



Fixing a No-View Conundrum

A CREEK-SIDE HOME RE-BUILD AND THE TEAM THAT MADE IT HAPPEN

By Lisa J. Gotto | Photography by Curtis Martin Photography

When an Annapolis couple moved into their lovely, two-story brick Colonial nestled within a robust copse of mature trees along a creek 12 years ago, they knew a few things right away: that they would enjoy the proximity to the water for years to come and—in years to come—they would need to make serious changes to the home's structure if they were to ever truly take advantage of its tranquil water views.



TAKING STOCK

First and foremost; they loved the land. The couple is environmentally mindful in everything they do, so the wooded nature of their lot with many large trees spoke to them. Two trees in particular, a large willow oak and majestic maple tree had been providing ample summer-time shade, so they wanted to preserve them. The nearby creek and the home's accompanying dock and slip, made Bay access a breeze for the avid boaters. So those vital aspects checked off two very important boxes for them.



And while they also loved the privacy the home afforded them, the style of the home consistent with that of most two-story Colonials, was limiting to them.

"The original home was built in the '60s or '70s without any consideration taken to situate it for water views," notes the husband.

Colonial homes in general are known for their charming windows with grid inserts; very quaint in Colonial times with a candle on every sill, but not as practical or desirable when they're obstructing a water view.

"They were small windows," he says, also noting a problem with the location of key rooms. "The family room and the dining room faced the driveway."

"The best view from the house was from the laundry room," adds the wife. So, room placement was also an issue.

"We took a look at the architecture...", says the husband, who has a professional background in electrical engineering and a keen interest in home construction, "...the stairway was right in the middle of the house which created some strange flow patterns. I thought about how to move the stairs to a different place to open it up. Renovation was further complicated by the brick exterior."

Ideally, they wanted cathedral ceilings, but the home was configured with a bath and a bedroom in the second story space that they would have to take out in order to make that happen.

What they did do early on to address the limited views was add a screened-in Florida room facing the creek off the back porch. Needless to say, this room became the most popular in the house. “We spent 90 percent of our time out there,” the wife says.

For the coolest months, they added a wood stove. However, with no ventilation connection to the rest of the home, the room again was limiting and definitely did not provide a long-term solution to their no-view conundrum.

“At that point,” he says, “you’re starting to take a look at ‘why don’t we just tear this down and start over again,’ because it’s actually less expensive to do reconstruction, or to do a new build than to try and fix what’s there.”

REBUILDING THE DREAM

The plans to tear-down and rebuild began in earnest in 2017, when they started researching floorplans online. This led them to an article about energy-efficient homes that mentioned a company called Bensonwood Homes located in New Hampshire. Further research provided a name of another company located in Idaho that specialized in timber-framed energy-efficient homes. With somewhat of a plan and definite dreams in mind, the two took flight to see what both companies had to offer.

Both offered floorplans with convenient, yet extremely well-conceived custom home options. Both companies would pre-fabricate some of the structure, building the



shell in a factory and then shipping it to their lot in Maryland. The couple was intrigued—and encouraged by the time that might be saved by going this route with the build.

Working from a photo in a brochure of a home interior they loved, and a draft floorplan that they created, the homeowners sat with an architect at Bensonwood and collaborated until a clear plan was devised—a plan that would take them far from the colonial framework that they had to the perspective of a visually stunning timber-framed contemporary.



ADDRESSING CRITICAL AREAS

Back in Annapolis with floorplan in hand, they had other hurdles to consider before the tear-down and build could start. As with many homes in our area, situated on the water, the home is located in a “critical area.” This designation was initially discussed during their session with the Bensonwood architect, as the original home’s footprint could not be altered in any way that would encroach on the critical areas or they would be in conflict with the State’s restrictions.

Another concern: on-site project management and custom building and construction know-how for crucial issues such as permitting, tear-down management, building integrity, and custom interior integration. For this, the couple turned to a local, award-winning custom home builder, Lundberg Builders of Stevensville. Their choice of builder would play a key role in many critical issues associated with this unique rebuild—not just the ones the State dictates.

In the fall of 2017, the homeowners and the Lundberg team began the daunting

process of the excavation and the demolition of their existing home. While it may seem like this is pretty elemental once you get a wrecking ball in place, they did not necessarily want it to go down that way. They researched and then expressed their environmental concerns with Lundberg Builders Site Supervisor, Keith Germerhausen, who made sure that as many of the dismantled materials as possible would go to a company specializing in home material recycling. Windows and doors were carefully removed for re-use, two by fours, timber, and other salvaged wood was

piled and designated for recycling, and two stories worth of sturdy bricks from the colonial, with the exception of the fireplace brick, were saved and then donated to Baltimore-based nonprofit, Second Chance.

So, by the time the couple took delivery of their first tractor-trailer full of building materials from Bensonwood in January 2018, the husband was more than ready to continue his hands-on participation in the build. (It took five tractor trailers to deliver all the materials that would be necessary to build the shell of their new home.)

The husband not only took detailed notes on every step of the process, he rolled up his sleeves and was anxious to help with as many parts of the build as he could. That started with those first deliveries of the materials, which included the large sections of pre-built exterior panels. The entire construction team on the ground was composed of four Bensonwood employees, two Lundberg employees, including Keith Germershausen, and the husband.

The build required fresh poured footings and foundation walls which would provide the base for those pre-built exterior panels, which are very similar to SIPS (structural insulated panels), only these are constructed of dense-packed cellulose instead of foam insulation. The result is an extremely durable, tightly-built, and energy-efficient structure.

A hydraulic truck crane was tasked with hoisting the heavy panels and sections of Douglas Fir timbers, and then lowering them into place per the exacting specifications of the new home's footprint. "When the panels get assembled all the seams are taped," explains Germershausen, who adds that vapor barrier zip sheeting is used to construct the panels to help reduce air infiltration.

In little more than two weeks-time, the installation of the home's exterior walls and roof was complete and the crew began roughing out the interiors. At this point, the Bensonwood crew returned to New Hampshire and the custom interior work was done by Lundberg Builders.

One of the most popular interior elements, the new wood stove in the main living area, would be the husband's project, and once in place, it provided the crew with the first warm days they had in a very cold-weather undertaking.

Within weeks the blueprint transitioned into the true vision. The lower level open floorplan flowed from a spacious entryway to a two-story great room with impressive and expansive fir timber framing. The moment you walk onto the classic oak floors at the front door you have a clear sightline to the creek that winds along the back of the house; the lush tree canopy bordering the wall of windows like a custom frame.

OPTIONS, DECISIONS, AND THAT ALL-IMPORTANT KITCHEN

Not everything about the old house had to go. Earlier, during the demolition process, the wife had a specific request: Could the second story bathroom be saved and re-installed into the new property?

"I said, 'I really like this bathroom; if you could just pick it up and move it to the new house.'"

She says the team at Lundberg did not bat an eye; they told her they would make it work. She was not disappointed, noting that Lundberg did make it work despite the fact that it wasn't the same size, they had to add a shower, and they needed to uninstall and then re-install a clawfoot tub.





She also had a very vested interest in the outfitting of the roomy, rustic kitchen they had been planning and seeing that come to fruition. Fortunately, many of the mandatory material, finish, and fixture choices were made by this time since the couple had done a great deal of pre-planning.

One finish decision that did need to be made toward the completion of the project was the choice of hardware for the kitchen cabinets and drawers. What could have been a problem for some people, turned into one of the charming get-togethers the homeowners hosted during the building process. A housewarming party was thrown for them and guests were given the suggestion to each bring a knob for their kitchen cabinets and drawers.



Walking through the kitchen today you will find an eclectic collection of knobs—each with a special meaning or story of its own created with the help of the giver. The homeowners cherish it.

So, what started out as a couple with a house full of hiccups became a true collaboration of the discerning homeowners, a visionary home design company, and a local builder with optimal project management and construction expertise.

“I couldn’t imagine having anyone different on that team,” the wife says of all the people it took to turn a house without one good view into a home with many great ones.