



Family Legacy

at PONDEROSA COVE



written by PATRICE PETERSON
photos by KIP JOHNSON



"WE COULDN'T WAIT TO HAVE OUR FOUR TEENAGE SONS COME HERE IN THE SUMMER AND EXPERIENCE LAKE LIFE."

Heather Erickson
homeowner

*I*t's a well-known fact that there are way more than 10,000 lakes in Minnesota. As a defining feature in many areas of the state, they can be a source of lifelong family memories at resorts and cabins. Just as each lake has its own unique characteristics as far as size, clarity, depth, and fishability, each cabin or homeowner also has a unique story to tell. Not everyone is a "lake person," but many properties have been in families for generations and will continue to be there for future ones. With their Ponderosa Cove home, the Ericksons hope to begin an ongoing tradition and family legacy on Eagle Lake.

Wade and Heather Erickson have lived in Alaska for 25 years, but both are originally from Minnesota and still have strong roots and families here. When they began thinking about purchasing a lake home, Heather somehow knew it would have to be on Eagle Lake, near her hometown of Ashby.

"We had school friends on this lake, and played there growing up," she says. "It's a real treasure, with freshwater springs and some freshwater coral. We couldn't wait to have our four teenage sons come here in the summer and experience lake life."

Heather also knew that the home they built would have to be designed with purpose and meaning. Family and friends have been at the forefront of each of those decisions, and, with a little help, she's created a beautiful blending of her family's heritage with a thoughtful and creative design. The results are stunning.

There is deep meaning in almost every aspect of this home, and the interconnections are exceptional. One example of the family connections is the handmade redwood canoe hanging from the vaulted ceiling in their new home. It lends a dramatic element to the entryway and living room and provides a backdrop for the wrought iron spiral staircase in the corner.

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"My dad and brother built that canoe during the early '70s at a friend's garage in Minneapolis," she explains. "It's sea-worthy, but they probably never used it. I remember it being in the garage all my life, and later it was left outside for many years and got weathered. When I saw it again more recently, I told my dad that we need it in the cabin we were building. At 85 years old, he refurbished it and brought it back to its glory. It took three men to get it hung up there."

The Property

In 2016, this property on Eagle Lake came up for sale. It had more than 200 feet of lake-shore, with an older, pre-built cabin on it, and a slight slope to the side of the lot.

"Since we were in Alaska, my cousin Bill, who is more like my brother, helped us with our search," says Heather. "We sent him out to look at it and give us feedback. Although we knew that the pre-built structure currently on the property had a limited lifetime, our intention was always to build at some point."

For four years, the family spent summers at the small cabin, started making memories at the lake, and then began formulating plans. A friend "rescued" the small cabin, moving it to another location, and they started construction on their new home in 2020.

"We really have the best of both worlds here," she says. "We have a sandy beach on part of it, and then also some weeds that provide a fishing hole off the dock. It's awesome for

the kids to be able to swim and fish on our property."

Eagle Lake has a very round shape, with just a small bay that juts out on their property. They decided to name it Ponderosa Cove. Heather's grandparents, Sally and Tony, had lived in a ranch house north of Dalton in a forested area, and a Ponderosa sign (from the TV show) hung right above the driveway. The Chris-Craft boat that Heather received as a birthday present from Wade is also named Sally to honor her grandmother.

Naming almost everything is a popular pastime for this family, and it's another nod to the connections that continue to weave through Ponderosa Cove.



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The Plan

A family friend in Alaska had a direct link to an architect in Perham, Minnesota, so another connection was established when Heather and Wade reached out to Kelli Wegscheid at Harmonious Architecture.

"When I first met with the Ericksons at their site, and discussed what they were trying to accomplish, we realized the lot is high on one side and low on the other side," Kelli explains. "That could make it a bit complicated, but we deal with all shapes and sizes of lots in our work. We knew the steps to take to work with the property, instead of fighting the property."

The design Kelli drew worked with the hill, and it fit the odd-shaped lot. The spaces in the home itself were all thought out to incorporate as much family as possible.

"Heather told me they wanted a room for her sister, a room for her brother, bunks for the kids, and an elevator to make sure everyone, including her parents, had access," says Kelli. "I think that's the point of it all. When they come from Alaska, they all want to be together as much as possible."



The Build

Choosing a builder made for an even more direct connection. Dale Bahr, owner of Above the Bahr Construction, graduated from high school with Wade in New Ulm.

"We're still close friends," says Dale, who does residential contracting work in St. Peter, Minnesota. "Some people worry about mixing friends and business, but it's not a problem if you have the right friends. They're amazing people, and our close partnership made it work."

Dale started his own company in 2019, and he says it was good timing when the Ericksons decided to build this house soon after that. He commuted to the Battle Lake area during the week throughout much of the construction. Although they had some setbacks waiting for materials, and some variances for the lot complexities, it was an overall positive experience.

"There was so much custom work involved in this home," he says. "One of the great things for me is that I was able to get to know a lot of the local subcontractors. Lakeside Lumber was a huge asset to me. When I started ordering materials from them, they provided me with names and gave me a local tie-in. I have a summer place up here for my family now, too, and those relationships continue."

There were some challenges along the way, but Dale says there is so much unique detail in this house that it made everything fun. "Whatever we were doing, it wasn't just putting up drywall and moving," he adds. "That's the part that I love, that it's not the same old routine, and that's why I do it. I want people to love their spaces."

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Kelli Wegscheid
Harmonious Architecture



The Interior Design

Furnishing and designing spaces in this home was extremely important to Heather. There was no doubt in her mind who she would ask to fill that role – her close friend in Alaska, Lisa Miresse, who just happens to be an interior designer. When Heather told Lisa they were building in Minnesota and asked if she'd be interested, there was an emphatic "Yes!"

Lisa says they originally met when a contractor working on the Erickson home in Alaska asked her for some design help. The two friends traveled to Minnesota together at the very beginning of the project, and Lisa was involved, sometimes remotely, all along the way.



An abundance of special touches can also be found throughout the home. There are two different sets of bunks, each "assigned" to specific boys. A special room (and bathroom) for Heather's sister is named "Susie's Room." Then there's one named "Becky's Room," for Bill's wife, who is Heather's cousin-in-law and friend. She was also instrumental in helping Heather with the project.

The Terracotta Tile that Heather found at Karvonen's in Perham caught her eye, "just had to" have it installed in the utility room. Another special touch is the transom window above the door leading into the main bedroom that came from a family home.

"Heather's style is clean and traditional and classical," says Lisa, owner of Blue Moon Interiors in Palmer, AK. "Combining her style with the many layers of meaning in this whole project was amazing. We were a great team, and we both wanted to be sure that it was very personal, but not overdone."

The pair did much of their coordination through video, but they also took a few trips together – to Minneapolis to choose some granite, and also to the Las Vegas market to check out the broad array of options available.

Heather agrees that everything they worked on together had a purpose, and that after working together for so long, their thoughts kind of fused.



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The loft above the kitchen was an after-thought. After they realized the ceilings in the kitchen were too high, they thought they needed to add a loft, and the spiral staircase was built to climb up there.

Under the Garage

The most unique room in the house was also an evolution during the design phase. Because of the slope in the lot, they had dug out underneath the garage and put in a workshop for Wade. Instead of wasting the additional space in that area, they began thinking about digging that hole bigger.

According to Lisa, "It started out as a wine-tasting room first, and then developed into an extraordinary space! They wanted something that would evoke the feeling of a German Ratskeller, like the one Wade used to frequent in New Ulm. Even the brick wall hallway leading to the bar area makes it feel

like you're walking down an alley and then happen upon the doorway."

The huge dark wooden bar was shipped from the Architectural Antiques Exchange in Pennsylvania, and the reclaimed wide plank floor came from an old mill in Tennessee. They wanted that floor to authentically creak when someone walked on it, and great care was taken during the installation.

"It was so much fun to build, and even the copper tin ceiling looks authentic," says Dale. "I had never installed a bank vault before, either. It's funny that you would imagine they have installers, but we had to figure it out ourselves. It took us seven guys to lift that bank vault door into place and maneuver it." Heather's plans include having a mural painted on the brick wall hallway to commemorate Grain Belt Beer, another nod to family lore.



"IT WAS REALLY BUILT TO HAVE A PLACE TO BRING THEIR FAMILY TOGETHER. WHAT STANDS OUT SO MUCH TO ME IS THE AMOUNT OF FAMILY AND LOVE THAT IS CONTAINED IN THIS HOME."

Kelli Wegscheid
Harmonious Architecture

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A Space for Everyone

Kelli adds that the design of the floor plan was thought out with the intention to incorporate as much family as possible - a space for everyone.

"It was really built to have a place to bring their family together," she says. "What stands out so much to me is the amount of family and love that is contained in this home."

Lisa admits that she cried when she saw Ponderosa Cove for the first time. "We poured ourselves into every aspect of this project because everyone wanted the same outcome for them. We knew how special it was, and I couldn't love it more. It became a generational piece that they'll pass down through their family."