

An Environmentally Friendly Home



The Ruhland Home on Long Lake



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FEATURE
HOME

by Alicia Underlee Nelson

Photos by Kip Johnson,
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When it was time to build their lake home on Long Lake near Vergas, Craig and Jessica Ruhland chose quality over quantity. “We tried very specifically to create a home with high-quality spaces, which reflects the nature of being at a lake in Minnesota,” Craig Ruhland explains. “We certainly didn’t want to create a large space which lacks character. My wife and I just preferred to build lesser square footage of higher quality.”

That’s not to say the Ruhland family’s summer retreat is small. The 5-bedroom, 3.5-bathroom home includes 2,900 square feet of heated space, a gracious sun porch, a two-stall garage and deck that features sweeping views of the water.

“We wanted something with an expansive view of the lake, so it’s pretty glass-heavy to the south,” explains Ruhland. That particular aesthetic choice helped unite the two main goals for the living space.

The Ruhlands wanted an environmentally-friendly home that promoted quality family time. Every detail in the home—from the functional to the cosmetic—is designed to be as efficient as possible, both for environmental and for practical reasons.

The striking decks that take up much of the south side of the home are a perfect example of how good design can blend form and function. The windows are covered with deep eaves and awnings, a design element that serves two purposes at the same time.

“In the summer, it helps reduce direct sunlight off of those south-facing windows,” says Ruhland. “And then in the winter, when the sun is at a much lower angle, you still get the warm and welcoming solar gain.”

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homeowner
Craig Ruhland

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The awnings are also quite practical for entertaining. “The awnings cover large portions of the deck outside the living room and the master suite, so while it’s raining you’re still protected,” says Ruhland. “They do a great job of blending the interior and exterior spaces.”

Other design elements aren’t as obvious, but they’re equally important for creating an energy efficient dwelling. “The house was built with SIPs—Structural Insulated Panels—that have foam sandwiched between layers of OSB (oriented strand board) sheathing,” explains Eric Haataja, of Haataja Contracting Inc. in Menasha. “The exterior walls and the roof were all built with SIPs.”

SIPs provide affordable, strong and extremely energy efficient insulation. They also cut down on construction time, since the panels are precut to fit—always a bonus for homeowners looking to minimize construction time and cut down on the time contractors spend commuting to a remote location like a lake home. (Ruhland says the panels were installed in a matter of days after the foundation was poured.) SIPs (pronounced “sips”) like the ones used in the Ruhland home are available through Energy Panel Systems (EPS) of Graettinger, Iowa and Extreme Panels in Cottonwood, Minn.

Insulated concrete forms (ICFs)—hollow blocks of foam that are installed as the

home’s exterior walls and filled with metal rebar and concrete—in the basement keep the space cool in the summer and warm in the winter. All the windows in the home (including the patio doors and the large bank of windows on the deck that look out on the lake) are energy-efficient styles. The result is a home that looks beautiful, meets the family’s needs and also has a minimal environmental footprint.

The design process for creating an energy-efficient home isn’t complicated, says Kelli Wegscheid of Harmonious Architecture in Perham. Wegscheid is the architect that brought the Ruhlands’ home to life.



"It's really not a lot different in the design, but more on the construction end," she explains. "The architect and builder work together with the owners on the SIPs panels, the best windows available, and the foundation built of ICFs. So with those three elements—the insulation, the windows and the foundation—we're making the envelope as tight as we can, which makes it much easier to heat and cool."

It can save homeowners money too. "If you're a young person and you're building a lake place and owning the utility bill for the next 20, 30, 40 years, you want to take that into account," Ruhland says. "We keep the thermostat at 55 degrees in the winter when we're not there and we use roughly 400 dollars worth of propane for the entire winter. My electrical bill, which runs the fan and recirculates air, is somewhere around 55 dollars a month. The electrical bill in summer months is about 130 dollars a month."



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With the exception of the main-level master bedroom, the bedrooms are all tucked into the basement and over the garage so guests can sleep late if they wish. The younger generation loves the bunkroom, which sleeps six in its timber-framed bunk beds. The setting provides the ultimate slumber party setting for little ones and ample charging stations for all the devices that teens require.

"The decks and the flexible floor plan are good for when you have larger family gatherings," says Ruhland. "It's designed with the flexibility that my wife and I could spend more time there when we get older, so it's a summer retirement home in the back of our minds."

The space is smart and efficient, but that doesn't mean that it scrimps on style. "The owners started with a great vision of what they wanted and we were able to make that happen," said Wegscheid. "They wanted a great view to the lake when you drive up, and they definitely wanted a rustic modern cabin where contemporary materials like corrugated metal are mixed with wood timbers, wide decks and big windows that are traditional in lake-home style."

The Ruhlands' home has a list of customized design elements. There are custom cabinets in the kitchen, built-in shelving around the fireplaces and storage cubbies in the hallway. The most striking architectural features—





the timber-framed trusses in the great room and master bedroom—required a collaborative approach to ensure that all the elements lined up.

“Facing the lake, we have the patio doors and the clerestory windows above those,” explains Ruhland, laying out the configuration of vertical patio doors and horizontal clerestory windows that flood the space with light. “The truss had to be designed tall enough on the furthest point of the underside to get as much daylight as possible. So it was a collaboration between the window supplier, the truss dimensions and the architect’s vision.”

The Ruhlands continued their commitment to family and responsible environmental practices by using salvaged materials as much as possible. The reclaimed wood used on the walls came from the farm in central Minnesota where Craig Ruhland grew up. The exterior galvanized steel, the steel around the fireplaces and the posts that make up the fireplace mantels are from an old pole barn that he dismantled. He also constructed the rolling barn doors inside the home from wood taken from his grandparents’ ranch in southwestern North Dakota.

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Kelli Wegscheid

Harmonious Architecture



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homeowner

Craig Ruhland



The wood’s age and the climate on the ranch gave Ruhland an interesting color and finish with which to work. “There was way less moisture, so the wood was kind of grayed out and patinaed,” he explains. “It gave an interesting and authentic finish to the wood.”

When the Ruhlands had used up the reclaimed materials in their possession, they looked to local contractors to find the right wood to compliment the design.

They would find that even ordinary wood takes on an elevated look in the hands of expert artisans.

Roger Wilson of Wilson Wood Products supplied the 10-inch square timber trusses that grace the master bedroom, the great room and make up the structural components of the deck. “Roger has his own sawmill and kiln near Ponsford, Minn.,” says Ruhland. “He has the unique ability to cut, plane and square a variety

of species to meet your project needs. He's pleasant to work with, affordable and detail oriented."

"John Cordahl with A&C Lumber supplied all of the beams for the project from Park Rapids, Minn.," adds Haataja. "John also supplied all of the material for the tongue and groove. Roger with Wilson Wood Products planed the material and turned it into tongue and groove."

Actually installing all the elements required even more collaboration. "We had to have a structural engineer from Iowa help with the truss design," explains Ruhland. Machining & Welding built the braces and other components of the design and Nathan Hillukka, lead carpenter for Haataja Contracting Inc. oversaw construction.



Ruhland says Hillukka's guidance over the project was essential. "It certainly takes effort to coordinate new construction with salvage materials," says Ruhland. "Trying to get those two things to blend together aesthetically is something you kind of have to work at. But he's the kind of guy you can bring a sketch to and he'll just have a smile on his face. He's a gifted and creative problem solver. He gets things done."

The result of all that creative problem solving is a striking cabin with a flexible floor plan that gives family members a summer retreat and a chance to reconnect with their Midwestern roots after moving to North Carolina.

Jessica and Craig met at North Dakota State University. Craig works for an architecture firm based in the Midwest and he frequently works from the cabin. Jessica, a physician who attended



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medical school at University of North Dakota and received subspecialty training at Mayo Clinic, joins him in Minnesota with their children, Trysten (an 18-year-old college student), 14-year-old Mikyla and 8-year-old Ethan. The family spends lots of time at the cabin both as an immediate family and with their extended family.

But the key to any lake home getaway is the lake itself. The Ruhlands spent plenty of time on the water paddle boarding, waterskiing and just hanging out on the boat. In order to minimize upkeep and maximize time spent outdoors, Craig (a landscape architect) put his own professional experience to work designing an outdoor space for his family.

For Craig, good design doesn’t end when you step outside the home. “For me, it’s about making the interior and exterior speak a cohesive language,” he says.

The result is a yard that’s easier to maintain, but is also aesthetically appealing and beneficial for the environment. He’s planted nearly 100 trees on the property and installed low-pressure drippers to eliminate the need to water. “We’ve tried to minimize how much we mow, so we have more time to hang with family,” he says.

“I just love how Jessica and Craig had a whole vision to include their whole extended family in this home,” says Wegscheid. “The space is used really efficiently, so the house is not overly large, but they can host a lot of family. They really did make a home for their whole family. And that’s what is most important about a lake home – gathering with family and friends.” ~L&H

