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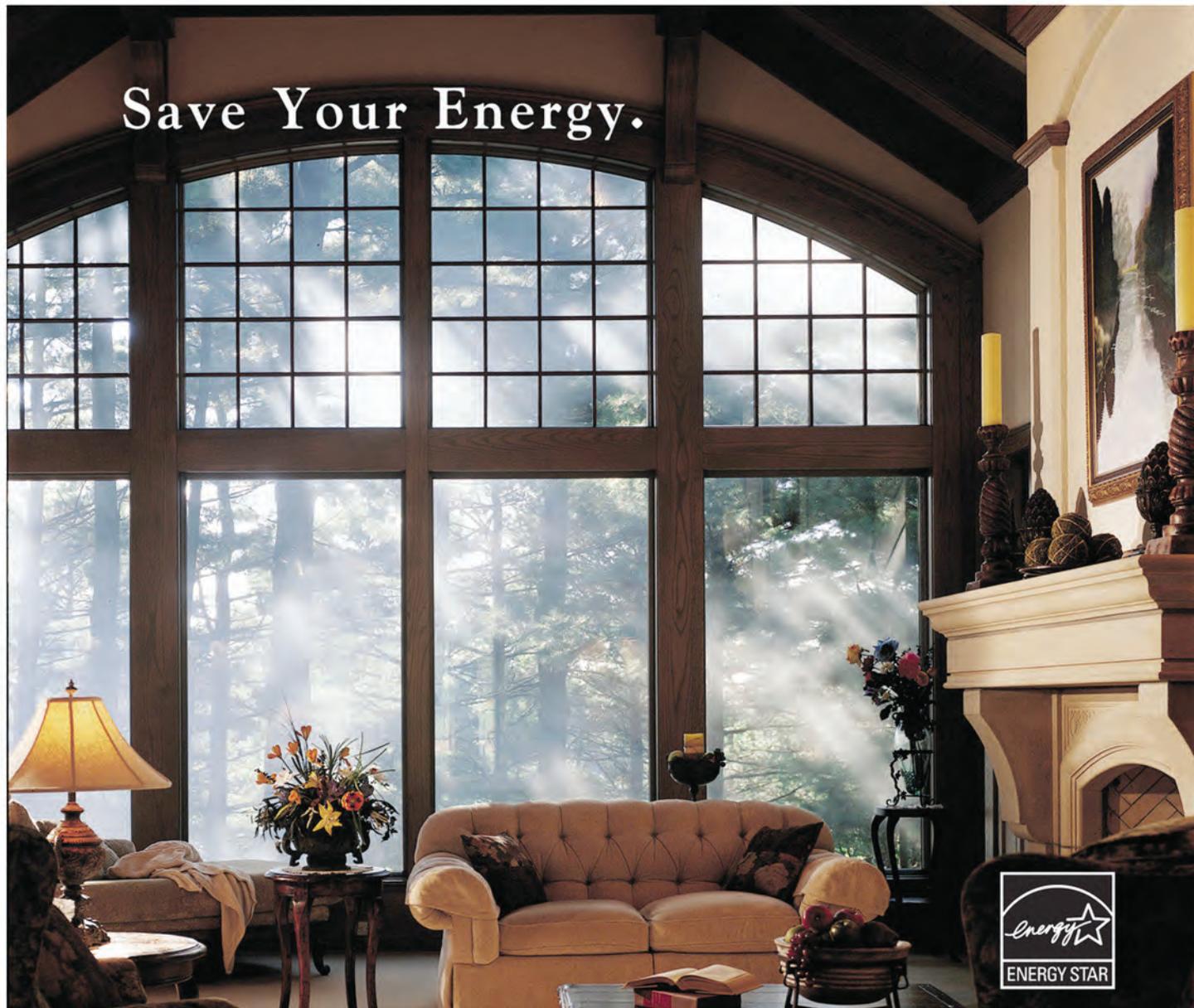
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# Feature Home

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"We've been around a lot of nice homes that inspired ideas," the homeowner said. The 1,900-sq-ft basement remodel became a three-year project with the combined expertise of architectural design by ADIDA, LLC, general contracting by Hawk Hollow Builders, millwork by E. Leet Woodworking, and smart technology by Integrated Smart Technologies, LLC.

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# WELCOME HOME Magazine

VOL. 31, NO. 4

WINTER 2023

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by JB PRINTING CO.\*

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\* JB Printing is an O'Keefe Publishing company, and is the first printing company to be designated as a Clean Corporate Citizen by the Michigan DEQ

Welcome Home Magazine© is published quarterly

## Welcome Home Magazine

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Phone 269-547-0333 / 269-349-9601

okeefepublishing@sbcglobal.net

www.welcomehomekzoo.com

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Welcome Home Magazine is owned and published by O'Keefe Publishing.



Printed on American  
made Paper by  
JB Printing  
Kalamazoo, MI



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# Sloppy Joes

Photography by Linda Hoard

Finding a recipe that can satisfy both kids and adults can be a challenge. However, the classic Sloppy Joe recipe is the perfect solution. An easy weeknight dinner, made with ingredients you may already have in your pantry, is a recipe I made many times for my family and friends over the years. Its simplicity, delicious taste, and ability to be made in bulk and frozen make it a go-to option for busy families. You can whip up a batch of Sloppy Joes that will leave everyone satisfied and asking for seconds. Add this recipe to your repertoire and enjoy the comfort and joy of this timeless dish!

## Ingredients:

2 pounds of ground beef  
1 diced onion  
2 stalks of diced celery (optional)  
1 1/2 to 2 cups of ketchup  
1/4 cup of brown sugar  
2 tablespoons of mustard  
Hamburger buns

## Directions:

Brown the ground beef with the diced onion and celery in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté until the vegetables are tender. Drain excess fat if needed.

Stir in the ketchup, brown sugar and mustard. Mix well to combine all the flavors. Reduce the heat to low and simmer the mixture for 15-20 minutes, allowing the flavors to meld together.

While the Sloppy Joe mixture is simmering, toast the hamburger buns in the oven or on the stovetop.

Once the Sloppy Joe mixture is ready, spoon it onto the toasted hamburger buns.

Serve the Sloppy Joes hot and enjoy!

We like to top with cheese, sliced onions and pickle relish.

It's also great on baked potatoes or as a dip with tortilla chips.

To freeze the Sloppy Joe mixture, allow it to cool completely before transferring it to freezer-safe containers. Label and date the containers and store them in the freezer for up to three months. Thaw in the refrigerator overnight and reheat on the stovetop or in the microwave.

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# Kalamazoo Valley Museum

By Barbara Fisher

Photos Courtesy of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum

**D**id you know that the Kalamazoo Valley Museum had its beginnings in 1881 as a collection of curiosities in the public library basement? Or that the museum has always been community funded and free to the public? Until 1984, explains Lexie Schroeder Kobb, Assistant Director of Museum Programs, the museum remained a department of the Kalamazoo Public Library. From 1984 to 1991 the museum received its operating support from the Kalamazoo Public Schools. Now the museum is part of Kalamazoo Valley Community College and is governed by its Board of Trustees.

February 1996 represented a milestone when a new 60,000 square foot, state-of-the-art museum opened at its current location at the north end of the Burdick Mall. Over 11,000 private donations ranging from \$10 to 4.5 million dollars made this endeavor possible.

Kobb enthusiastically offers that “with constantly changing exhibits, experiential learning for adults and kids, and planetarium shows, there is [just] so much to love about the Kalamazoo Valley Museum”.

The museum offers both permanent and special exhibits, classes and festivals. To keep current on all the museum has to offer visit [kalamazoomuseum.org](http://kalamazoomuseum.org) and/or sign up for the monthly e-newsletter.

On display now, guests may find the following examples of special exhibits.

**SPLAT!** The Buzz about Flyswatters (on display until January 7, 2024). Can you relate to the passion of collecting? Iza van Riemsdijk made her first flyswatter purchase in Japan in 1989 and her collection has grown to over 3,300! Guests may view 1,160 pieces of her collection and learn about the history of flyswatters (of course there is one!) and the local connections to the subject of flies.

**Off the Shelves** (Exploring the Museum’s Furniture Collection) (on display until January 21, 2024) provides a walk through history and more contemporary times; each of the pieces on display has a tale to tell.

January welcomes not only 2024 but also several new special exhibits to appreciate.

**Kalamazoo State Hospital** (February 3, 2024 – January 19, 2025). In 1848, the Michigan legislature recognized the need to address the mental health of its citizens and began steps to create the first psychiatric hospital. The hospital opened in 1859 and 165 years later the hospital continues to operate at its original location. The exhibits will look at the history of the patients, employees and buildings.

**Skin: Living Armor, Evolving Identity** (February 10 - June 2, 2024). We all have it! This exhibit will explore the subject of skin through the lenses of biology, technology, innovation, identity, race and culture.

**The Questioners: Read. Question. Think. PLAY!** (June 15 – September 1, 2024). Based on the best-selling children’s book series by Andrea Beaty celebrating science, technology, engineering, art, math, perseverance and passion, this exhibit will offer young visitors hands-on exploration.

The museum draws from its 60,000 historical and cultural artifacts for its permanent displays. With so many artifacts, even the permanent exhibits regularly undergo change to keep them fresh and relevant. Museum guests will find a number of permanent exhibits including the ones appearing below.

**Mystery of the Mummy.** Highlights of this exhibit include an Egyptian mummy and artifacts coupled with forensic reconstruction of what she looked like.

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history of the museum's favorite artifacts in a three-story shadow-box wall.

Innovation Gallery. The Innovation Gallery is a science exhibit and offers technology-rich exploration of four major areas: body, land, mobility and music.

The museum is about more than the permanent and special exhibits. A favorite destination at the museum is the planetarium. Various themed shows are offered (check the website for offerings and show times). For instance, the Sky Above Us (40 minutes) is designed for 4th graders and older. A primer in learning how to identify celestial treasures of the season, guests will leave with a star chart with tips for finding constellations in the night sky. There is a \$3 charge per person to visit the planetarium.

The museum also offers a few online exhibits such as a look back at the 1980 tornado that ripped through Kalamazoo like a wrecking ball.

And that's not all. The Kalamazoo Valley Museum organizes annual festivals and unique offerings for adults including the Fretboard Festival (luthiers and stringed instruments with live music, workshops and demonstrations), S.W.A.N. (State Wide Astronomy Night), a collaboration with educational institutions around the state, a new food theme each year with the Kalamazoo Foodways Symposium, Juneteenth Celebration of Freedom (a film festival) and the Gilmore Film Series in collaboration with the Gilmore Piano Festival.

On a seasonal basis, enjoy tours of the museum's environmentally friendly rain gardens offering beauty as well as providing a place for rain to soak into the ground instead of running into the streets and storm sewers.

The museum offers free general admission and is open 10 AM – 4 PM Tuesday – Saturday and noon until 4 PM on Sunday. Parking is available in the Arcadia Ramp (on the corner of Eleanor and Rose next to the museum) or at metered parking. Street metered parking is free after 5 PM and all day Saturday and Sunday.





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## Green Thumbs Year Round

By Zinta Aistars

**T**he Ouding family is a family of green thumbs, all pointing upward. River Street Flowerland on 1300 River Street in Kalamazoo first took root as a family greenhouse in 1978 with retail greenhouses. Jane Ouding, daughter of founders Karen and Mike Ouding, elaborates on the business history:

"It was part of a wholesale bedding plant greenhouse operation started by Robert Ouding after he switched from growing celery on the same plot in the 1960s," Jane Ouding says. "Rick Ouding, my uncle, started a wholesale greenhouse in 1984 and took over the Market Street corner when his grandfather retired in 1991. Rick decided to keep the retail going, and so River Street Flowerland was reincarnated in the spring of 1992 with his sister-in-law, Karen, my mother, taking the retail helm. The retail team included Mike Ouding, and his mother, Carolyn Ouding. Carolyn added her unique eye for detail, color, texture, and a constant pursuit of the odd plant to each combination planter she creates."

Jane Ouding joined the business and brought her work home with her as well. She has, she says, more than 200 plants throughout her home. Through the inherited wisdom of family generations, as well as her own hands-on experience, she has learned what works and what doesn't when keeping plants healthy.

"The most important thing to keep in mind is that growing plants is a learning opportunity," she says. "Start with something that catches your eye and do your best to abide by the care recommendations. The same plants won't react the same in different places—it's up to you to learn about your plant and your space. This can be daunting but it's fun, too!"

With the help of artificial lights, fertilizers, and time, Ouding says a committed plant-grower can make most any plant thrive. Adjust care by keeping an eye on how the plant responds to different variables. If the plant loses color, goes limp, or begins to brown, check lighting, check if the soil is too wet or too dry.

"All of these changes can tell you something about your plant," Ouding says. "Sometimes a plant tells us it's not right for us by doing what some think is the very worst—dying. However, I think this is just an opportunity to try again, using the knowledge we learned from that first plant."

As for choosing low-maintenance plants, Ouding says that can be a tricky question. She favors succulents, usually thought of as low maintenance, but they do require lots of bright light, she points out.

"And they do need water, at least sometimes," she says. "I water mine almost like any annual through the summer, and then when they come inside for the winter, they get a thorough drink every 4 to 6 weeks so that their root body stays intact and isn't shocked when the growing season comes back around."

Ouding prefers Ficus Decora in her own home as a low-maintenance tree that adapts well to change and comes in an assortment of variegations. For Ficus plants, she recommends dusting the leaves every two months.

Plants requiring more maintenance include begonias and alocasia, but, she says, are well worth it for the beauty they bring to a home. Begonias prefer to be almost dry while simultaneously thriving in a humid atmosphere. Use fresh or distilled water. Alocasia leaves, meanwhile,



do best when leaves receive a weekly polish with neem oil or a general pest spray.

When the cold Michigan months roll in, Ouding offers instructions for helping outdoor plants survive.

“For the most part, if it’s above ground it should come inside,” Ouding says. “It’s getting harder and harder to predict our Michigan winters, but above ground planters have a pretty good chance of freezing all the way through, killing your plant and potentially breaking your pot.”

If room inside is at a minimum, Ouding suggests cutting the outdoor plants back and placing them along the south side of the house, where they should be more protected from the elements.

“And cross your fingers. So far this has worked for me with all sorts of herbs, but it’s always a gamble,” she says. “For the most part, plants aren’t actively growing during these winter months. That means we can

taper back on watering, and many plants even benefit from a good trim. This can promote branching and for flowering plants often even more buds. As it begins to warm, you can ramp up your watering; during the depths of winter, you may have been watering as little as monthly, but as we head into spring this should become more regular. Weekly is usually ample. Try not to put your plants back outside until we’re above freezing at night. For Michigan, that’s often as late as May 15.”

#### PLANTS INSIDE A MASON JAR

For Dianna Nance, owner of Mason Jar Plant Shop and Shady Lady Plant Interiors at 116 West South Street in Kalamazoo, the influence of a previous generation brought her, too, to a love of plants. In her case, however, that love was born out of growing up around a mother who had a passion for gardening. A vegetable garden was also an

outgrowth of need for the family of eight, to keep all mouths fed with fresh vegetables.

“My mother, Jean, grew not only amazing flowers, but also vegetables and fruit that she would turn into all manner of preserves—jellies and salsa and sauces—all kept in carefully tracked Mason jars, and woe to you if you didn’t return them promptly enough so she could start the next batch,” Nance says.

“I lost both my job in healthcare management and my mother in March 2020, and I was faced with making a decision on how to spend the remainder of my career,” Nance says. “My mom left each of her children a small inheritance. Her only request was that we do something meaningful with it, and it was to my gardens and flowers that I turned for inspiration. It struck me then—I could open a plant shop and name it Mason Jar in her memory!”

Together with her daughter, Jill, Nance opened the doors of Mason Jar Plant Shop soon after, alongside her interior plant design business, Shady Lady Plant Interiors.

When customers request help in selecting plants for their home, Nance asks these questions:

- What is your experience with indoor plants? We have many plants that are easy to care for and perfect for those just starting their plant collection.

- What kind of light do you have in the space you want to place these plants? All plants need light, but some need more and some need less to thrive.

- Do you want a table-top plant, a floor plant, a vining plant, or something else?

- Do you have pets that are likely to bother these plants? There are many plants that are pet-safe if that is a consideration.

Nance says that Mason Jar Plant Shop has a focus on indoor houseplants only, and although some can be taken outside during the summer months, all need to be brought indoors before frost.





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## THE HOLIDAYS WITH OLD WORLD STYLE

By Zinta Aistars

Feature Photography by Jim Schuon Photography

When Valentina Velkova, owner of ADIDA, LLC—Architectural-Design-Interior Design-Art—was asked to consider a remodel of a home in the Old-World European style, her eyes lit up.

“It was like a dream project come true,” Velkova said. “Like going back in time. I grew up in an old city in Bulgaria, and that Old World style was all around me. We had a well-preserved Roman theatre up on a hill where I grew up. When the homeowner requested that Old World European look for their basement remodel, I knew just what to do.”

“We’ve been around a lot of nice homes that inspired ideas,” the homeowner said. “Bringing Val into the mix when we decided to remodel our basement, with her heritage and her expertise with the European style—and we knew the quality of her work through friends who had worked with ADIDA—she seemed exactly right for what we wanted.”

The 1,900-square-foot basement became a three-year project, completed in 2020, with the combined expertise of architectural design by ADIDA, LLC, general contracting by Hawk Hollow Builders, millwork by E. Leet Woodworking, and smart technology by Integrated Smart Technologies, LLC.

“It may be Old World style, but with all the bells and whistles,” Velkova said. “We began by opening up the

entire basement space, like working on a white canvas. The homeowners wanted a game room with a billiards table, a guest bedroom with bathroom, a home theatre, a full bar with seating, an exercise room, a wine and whiskey cellar, and a cigar humidor. And all of that separated by Roman-style arches.”

A section of the basement was left for the necessary mechanics of the home, hidden from view.

“We are a boutique builder,” said Sera Gesmundo, owner of Hawks Hollow Builders. “We have been building and remodeling custom homes since 1973—my father Jack Gesmundo started the company. Our roots are in custom cabinetry of quality craftsmanship. We had already done a couple projects for these homeowners, so we worked with them first to understand their vision for the basement.”

### A FUN PLACE TO BE

“We wanted this to be a fun place to be,” the homeowner said. “And we knew Hawks Hollow Builders already, just like ADIDA, and we knew them to be caring and considerate, easy to work with. They put their hearts into what they do.”

Rather than the once-popular open concept, the homeowners wanted each space to be distinct, divided by brick-and-mortar arches and beams along the ceiling.





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“Many of the arches and columns incorporate additional functionality with built-in speakers and storage niches,” Velkova added. “Lighting helped to designate separate spaces, too.”

“Technology is everywhere in this remodel,” the homeowner said. “Yet nowhere. We wanted it to be a part of the space, not to overtake it. Much of it is entirely invisible so that the design stays true to its nature. With a push of a button, it all comes to life. There are security cameras with invisible trip wires, an audio system built into the bar, and when we queue up a movie in the theater, the lighting automatically dims. When the movie ends, the lights come back on by themselves. Shades open, drapes open on their own. We even have a movie board that shows ‘coming soon’ and ‘playing now.’”

Lighting adds to the ambiance with sconces embedded into recessed and arched spaces lining the walls. Vintage chandeliers hang over game tables. Liquor shelving behind the bar has lights focused on the spirits to entice. Floor-mounted lighting beckons the guest forward. The light of a flickering fire in the stone fireplace adds to the comfort.

“Heating and cooling are integrated into the build, too, to maintain the perfect temperature at all times,” the homeowner said. “As for sound, the space is acoustically treated to isolate all sound. If we are entertaining below, or watching a movie, no one upstairs can hear any of it.”

#### BRINGING IN THE HOLIDAY CHEER

As the holiday season nears, the homeowners have decorated their remodeled basement for a season of celebration.

“We went full Griswold,” the homeowner chuckled, alluding to the Christmas movie. “The lights are all out, the garlands, the red bows and wreaths on doors and windows. In the summer, we take advantage of the double walkout doors to the pool in back, but in winter, this is where our friends and family come together. Rainy or snowy days, evenings and weekends, this is where you will find us. It’s our fun place.”

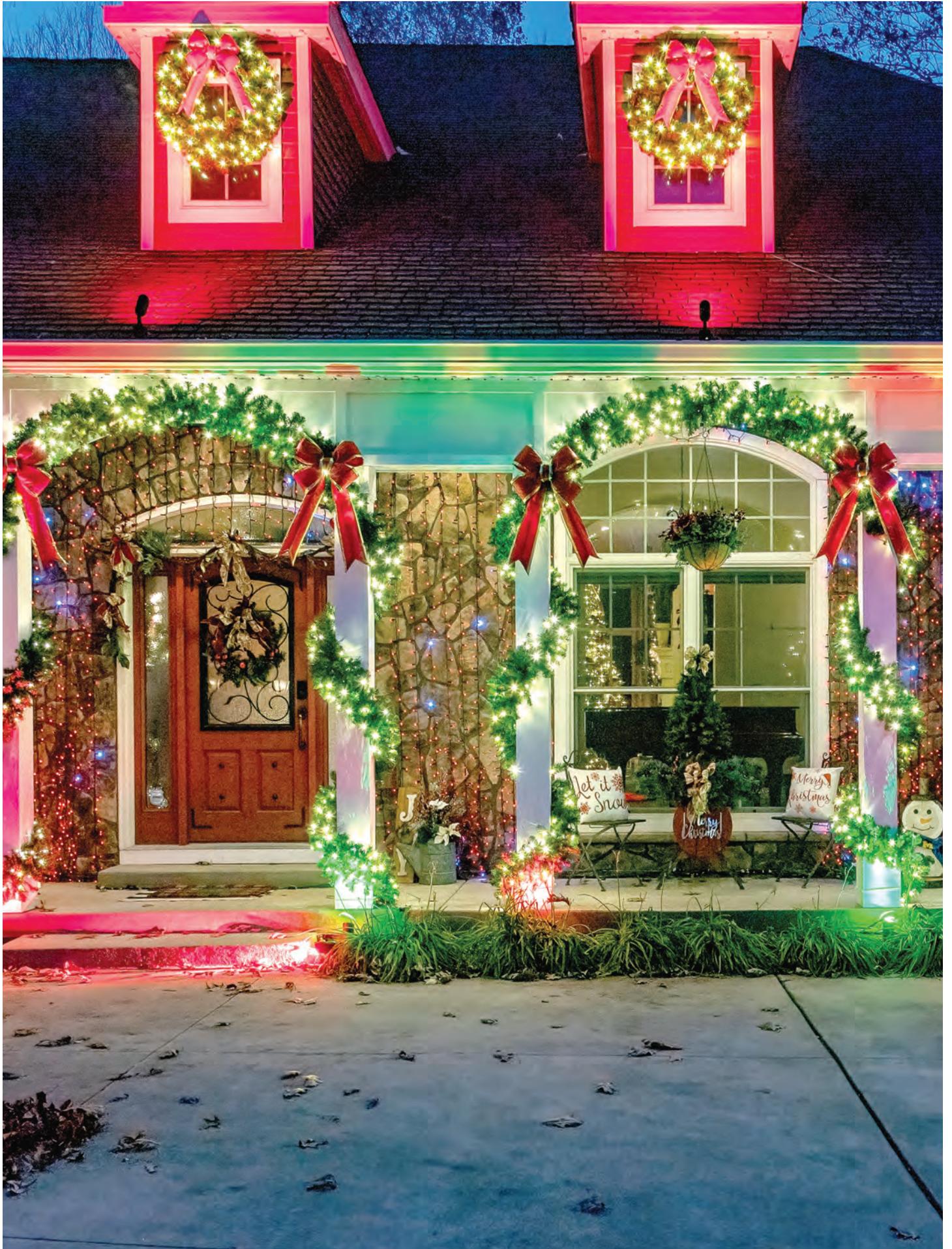
“Since I began ADIDA in 2005, this has been my favorite project,” Velkova said. “It was such a unique project for this country, and it felt like going home for me, to bring my European heritage to the project. To walk into this basement now is like walking into a different world.”

“The finished project looks like a castle from another time,” Gesmundo said. “Our advice to anyone considering a remodeling project is to begin with an initial consultation. We talk through all the details, walk through the home to see if we are a good fit for the job and talk about the possibilities. Then we return to the office and develop the project, work with designers like ADIDA, and return to the homeowners with a written scope of work and estimate.”

Hawks Hollow Builders then post photos daily on a portal provided to the homeowners so that they can follow the progress of the project and read the job log, much like a diary.

It is a team working together, step by step, to make that fondest holiday wish come true.











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# Home Sweet Home Throughout the Years

By Zinta Aistars

For younger homeowners, making renovations to their homes are all about style. For older homeowners, however, home renovations are—and should be—all about safety and function. Most people as they age prefer to stay at home as long as possible, if possible.

The best time to consider what modifications we should make to our homes for our elderly years is before we need them. Planning well ahead can include assessing how our home might accommodate a future need to use canes, walkers, or wheelchairs. It can include making changes to lighting for aging eyes. It can include how rooms are laid out, if there are stairways inside and out, and even incorporating technology that might make daily tasks easier to accomplish.

“Making an assessment of your current home is a good place to start,” said Brian Pennings, vice president of Pennings & Sons at 5829 West KL Avenue in Kalamazoo.

Pennings is a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS). That means he has completed a course headed by the National Home Builders Association, learning about how to remove barriers in a home for aging or disabled homeowners.

“Part of that training was to sensitize us to the needs of someone who, for instance, might have arthritis and has trouble opening doors,” Pennings said. “We would be given a sock with a tennis ball inside of it, put that over our hand and then try to open a door using a doorknob.”

With that, Pennings learned to replace doorknobs with easier-to-grasp levers. It was just one of many renovations possible for a safe and accessible home.

“When we do an assessment, we look for those practical things,” Pennings said. “Doorways at a minimum of 32 inches wide—offset hinges can help with that—and tapering thresholds and door mats. Our newer construction

already does that. Stairs can always be an issue. We take a close look at bathrooms, starting with grab bars and walk-in showers.”

In any new construction, Pennings said, homes are built with aging in place as a consideration.

“When building a new home, we try to eliminate any step from the garage and make sure there is at least one barrier-free entrance into the home,” he said. “And in bathrooms, we put in backing for grab bars in showers, generally make them barrier free. We build wider hallways and doorways, and we put in lighting with the thought of having it in the right places for better vision.”

Pennings said the time to hire a professional to build or renovate for these kinds of changes is now. It may cost more upfront in new construction, he said, but it is a matter of pay now or pay more later.

“You get what you pay for, and thinking about what you will need to age in place can save money later,” Pennings said.

## BEING PROACTIVE FOR FUTURE NEEDS

Branden DeHaan is one of the CAPS team at DeHaan Remodeling Specialists, Inc., at 2805 West Main in Kalamazoo. He is a sales estimator and production manager, and he spent a couple weeks at a seminar to earn his certification as an expert on aging in place.

“Some of the needs for aging homeowners are already part of building codes, but we also worked with designers to look at different layouts and how to navigate them,” DeHaan said.

The most common space to renovate, he said, are bathrooms because that is one of the homes’ tightest, most confined spaces. Kitchens, because they are so often used, are also a top choice for renovations.



“We can put in curb-less showers, and we look at how close the vanity is to the shower,” DeHaan said. “A lot of our work is to look at where you might trip as you move about. Anywhere you might fall or trip, we look at putting in something to hold onto. We can also add in a bench in the shower so that you don’t have to stand too long.”

Steps are a frequent problem, and DeHaan can rebuild stairways to make them easier to climb or add a second railing so that both sides of the stairs have a handhold. Should a ramp be required in a temporary situation, for instance after surgery when mobility is limited, DeHaan Remodeling can provide a portable lightweight, aluminum ramp that can easily be removed when there is no longer a need.

“Lighting can be another concern,” DeHaan said. “We add lighting around doorways and stairways or any area where the flooring may be uneven, and recessed lighting where someone may need more visibility. We can also angle lighting for someone who is in a wheelchair.”

Many of these changes are already incorporated in

new construction, DeHaan said. When working on an older home, the DeHaan team walks through, takes measurements, ask questions about homeowner needs, and then prepare computerized 3-D drawings for the homeowners to see the coming renovations before they begin.

“Those will show you exactly what your home will look like before we tear into anything,” he said.

#### DETAILS THAT ADD UP TO A SAFER HOME

Other changes made to a home to make it safer may not include construction at all. These may include technology such as mats beside beds that send out alerts when someone unexpectedly gets out of bed, medical alert bracelets or necklaces to wear, or other alert systems that can be connected to signal family members, caregivers, health care systems or other kinds of assistance for a homeowner requiring emergency help.

Stocking kitchens with appliances that have automatic shut-offs when no longer in use can be helpful. Electric outlets can be moved to more convenient spots to avoid bending over or tripping on cords. Removing rugs that may slip or adding non-skid rubber mats beneath throw rugs or clearing clutter where it may cause a fall—these may seem like small changes but can add up to keeping the older homeowner secure.

Help paying for repairs and safety updates to your home is available. Check with your state housing finance agency, social services department, community development groups, or the federal government for financial aid programs and discounts.



Jordan and Branden DeHaan  
with their father, DRS founder,  
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# Keeping up Good Spirits

By Zinta Aistars

Photo Courtesy of Distilling Companies



THE KALAMAZOO STILLHOUSE

**D**rip, drip, drip. Amber drops of condensation collect in the big vat as the liquid heats up and the alcohol separates from the hot water and mash. It's a little like magic.

"A true distiller knows when to make the cut," says Joanna Merrill. "A professional distiller can simply put a finger in the tank, scent the liquid, put it on your upper lip, feel the texture on your finger—and you know when it's time."

Cuts are made to separate the pure from the impure alcohol during the process of distillation. It is a moment of decision when the distiller decides what to keep and what to toss. Cuts can also be made to blend different flavors.

Joanna and Nick Merrill would know. They are the owners of Kalamazoo Stillhouse at 618 East Michigan Avenue in Kalamazoo. They distill a selection of wheat and white whiskey, golden and silver rum, vodka, gin, bourbon, and bitters.

"We are both natives of Kalamazoo, and we've always seen Kalamazoo as a beer town," Joanna says. "There's market saturation. Much less so with spirits. Nick's father—he lives in Washington—makes whiskey, and he showed us how to do it. It seemed like a simple enough process, and we thought we could do it."

Whether the process is simple is arguable, but the Merrills established Kalamazoo Stillhouse in 2012, pursued getting their local, state, and federal licenses, and then opened the doors to the public in 2015—only the 45th in the State to obtain that license out of 200 issued, Joanna says.

The building is recognizable from a distance—with an immense, vibrantly colorful mural painted across one side by local artist, Bonus Saves, also known by the name of Patrick Herschberger.

The 4,000-square-foot facility houses hundreds of barrels, different spirits aging inside different woods, most of them for two to three years before they attain perfection. The spirits can be ordered online but must be picked up at the facility, which also sports a tasting room and the occasional workshop. Tours are also available.

"Nick and I have worked hard on our recipes, and we use local resources like Michigan wheat," Joanna says. "Once we got them right, we haven't changed them over the years, so you always know what you are buying. I studied chemistry at Kalamazoo College, so that came in handy," she smiles.



GULL LAKE DISTILLING COMPANY

Another married couple, Lindsey and Theodore Koch, run a distillery across town at 92 East Michigan Avenue in Galesburg. Established in 2017, they, too, required time to obtain licenses and were finally able to open their doors to the public in March 2020.

"And then Covid closed the doors right back again five days later," Lindsey Koch, business manager, says. "We did what we could to survive, selling beer curbside for pickup. We spent the time building an outdoor garden where we now serve food with our spirits."

Gull Lake Distilling Company offers classic spirits such as whiskey, bourbon, rum, gin, vermouth, hard seltzer, and brandy, but they also have a line of flavors one doesn't often find on the liquor shelf: Horseradish Vodka, Blueberry Cobbler Moonshine, Maple Syrup Finished Bourbon Whiskey, Port Wine Finished Bourbon Whiskey, and other intriguing flavors. Most all have a focus on Michigan sourced ingredients, beginning with the grains—corn, rye, wheat, barley, and then flavored with an assortment of fruits and spices.

Most of the spirits and wines are aged in oak barrels, an average of two years but as long as four years. As the Kochs approach their fifth anniversary, they plan to release a four-year aged bourbon in celebration.

"We like to offer a unique experience with unique products," Lindsey says. "Our tasting room has constantly rotating products you may never taste again. We are also unique in that we are a locally-sourced distillery that is also a winery and brewery—something for everyone—but our main focus is on the spirits."

Both of the Kochs were formerly teachers, Lindsey teaching math and Theodore physical education in Chicago, when they decided to start their own business instead.

"We thought about our passions," Lindsey says. "And we had dabbled in home brewing. My brother-in-law was a distiller, and we found what he could do fascinating. When we moved to the Kalamazoo area, we decided on hard spirits because it was a missing niche here."

The Kochs are expanding the food offerings of their business, adding a pizza oven, a Sunday brunch buffet, burgers and hot dogs, sandwiches, and an assortment of appetizers. With a family-friendly atmosphere, children have a selection of mocktails and sodas.



## GREEN DOOR DISTILLING

There's a reason the door is green at the Green Door Distillery at 429 East North Street in Kalamazoo. The owners—Ben Wallace, Steve Jbara, and Scott Benton—gladly explain: "In the prohibition era, chances were that a door painted green meant it fronted a speakeasy. It was one of the only forms of advertisement used to showcase where liquor was sold."

Speakeasies were so named because the illegal patrons were told to "speak easy" and not bring attention to the prohibited business on the other side of the door. For the Green Door Distillery, the hope is that the green door will signify good times and good spirits—and might even inspire a shout out.

The three friends brought varied business experiences to their distillery. Scott Benton is also an equity partner in the Grand Rapids Gold G-league basketball team, through which he first connected with Jbara and Wallace. He also owns and oversees the direction of the printing company, Vizcom Media.

Steve Jbara is the founder and co-owner of the Grand Rapids Gold G-League basketball team, CEO and co-founder of Detroit-based ad agency Atomic Honey, and Chief Strategy Officer of Brooklyn-based CO2 technology firm, Air Company.

Bringing the final scoring point to the distillery is Ben Wallace. Wallace played in the NBA and also owns BW Undrafted, a Michigan-based cannabis company.

Also joining the team is Kalamazoo native, Shaneé Marvin, managing day-to-day operations at the distillery when she is not working at Atomic Honey or as director of strategy at Grand Rapids Gold.

"Ben, Steve, and I have worked on a number of companies together and the three of us have found great balance and success in those endeavors," Benton says. "I look forward to putting Green Door on the map in the state of Michigan."

Spirits on the Green Door Distillery shelf include vodka, gin, whiskey, and an assortment of liqueurs in flavors such as blueberry and hazelnut coffee. The tasting room offers a list of tantalizing cocktails.

Cheers!



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