

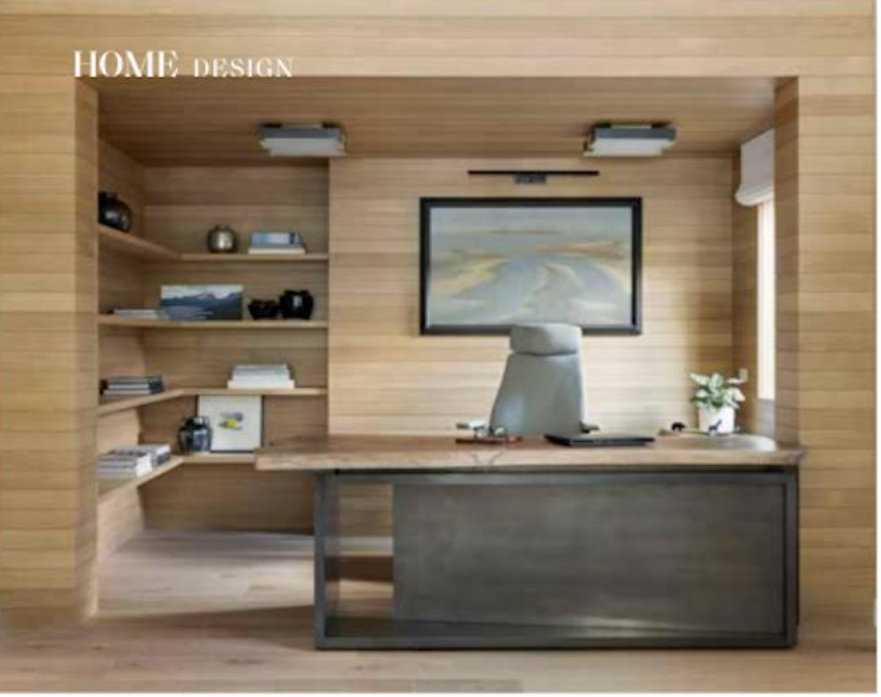
GOOD KARMA

Inspired by a California couple's appreciation for design, the teams at Engler Studio, Charlie & Co. Design, Watercourse Design and Welch Forsman Associates transform a house on Cedar Lake into a deeply personal home.

BY MELINDA NELSON



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SPACECRAFTING



FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS, NEIGHBORS WATCHED WITH INTEREST as a couple renovated a home on Cedar Lake in Minneapolis. The homeowners invited their new neighbors for dinner when the house was finished. As the guests walked up the path, they were welcomed by an enchanting front door carved with hummingbirds, a loon, a lady's slipper, a canoe and other symbols of the North Shore, along with the irresistible aroma of savory Indian food.

As the neighbors soon discovered, the couple had grown up on opposite sides of the world, so their door offers a portal into the fascinating, multifaceted life they've created together. She is from Two Harbors on Lake Superior, and he is from Mumbai, India, where elaborately carved doors offer a blessing to all who enter a home. The couple met at Cornell University and then moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, where they raised their two daughters.

Even though they all spent every Fourth of July and Christmas with family in Two Harbors and Minneapolis — earning the husband the title of "honorary Minnesotan" — the couple hadn't originally planned to buy a home here. But then one of their daughters chose to live in Minneapolis after completing her doctorate in chemical engineering at the University of Minnesota, and the area started to make more sense.

Several years earlier, the couple had traveled to Minneapolis to see their daughter, who was pregnant at the time. During their visit, their son-in-law, who'd grown up with his grandmother, suggested they look at a house for sale nearby. Says the wife: "Kim Pease, our realtor, opened the door, and we looked out the front window and saw people walking their dogs and cross-country skiing on Cedar Lake. We walked through the house and saw our kids' house and the park from the back window. It was magical. And so, with the kids' encouragement, we bought the house."

The couple had initially planned just to paint the walls and change the cabinet knobs. But after Pease invited them to meet a longtime friend, interior designer Linda Engler, they began to entertain more ambitious design possibilities. "Linda felt very familiar to me," the wife says. "Minnesotans have a very low-key way of interacting, and her style and competence immediately resonated with me."

Engler suggested several key design changes to bring more light into the interiors, create better flow and provide unobstructed views of the lake, the park and the kids' house. The couple loved her ideas, so Engler gathered an experienced team of friends she knew would bring exceptional creativity, problem-solving skills and good karma to the project, including Engler Studio colleagues Jenn Taft, studio director, and Alison Haugen, designer;











Charlie & Co. Design's Colby Mattson, principal/designer, and Jonathan Mason, project manager/designer; Welch Forsman Associates' Don Forsman, principal, and Jim Kalb, project lead; and Ian Lamers, landscape architect, of Watercourse Design.

"Our clients are down-to-earth, generous and respectful of each other's preferences and aversions, which set a wonderful tone for our collaboration," says Engler. "They challenged us to brainstorm and look beyond the obvious." Propelled by the couple's enthusiasm and keen eye for design, the project quickly evolved from a simple renovation to a whole-house transformation.

Most of the meetings took place over Zoom. "Even though we weren't all in the same place, our connection and chemistry were so strong, the meetings didn't feel remote or distant," says Engler. "There was an easy, natural camaraderie from the start, and while it may sound Minnesota-corny, we all looked forward to our meetings."

It might have been easier and more cost-effective to start from scratch and build a new home, but the couple didn't want to tear down the house. "We love homes of all types, from modest to the most beautiful," muses the wife. "The previous owner loved her home, and we would never demolish a place that someone else had loved. We care about the neighbors, their feelings and the context of the neighborhood."

Guided by form following function, the couple wanted their home to elevate their relationships with their kids and grandchildren. They also wanted the spaces to be easily accessible and aging-friendly so they could stay connected with their family. The design team responded by reimagining the house with 5,245 square feet of effortless flow and functionality. They opened up the main level and added a skylight over a glass-walled staircase with two railings, one for grown-ups and another for children. The living room offers views of Cedar Lake and flows easily into the dining area and the kitchen, which looks out over the lap pool to the park and the kids' house.

The couple's suite and two offices also offer views of the lake. A covered porch on the second level feels like a treehouse, while the lower-level playroom provides plenty of space for reading, playing games and dancing with grandkids.

"We loved collaborating with the entire team to create a variety of new spaces within a very limited footprint," says Mattson. "Our clients' trust and ability to convey their goals, motivations and inspiration made the process very enjoyable and rewarding."

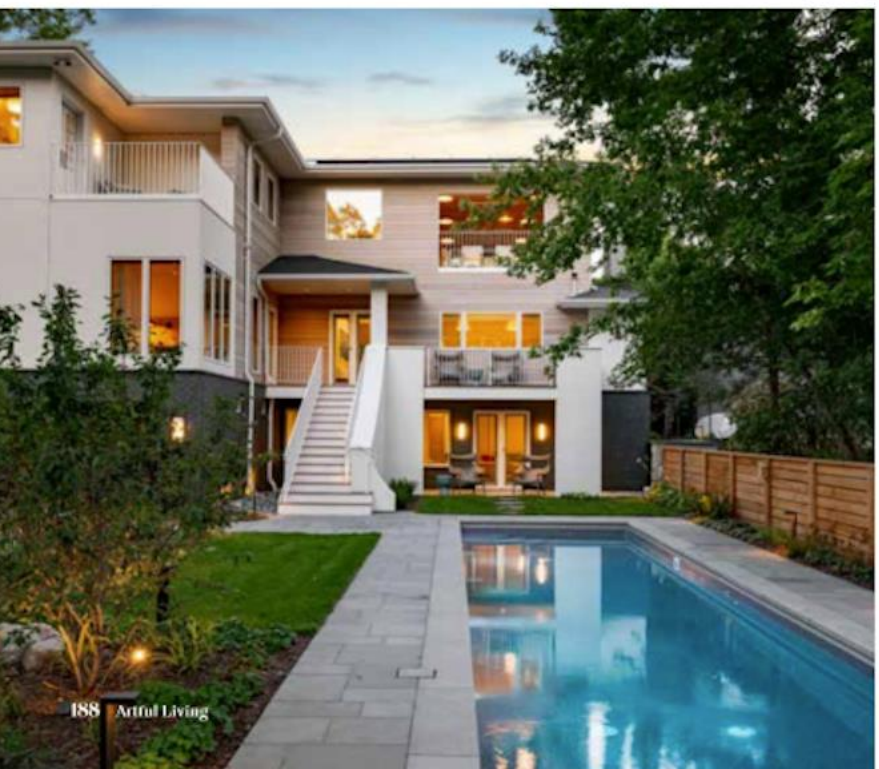
Inspired by the wife's love of calming, watery hues and natural elements, Engler and her team curated a mix of comfortable furnishings, handmade rugs and artisanal textiles to complement organic paper sculptures by the couple's other daughter, an artist. Whenever the couple was in town for a design meeting at Engler Studio, Valerie Tracy, controller, gave them a Minnesota-style welcome with two loaves of homemade pumpkin bread, one to enjoy with their kids and one to take back to California.

When the couple shared stories about visiting the wife's family in Lapporten, a valley north of the Arctic Circle in Swedish Lapland, their memories gave Engler an idea. She called a Swedish client and, serendipitously, his father was a good friend of Claes Grundsten, a world-renowned photographer. Sure enough, Grundsten had photographed Lapporten, so Engler ordered a stunning panoramic image and had it framed as a surprise.

While the Welch Forsman team was taking the walls down to the studs, digging deep into the basement and raising the ceilings to create more light, the design team continued creating their magic. To honor the couple's request for a special front door, the designers came up with a door with inset panels and hand-carved emblems of Minnesota on both sides. The Engler Studio team designed the panels and images and commissioned woodcarver Erik Wyckoff to bring them to life. Mattson designed the structure, and the Welch Forsman team fabricated and installed the door.

"The door is the perfect symbol of this amazing project," says Forsman. "Our clients understand beauty, craft and design, and we all had so much fun collaborating with them to create a jewel box of a home filled with unique elements and beautiful vignettes."

When installation day finally arrived, the Crown Warehouse trucks pulled up to the house. As the movers carefully carried the furnishings over the threshold, the door bestowed a blessing on each person. Engler and her team layered each room with beauty and meaning, hanging the Lapporten image in the dining room and placing one of the daughter's sculptures over the fireplace, making the house feel like home.





Builder: Welch Forsman Associates
Architectural Design: Charlie & Co. Design
Interior Design: Engler Studio
Landscape Design: Watercourse Design

