



making lemonade

Couple builds home despite complications during pandemic

BY GLENDA WINDERS // PHOTOGRAPHY SUBMITTED

Mike and Rebecca Kirsch can joke about building a custom house during COVID now that they are living in their home on Harrison Lake. But the timing couldn't have been worse. Building during a pandemic meant material shortages and many delays. The round tiles that Rebecca wanted for the master bathroom, for example, were not available, so she had to choose a completely different style.

"We took lemons and made lemonade," she said. "I had a vision for that bathroom, but you couldn't get those tiles, so I just had to change my vision."

And there were other snafus. When the cabinetmakers produced cupboards at the wrong height, leaving tons of wasted space above them, builder Tom Banister came up with a solution. He suggested adding more on top of what was there and tying the two levels together with a simple strip of wood. That then required moving the valances that hold remote-controlled shades to the level of the strip, but in the end the result was seamless.

When the Kirsches originally came to Columbus in 1994, they lived at Tipton Lakes.

"That's where we got the bug for the water," Rebecca said. "We loved living on a lake, fishing, playing, boating — we had a lot of fun."

But as their children got older, the family moved into town so they could be close to St. Bartholomew School and North High School. Now that they are adults (Sloane, 30; Harrison, 28; and Gabe, 25), this new house is just for Mike and Rebecca, along with canine companions Cayenne and Roxie.

Once they became empty-nesters, they decided to go back to lakeside living. They looked at several homes for sale, but each of them would have needed a significant amount of work to make them exactly what they wanted. Instead, they bought a lot and hired architect Jeff Marshall to design a home. After a drive to look at what they did and didn't like in the houses they saw, he came up with the design: a

Mike and Rebecca Kirsch's custom-built home on Harrison Lake.



Mike and Rebecca Kirsch's kitchen features a large slab of white Cambria quartz with deep-gray markings that sets the tone for the rest of the room.

3,138-square-foot mid-century-style home with four bedrooms and three bathrooms arranged on a main floor and a finished walk-out basement.

Then they hired Banister Construction.

"Mike and Rebecca were awesome to work with throughout the build process," Banister said. "Their input and their timely selections of new and innovative products and features throughout the home made for a great experience for us as their building contractor."

They chose stone and siding for the exterior. The piece that set the tone for the interior décor was a huge slab of white Cambria quartz with deep-gray markings that Rebecca fell in love with the moment she saw it. From there it was on to white cabinets, stainless-steel appliances, silver-tile backsplashes and black fixtures with square faucets. Drawer

and cabinet pulls are square and black, and black door handles are attached with square black bolts. Every detail was painstakingly selected by the couple with some help from interior designer Colleen Smith.

"We're only going to build this house once," Rebecca said.

Next came the black-and-silver seating at the island.

"We are a family of five," Rebecca said, "and when everyone's here, they all have a seat at the table."

If the dinner crowd is larger, a nearby dining alcove is arranged so that all the guests can see one another. The table here was fashioned from a tree that fell in a storm and was then ebonized by sculptor Donald Mee. That area and a couple of others are bumped out for both space and aesthetics to give a sense of movement to the back of the house. The three-car garage in the front serves the same

purpose, a tip they got from both Marshall and Banister.

The project was a collaboration in many ways. The great room plans called for four windows looking out over the water, but the Kirsches wanted as little obstruction of their view as possible. They asked Banister for one big picture window, which he said wasn't possible, but they settled for two and were delighted with the results.

Another builder to whom they spoke advised them not to extend their deck all the way across the house because it would restrict the view. Instead, the deck runs along one side of the house and part of the garage, still giving them plenty of room to entertain. Arranging the deck in this way, however, caused a 5-foot drop to the garage. The solution was to construct a bridge, and now they can easily store umbrellas and extra chairs in there.

"You adapt during the build," Mike said.

They are grateful for another suggestion from an architect friend who advised them not to remove all the trees from their lot, and they said Banister helped them keep as many as possible. Some were tall enough that the branches don't obstruct the view. They also wanted to save space for an eventual pool, but for now a hot tub and fire pit enable them to enjoy the outdoors.

Countertops throughout the house are quartz, floors are maple, and the décor is basically black and white. All the furniture came from Furnitureland South in High Point, North Carolina, where the couple masked up and went shopping, also during COVID.

That includes the comfortable teak and rattan pieces they bought for what was going to be a screened-in

porch but turned out to be a cozy TV den. An art piece to which their son contributed when he was a student at St. Bartholomew's adorns the mantelpiece over the fireplace.

Also on this floor is the master bedroom, with its own dramatic view of the lake. The suite includes a bathroom outfitted with large white subway tiles punctuated by black and gray decorative ones. The deep gray cabinetry features appliance cupboards with electrical outlets for such items as toothbrushes and hair-dryers. An art piece from China lends a splash of red to the room. The huge walk-in closet has no built-in cabinets or drawers.

"It's nothing fancy, just shelves and rods," Mike said. "I'm very visual. I like to be able to see my stuff."

A guestroom earmarked for Rebecca's mother is also here, and the only exception to the consistent black and white décor — a bathroom with one wall painted Kirsch Red. A sliding barn door covers a hallway to the garage that along the way passes the laundry room and cubbies for coats and boots. Also hidden away here is a small office with a military desk that Mike painted bright red. The builders moved the window scheduled for this space to make for a better view. The dogs' eating area is brightened by a painting of a colorful poodle by Lydia Wilmer.

John Hendricks fashioned the solid walnut staircase with its unusual railing, and over it hangs an elegant light fixture from Italy made from recycled plastic. Nearby is a wall of crosses collected during their travels all over the world, symbols of their Catholic faith.

Downstairs is what Rebecca calls "a fun play area." The living room is equipped with a pool

table and shuffleboard game in addition to comfortable seating and television. The kitchen's special features are a pass-through window to the outside patio and glass tiles behind the bar area.

One bedroom on this floor faces the lake, and the other has no windows so that it can be used as a storm cellar. The two rooms are connected by a Jack and Jill bathroom whose shower has a surprise of its own.

"We tried to keep natural light wherever we could," Rebecca said, "so the shower has a big window. Even though you're down in the basement, it doesn't feel like it."

The couple are both Indiana natives. They met when she was working on a co-op program (university coursework alternating with on-the-job training) at what was then Allison Gas Turbine in Indianapolis and is now a part of Rolls Royce. His bachelor's degree is from Purdue, where he had taken part in the same program. Later he earned two master's degrees

at MIT. Her undergraduate work was at what is now the Kettering Institute with an MBA from Indiana University.

Since both are engineers, Rebecca likes to joke that he was a turbine designer, she was a compressor designer and between them there was combustion. They married in 1990 and came

to Columbus when she took a job with Cummins. During the course of that position they lived in England for more than two years as part of her work.

Now both retired, the couple enjoy playing golf and riding bicycles together, but their shared passion is travel.

"The day I retired we were in Ljubljana, Slovenia," Mike said, "and the day she retired we were in Barcelona."

Since retirement they've taken a trans-Atlantic cruise, and this fall they will walk the 160-mile Camino de Santiago in Portugal and Spain. They plan to be away most winters but back to their forever home in the summertime.

"Their engineering and business knowledge really helped all of us to collaborate and create a truly custom build to fulfill their visions and expectations," Banister said. "Their vision for a mid-century modern home on Harrison Lake fits its surroundings very well. It will be a timeless design in that location for many years to come." ☺

The front entrance to Mike and Rebecca Kirsch's home.

