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Submitted photo

The Walshes town of Merton home sits on the shores of Beaver Lake and features a multi-level patio perfect for entertaining, relaxing and enjoying the views.

Development Spotlight

Shedding light on lake living

By J.A. Berger

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Jerry and Donna Walsh are lake people — it just took them a while to realize it. They lived in New Berlin where they built a house and raised their two daughters — now grown and on their own. “We saw a story in the Journal Sentinel about lots on Green Lake and my husband wanted to go and check them out,” Donna remembered. “They were too expensive.”

Donna and Jerry had ulterior motives for wanting to live on a lake. “We thought if we lived somewhere so appealing our daughters would come home more,” she said with a chuckle. The couple started looking for existing lake homes. “The Realtor showed us some homes on Beaver Lake, but they were out of our price range too.” They told the agent they were open to building and, soon, the agent found a piece of property on Beaver Lake that had been subdivided back in 1960. A lot with 100 feet of lake frontage and an old shed was for sale. Jerry and Donna bought it. That was 2007.

Then the Great Recession hit. “We just didn’t have the courage to build,” Donna said. But that didn’t stop the couple from enjoying lake living — albeit a bit rustic. “We bought a kayak. We would pack a picnic lunch and come out here. During those five years we spent a lot of time in the shed — as a changing room, a shelter from storms and a surprise birthday for Jerry.” That wonderful, old shed was eventually tom down.

The north shore lot, officially in the town of Merton, had lovely elevations and by 2009 the Walshes decided it was time to build. “We had a very contemporary home in New Berlin,” she said. “Now we wanted something cozy and Old World.” They contacted Barenz Builders who work with a number of architects to suit their customers’ tastes, budgets and lifestyles. The custom home that was designed for the Walshes was completed in December 2011.

The 4,200 square foot, two-story home has its master suite on the first floor. The den, great room, kitchen and sunroom all face the lake. There are three bedrooms on the second floor and 4 ½ baths throughout. The home and patio are multilevel designs giving unobstructed views of the lake. “The house is built on the lot’s elevation,” Donna said. The home and patio design complement the topography.

The Walshes wanted to build green. “Barenz suggested in-floor radiant heating on the first floor, which we love, and we had a geo-thermo system put in,” she said of the system that uses the Earth’s temperature to help heat and cool the home.

What’s her favorite feature of the house? Donna couldn’t settle on one thing. “I love my sunroom. We love the master bath with its green marble, glass block and double showerheads. My kitchen is awesome — it has a huge island with a five-sided end with seating. It’s great when we entertain.”

The patio, where they spent their first of many summers, can be accessed from the kitchen and den. Its multilevel space offers a cozy area to curl up on a glider with a good summer read or an area with a dining table, grill and seating for family, friends and yes, their daughters.

Barenz Builders, owned by Ron Barenz, has specialized in custom-built homes on individual client lots for 35 years. “We build three to five homes a year,” said son and project manager, Ronny Barenz. “We build every home as if it was our own.”

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