

| FEATURE



Crooked Lake cottage rises to the challenge ... and wins

Sometimes location follows determination. Or family. Such is the case with the tastefully updated Crooked Lake cottage of Bryan and Connie Rellinger.

"We weren't even looking at this place," Bryan says of the wonderful little cottage, a stone's throw from Oden Island in Ponshevaing.

However, after spending several years in a cottage just up the street, the property came on the market and the Rellingers knew they were soon to move.

They didn't want to go far, however, because more than a place on the lake, the couple and their two children appreciate family. Bryan's father, Gary, lives just up the street, near their old place, and Bryan and Connie were determined to keep that family connection close. Growing up in the area also means Bryan's boyhood memories run deep in the neighborhood.

So with help from Stephanie Baldwin of Edgewater Design Group in Petoskey, Bryan's friend since elementary school, the Rellinger family set about transforming the early 20th century lake home into a 21st century treasure.

Zoning regulations limited the size of what the team could accomplish, but not the scope.

"We had to change our entire idea," Bryan says. "We had to think smaller but more detailed."

Baldwin says the project required creative thinking. ▶

By Glen Young • Photography by G. Randall Goss



The Rellinger family

Jack, Connie, Bryan and Grace



"It packs a lot of features into a small footprint. It's a doll of a house."
Stephanie Baldwin, Edgewater Design Group





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"The biggest challenge was it is on a non-conforming lot," she explains. "It required conversations and several meetings to see what we could and couldn't do; it sits about 25 feet off the water."

Calling the project "an extreme remodel," the group conceived ideas, and made preparations. The goal was a winter renovation, with a move-in date of Memorial Day. Then the winter of 2013 arrived, throwing in a new challenge.


Pellston builder Jim Boelter plowed ahead, taking advantage of every break in weather and opportunity to make progress.

"You are in reverse" on such projects, says Boelter, explaining how remodels typically require some demolition take place before renovation begins.

Boelter and his crew found a particular challenge in the removal of a masonry porch and chimney in the area of the new entryway. The original masons used field-stone and other heavy stone to bolster the old masonry.

"There's a true test there," Boelter says, as his crew first tore out the old masonry, then took the area down to the floor joists before constructing the updated entry.

"We took the whole house down to the first floor, then rebuilt the exterior ▶



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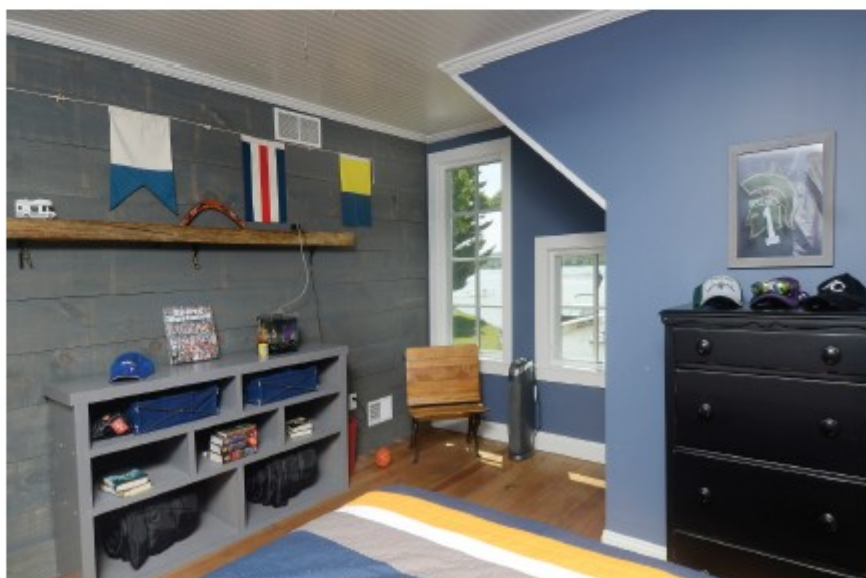
"...a skilled builder who went above and beyond. Very responsive with excellent communication throughout the project." - Bryan Rellinger

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“We wanted different finishes in each room. Our goal was to be creative in space.”
Bryan Rellinger



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walls, and rebuilt the interior spaces so the kitchen has a view of the lake,” Baldwin says.

In the end, Boelter says, he and his crew, following Baldwin’s plans, created a cottage with “a great appearance. We tried to maintain that look,” he says, which all involved agree is the result.

“We made the most efficient use of the space we had,” Baldwin says.

The remodel resulted in a 2,100-square-foot cottage with four bedrooms and two bathrooms, enough size for the family to enjoy as well as use to entertain family and friends.

The kitchen now offers sweeping views of Oden Island to the southwest. A main floor master bedroom also looks out on the lake, with a master bathroom detailed with custom tile accents.

“It packs a lot of features into a small footprint,” says Baldwin. “It’s a doll of a house.”

Upstairs, the guest bedroom doubles as an office, while the couple’s two children, 13-year-old Grace and 9-year-old Jack, enjoy their own distinctively decorated bedrooms. Much of Grace’s bedroom furniture is original to the cottage, but with fresh paints and accents. The view from Jack’s room gives the impression of being on a boat, as there is only water to see.

Across the hall, in the office, a large ▶

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wood relief map of Crooked Lake, originally featured in the Ponsheawaing General Store, hangs handsomely on the wall.

Completed in the footprint of the original cottage, the updated home provides not only the additional sleeping space, thanks to the second floor dormers that provide each of the kids with their own bedroom, but also the updated kitchen space on the main floor, with granite countertops. A sliding barn door can separate the kitchen from the main entryway.

Grace appreciates "that I can wake up and see the lake." Jack opines more practically. "I like that our rooms are not connected anymore," he laughs. Before the updates, the siblings shared space in the same room.

"We wanted it to be rustic," Connie says.

Bryan explains, "We wanted different finishes in each room." He adds, "Our goal was to be creative in space."

Mixing colors, textures and fixtures, the project provides for interesting spaces around every corner. Running throughout the main floor is vintage chestnut flooring, salvaged from a rustic West Virginia barn. Bryan located the repurposed planks through a web search, and then arranged to have the lumber shipped to Pennsylvania where a lumber mill readied the boards for flooring. On the second floor, the original yellow pine floors provide a similar classic look.

The updated design provides for an additional eight feet of space on the back of the original structure, built in the early years of the last century.

Through it all, Bryan and Connie were determined to use as many local contractors as possible, including White Pines Electric and Superior Stone. Petoskey craftsman Eric Boese of Penta Associates completed the floors and other woodworking features, including a dining table crafted from the same reclaimed chestnut. Fairbairn's in Alanson installed plumbing. Tony Pethers of Tony's Creations completed custom stone and tile work



on the interior, while Josh Wyatt of White Pines Electric "was key to electric design as well," Bryan explains.

James Cesario of J Cesario Builders is currently finishing a detached garage that will also offer additional living space on a second floor, as well as ample storage for vehicles and toys.

As accommodating as the cottage now is, Grace and Jack, and their parents appreciate as much as the updates, the nearby ameni-

ties, like the bike trail, which they regularly access for trips to the Dairy Queen, or to Alanson for a game of pick-up basketball.

The best part, however, is their connection to family.

A family favorite is "Cousin Week," when Bryan's several siblings and families convene for time at the lake. "Tubing is our favorite thing to do," says Grace. And of course, living just down the road from Grandpa is a perk, too. [HL](#)