

COVER STORY



Before: Remodeling of the Johnson's lakefront home began when Louanne Johnson wanted to move the kitchen into a different area.



And after: The project resulted in a new look both inside and out.

TACKLING THEIR OWN PROJECT

STORY BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN • SPECIAL WRITER

When Louanne Johnson and her husband, Mark, decided to renovate their 4,000-square-foot West Bloomfield home and add a new kitchen, they never dreamed it would take so long. Divided into two phases, the project lasted 2-1/2 years because the Johnsons, choosing not to hire a builder, did the work themselves with the help of brother-in-law and master carpenter Russ Abate.

"Our friends would ask us when would we be finished. Anyone who has built or renovated knows the inside joke there's just one more molding to go," Louanne Johnson said during a tour of the 19-year-old colonial on Middle Straits Lake.

This was the fourth lakefront home the Johnsons remodeled so it wasn't a totally new experience for them. After firing an architect, Louanne spent seven months drawing up the plans. Living in the house for 11 years, she knew better than anyone where she wanted the 18-by-23-foot kitchen. Phase one began.

Louanne admits a builder would have completed the work in a more timely fashion. However, the savings of not hiring one allowed the couple to buy higher quality materials such as the scratch-resistant granite counter tops in the kitchen.

The center island boasts a stove with retractable vent and light plus plenty of space for chopping, or measuring and mixing ingredients. A spice drawer next to the stove shortens the time spent sorting through dozens of bottles in search of oregano. Naturally finished hickory cabinetry is in keeping with the 3/4-acre wooded landscape outside the kitchen window.

A rollout desk next to the telephone hides the clutter of bills and paperwork necessary to run a household. To complete the bright and airy space, Louanne looked for advice from friends who decorated interiors professionally. Floral-pattern scarf drapes ordered from a catalog pick up the cranberry veins in the granite.

"The children loved the neighborhood and we loved our lot too much to move. Number one in the kitchen was space and storage but most importantly I wanted a view of the lake," said Louanne, who minored in art in college.



All in the family: Mark and Louanne Johnson of West Bloomfield did the work themselves when they renovated their home.

Next phase

The entire main floor was gutted during phase two, the old kitchen torn out, foyer expanded and the laundry room moved to the first floor from an inconvenient space in the basement. Louanne, Mark and children Natalie, 14; Ryan, 12; and Eric, 9; helped remove debris after each room was demolished. In order to let more light in the double front doors, recycled to a walk-out garage, were replaced with a single white door and two sidelights featuring beveled glass designs.

"At the time it was being built, I hated it," Natalie said. "Now the house looks nicer than it did before."

The worst days occurred when the poured cement basement wall was cut open with a wet saw to construct the walk-out garage, Louanne said. Dust, spewed from every vent in the house, took three days to clean up.

"Our house was like a set from 'Tales from the Crypt.' It looked like there was smoke in the house," Louanne said.

Putting on a new face

When asked which elements of the project made the biggest difference, Louanne answered with one word: paint. The brick fireplace in the

family room became white-beige to accent cocoa-colored walls. Neutral colors throughout the first floor encourage a flow between rooms.

"If someone wants to add instant newness to a house they should repaint the trim. All of the trim was painted white. It makes it look much fresher and brighter."

Louanne's painting wizardry extended much further than simply painting woodwork. Classes taken at Bloomfield Decor led to labor intensive decorative painting of walls by Louanne. Surfaces, painted up to four times with a variety of techniques, not only create interest but avoided the costly installation of wallpaper.

But Louanne didn't stop at the walls. An antique chest hidden away in the garage took on a marbleized look. Next came a bench and other furniture. Instead of buying a new dining room set, chairs were recovered with fabric from a local store then painted black and sponged in with green. Louanne loved the decorative painting so much she has started a business with sister Rene Abate.

Mark credits his wife for the success of the finished product. She found and bought materials, caulked and painted, and coordinated the project while he was at work.

"It was Louanne who had the vision to move the kitchen into a totally different area," Mark Johnson said, "and that's how this all began."



On the cover: Louanne and Mark Johnson's new room with a view of Middle Straits Lake makes meal-times enjoyable.