

Piku House: Dirk Denison, who grew up in Birmingham, has won a major award for this house he designed in Orchard Lake.

Architect wins major award for Orchard Lake Piku House

A Birmingham native who now works in Chicago has won a major architecture award for a house he designed in Orchard Lake.

Dirk Denison, 38, received the Certificate of Merit in the Distinguished Building Awards for design of the Piku House.

The American Institute of Architects Chicago awards are among the most coveted in the country due to intense competition. The Piku House edged out nearly 100 entries.

Denison, a Cranbrook graduate, attended the University of Michigan. He holds a bachelor of architecture and master of business administration from the Illinois Institute of Technology. He also has a master of architecture from the Harvard School of Design.

The Piku House was commissioned in 1989 as an empty-nest residence planned for one-floor living with secondary spaces located on two lower levels.

The house, 5,000 square feet, has three bedrooms, office, family room, living room, dining room and two kitchens.

"The things that really influenced the shape of the house was the configuration of the site — long and narrow and a change in elevation of 18 feet," Denison said.

"It's very contemporary," he added. "Openness of space allows each room to be flexible and allows one function to flow into another space."

Judges were impressed with Denison's effort.

"There is a bold and clear use of materials and of the site," commented Frederick Schwartz, AIA New York. "The integration of the house with the landscape is superb."

Providing large wall surfaces and expansive counter surfaces for an extensive art collection was a primary design consideration. In addition, several new art works were commissioned to be integrated into the architecture.

The effect of natural light, particularly the setting sun, played a crucial role in the design. The living room fireplace reflects the ever-changing light.

Denison, currently in private practice, also serves as associate dean for academic affairs and director for graduate programs at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.

Landscape architect for the Piku House was John Grissim & Associates, Farmington Hills. Marlin Construction of Grosse Pointe was the general contractor.

Clogged toilets can be a mess

AP — Toilets and drains can be a mess when they're clogged.

If a sink, tub or toilet doesn't drain properly, try using a plunger first. Place the plunger's cup securely over the drain hole and vigorously pump the plunger handle up and down about a dozen times to force the trapped water through the system. On a bathroom sink or tub, plug the overflow outlet with a wet cloth before using a plunger.

To make your plunger more effective, smear a little petroleum jelly around the edge of the cup to create a better seal.

With a clogged toilet, the blockage is most likely in the toilet itself. Usually an object gets stuck in the bend of the trap.

If you can see part of it, you can retrieve an item that your toddler dropped into the toilet, for example, without too much fuss. Slip your hand into a plastic bag, grasp the item and pull it out. Then turn the bag inside out. The item will be in the bag and your hand will remain dry and clean.

If plunging fails, try using a water closet (toilet) auger before calling a plumber. The auger, available at hardware stores, has a flexible cable running through a shaft, with a springlike tip. The end of the cable is inserted into the drain hole and the handle is cranked until the tip bites into the clog. Crank the auger's handle a bit more, then slowly pull out the clog or break it up by moving the handle back and forth.

If a plunger doesn't work, place a bucket under the P-trap, the looped part of the drain pipe below the sink. Put on rubber gloves. If the trap has a drainage plug on the bottom, open it with a pipewrench and fish out the debris. Otherwise, loosen the slip nuts on the trap with a pipe wrench and remove it. (Wrap

the jaws of the wrench with electrical tape so that you don't scratch chrome fixtures). Check the trap for obstructions by inserting a straightened clothes hanger wire.

If the problem isn't in the trap, insert a flexible wire snake into the drain pipe in the wall at the point where the trap joins it and work the snake in as far as it will go. The snake is longer and more flexible than the closet auger, letting you reach into drain pipes. When you feel the snake encounter the obstruction, crank its handle to force the tip into the clog. The cranking will either break down the clog or let you pull it out with the snake. After connecting the P-trap again, run water through the drain to be sure it's open and that there's no leak.

You can also use chemicals to open clogged drains but they usually have limited effect. Because they must be heavier than water to reach obstructions, they settle in the bottom of the trap and won't go much farther.

CAUTION: Drain-cleaning chemicals are extremely dangerous if ingested or splashed onto the eyes or skin. Read the directions carefully and store leftovers out of the reach of children. Never use a plunger after pouring a chemical in a drain. It's a sure-fire way to splash chemicals on yourself. Be sure to tell a plumber that you've put chemicals into a drain.

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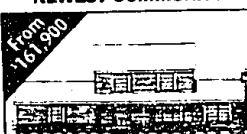
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