the [people] at the hardware store, you know the kids at the grocery store; it’s the same people all the time. And the lake ... that speaks for itself.”

Beauty, Inside and Out

The house that stands in place of the original rambler makes the most of the landscape. The couple worked with Keith Waters of Keith Waters and Associates, Inc. to create a design that was just right. The relatively quiet look of the house from the front belies its scale, which is more evident in the back, where it rises three stories from the ground. And while there are relatively few windows on the front of the house, they dominate the back. “It’s all about the lake ... and how to design so you don’t overwhelm [it],” Wayne says.

The process of building the home took a mere nine months, thanks to Wayne’s connections in the building industry; he is the division president of Ryland Homes. “But it took the better part of a year to get everything right,” he adds. “I think the key to this house was the marriage of Karen’s design capabilities [she is a senior interior designer for Gabberts, and a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers] and my 25 years of experience [in building].”

The Grand Tour

The foyer is framed by sturdy white columns. Two pieces from the family’s unique collection of antiques are also noticeable features. A beautifully aged Persian wool rug lies over the heated limestone floor; it has been in Wayne’s family, which is of Armenian descent, for more than 60 years, and is itself nearly 100 years

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old. Against the wall, a grandfather clock regally commands attention. It too is an heirloom from Wayne's family, as his father was an avid clock collector and repairman. Just off the foyer is Wayne's office, which holds sports memorabilia of his lifelong favorite teams—the New York Yankees and Giants.

The living room has 18-foot ceilings with tall windows showcasing the beautiful view of the lake. On one wall, there are intricately constructed models of old Chriscraft boats and a sailboat. Karen, noting that they are a complement to the lake, says, "Having a sense of place is important to us." A flat-screen television mounted on the wall can be extended outward when in use and then be discreetly retracted, and speakers are integrated into the wall for surround-sound effects with no visual interruptions. On the floor is another of the family's heirloom Persian carpets.

The kitchen is truly unusual. There is a sitting area with a gas fireplace, two comfortable chairs and a flat screen television. It's an ideal



Opposite: The master suite is filled with soft colors and light. Above left: Acid-etched concrete floors add interest in the lower level. Above right: A unique paint treatment and a hammered nickel vessel sink make a half-bath into a showpiece.

spot for relaxing in a room where the family tends to congregate, and the fireplace also has a compartment for warming bread. The wall facing the lake is made almost entirely of windows. "We wanted the room we used the most to face the lake," says Karen.

The kitchen also features knotty alder cabinets, honed granite countertops, travertine backsplashes, a six-burner professional range, two ovens and two refrigerators clad in alder to match the cabinets. The adjoining pantry has cabinets with pull-out shelves that make for easy organization.

A half-bathroom off of the kitchen has been made into a showpiece through interesting details. The walls, which gently curve around the room, are painted in a crackle faux-finish with just a hint of a metallic sheen. The unique wall treatment perfectly complements the vessel sink made of hammered nickel.

The spacious master suite maintains the feeling of airiness, and recalls an elegant B&B in Provence. The four-poster bed, hung with white panels, is dressed in crisp, clean French linens. Just off the bedroom, the master bath has a spa-style shower with several shower heads and a pebble floor, as well as a roll-top, free-standing bathtub. A wall-mounted flat screen television hovers above one end of the bathtub.

The fact that the Soojians love to have guests in their home is obvious in the lower level. There is another fully equipped kitchen in the basement for guests to use. They haven't shied away from unusual treatments in this part of the house, either; the ruddy-hued floors are acid-etched concrete, and the bathroom features wire-brushed granite counters, which bring out the natural texture of the stone without making it rough to the touch. In what might otherwise be unused space under the stairwell, there is a climate-controlled wine cellar with a 20-case capacity.

Despite having roots on the East Coast, the Soojians say that this is where they truly feel at home. "The quality of life here is far superior," Wayne says. 🐦

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