

F

FEATURE  
HOME





# A Home with a Country Feel



WRITTEN BY PATRICE PETERSON  
PHOTOS BY KIP JOHNSON





A weekend getaway more than 11 years ago led Walt and Glenda Bro down the long and winding road to building a home in the rural Vergas area. It began when one of Walt's patients gave them a gift certificate for a B&B on Spirit Lake.

"We arrived late on a Saturday night in the dark," explains Glenda. "On Sunday morning I wanted to sleep in, but we had to be back in Fargo to teach Sunday school, so we got up early. Had we slept in, we would have missed the amazing views God wanted to show us on the drive back to Fargo. The sun was just coming up, and as we rounded each curve in the road, we saw beautiful colors reflected off the lakes, hillsides and trees. Every pond seemed to be filled with some type of bird – geese, ducks, swans – and we both thought this would be a beautiful place to retire."

Glenda grew up on a farm in South Dakota, and Walt grew up in Burbank, Calif., but he spent his teenage summer years working on his uncle's farm in her area, where they went to the same country church. After medical school, residency at Mayo Clinic, and private practice in South Dakota, the married couple moved to Fargo, where they raised their four sons, and Walt worked as an OB/GYN doctor.

"I wasn't sure I would be a very good doctor's wife, and he told me we would move to a farm when he retired," says Glenda. "He kept his promise."

Their decision of when to begin building on the property they purchased in Vergas was moved forward a bit early when the city of Fargo bought and demolished their home on the Red River as part of the flood diversion efforts in 2013.

"We loved that home, but we decided it was time to move on and start over with a new house and a new style," says Glenda. "Our dream was to capture the 'country



*"Our dream was to capture the 'country feel' of my grandparents' farmhouse in Cresbard, South Dakota – not to reproduce the exact look or design, but to incorporate the feelings we remember from being there."*

Glenda Bro  
homeowner

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*"They own this vast piece of property, so we didn't have too many restrictions. Their view from the living room is stunning, but this home was also designed and built for comfort and enjoyment."*

Hunter Briard | Briard Construction

feel' of my grandparents' farmhouse in Cresbard, S.D.—not to reproduce the exact look or design, but to incorporate the feelings we remember from being there."

Set back considerably off the road and standing alone among rolling hills with adjoining farmland, the distinctive gray and white home has a circular driveway and a decorative white picket fence. It all closely resembles the image Glenda photocopied out of a magazine and

provided to architect Kelli Wegscheid of Harmonious Architecture in Perham.

"We looked at a lot of homes and pictures, but wanted the expertise of an architect to be sure the house looked right and was structurally sound," she says. "Once we met Kelli at the Fargo Home Show, there was something about her that we liked right away, and we were ready to move forward."

Wegscheid was involved from the very beginning, which started with 120 acres of land and that one photo.

### *A Blank Canvas*

"I joined Walt and Glenda, and we walked on the extensive property searching for the perfect location," says Wegscheid. "There weren't any land issues other than building their access road, so we pretty much started with a blank canvas. We wanted a spot to catch the beauty of their land, and I think they've really captured



the most panoramic view of the rolling countryside.”

Once they chose the builder, Briard Construction, a small father-son business in Detroit Lakes specializing in custom homes, additional considerations needed to be taken into account.

“We wanted the house to face south and be able to capture the sunshine, especially during the winter months,” says Hunter Briard, who acted as the general contractor throughout the construction. “We also had to find the right elevation for the walkout basement, without getting too steep of a hill.”

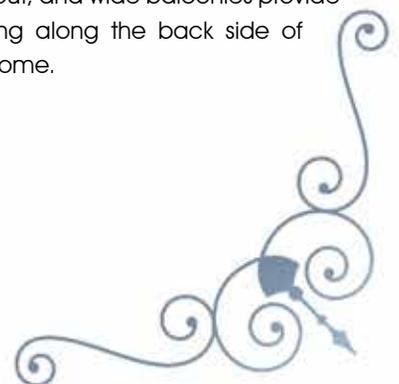


Since they wanted to be set far back from the road, the best route for the extensive driveway also had to be well thought-out. Halfway down that driveway, they added a large storage building, mostly to house the equipment needed to clear snow and grade the road... and also to store some of Walt's toys.

“They own this vast piece of property, so we didn't have too many restrictions,” says Briard. “Their view from the living room is stunning, but this home was also designed and built for comfort and enjoyment.”

### *Designer's Dream*

The spacious kitchen is impressive, with plenty of seating, and a laundry room off the kitchen doubles as a craft room. An arched “theme” is carried both inside and out, and wide balconies provide viewing along the back side of the home.



"This house was a dream to design, and we really got to incorporate all of their wishes," says Wegscheid. "Even the master bathroom is spectacular, with an open layout, beautiful views, a barrel ceiling with cherry wood, and a fireplace built into the wall."

The design and building took almost a year, and Glenda says their prayerful decision to use Wegscheid and Briard as their architect and builder made the entire process more successful.

"Kelli helped us make many decisions when it was all still on paper and could easily be changed," she says. "Working closely with Kelli's blueprint, Hunter handled all the general contracting work and used his own carpentry crew, finishing the project on time."

Glenda and Walt needed a home they could enjoy now, but they also wanted it to be practical enough so they could remain in it as they get older. With wide hallways and the couple's personal living

space on the main level, they designed the lower level with their four married sons and eight grandchildren in mind.

"We wanted a home where our family could feel comfortable with their own bedrooms and bathrooms downstairs," says Glenda. "We try to get them all here as often as possible, even though they are spread from Fargo to Moorhead to Bismarck to Vancouver, B.C. We have fun together eating, playing games, and sometimes doing work projects during their visits."

### *Surprising Twists*

One special feature was kept hidden from the grandchildren during the building process until the home was completed.

"In the lower level, there is a built-in bookcase on one wall that actually hides the room behind it," says Glenda. "It's a fully equipped theater room, but you can't tell it's there until you push a special button and the bookcase swings inward like a door. Walt likes to play



*"This house was a dream to design, and we really got to incorporate all of their wishes."*

Kelli Wegscheid  
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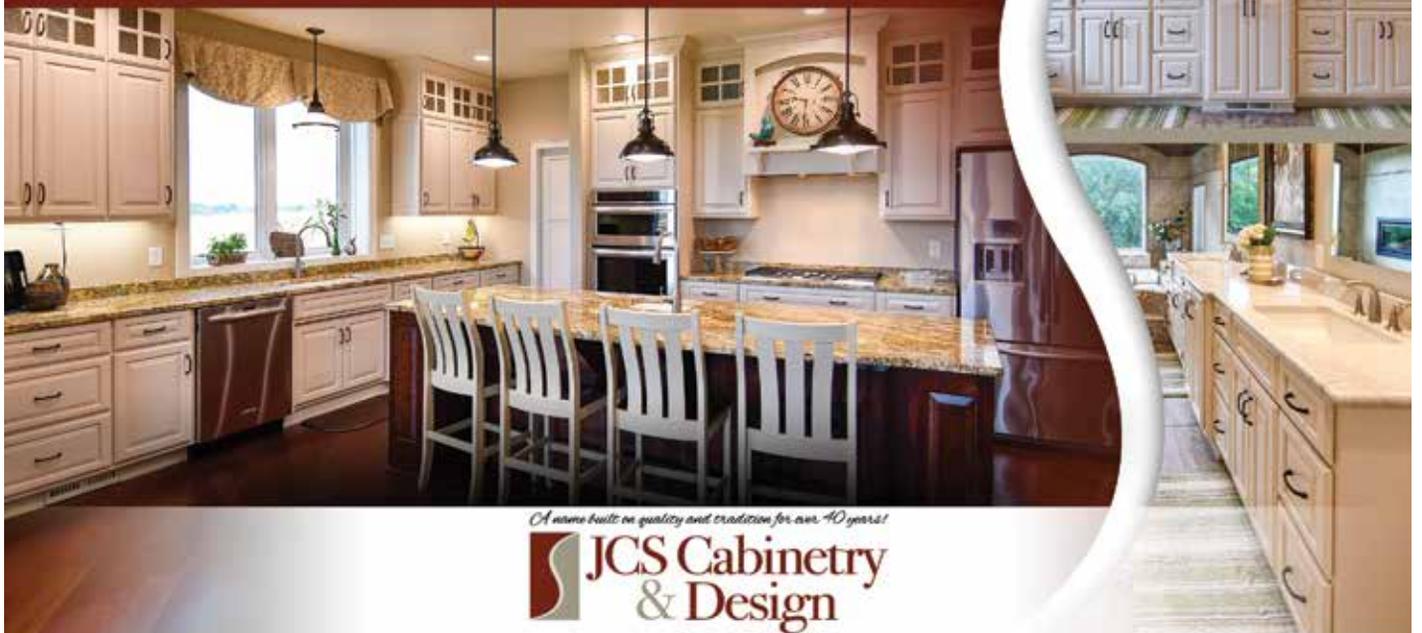
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hide-and-seek with the grandchildren, and they were pretty surprised when he just disappeared and they couldn't find him. He was in the hidden room."

Beauty is in the details, and this home is full of beautiful surprises – even when it comes to window coverings for the high arched windows in the south-facing living room.

"They wanted blinds on this window, but didn't want to ruin the arched look and didn't want to see the blinds," says Briard. "We came up with a design to build a 'baffle' that hides the blinds, which can be retracted with a remote control. It all looks simple and clean and even hides the hardware."

The breakfast nook, which resembles a castle's turret, is one carryover from the Fargo home on the Red River.



*"As you sit at the kitchen table, you can see in almost any direction, and it lifts your spirits just looking out over the farms and rolling hills."*

Glenda Bro | homeowner



"We had a sunroom off our kitchen in Fargo and wanted to incorporate that feature in this home," says Glenda. "As you sit at the kitchen table, you can see in almost any direction, and it lifts your spirits just looking out over the farms and rolling hills. God paints the western sky with an array of amazing colors on some evenings. We enjoy watching eagles, hawks, geese, deer, fox, and occasionally otters."

The lawn surrounding their home is about three acres, but a considerable amount of their land is rented out for farming, so the country "feel" Glenda and Walt desired is captured on a daily basis.

"My grandson loves to watch the farm equipment, especially when they are baling alfalfa," she says. "Some of the land is irrigated, and we all enjoy watching for rainbows, as the sprinklers shoot streams of water in the air."

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Glenda has also started planting gardens and growing fruits and vegetables.

"A man from our church brought us a load of compost to help amend the soil, and my green beans and tomatoes were huge," she says.

Wanting to fit in and have people feel comfortable at their home, they're doing

more and more entertaining, but also spending additional time together since Walt retired. Plus, Walt has now added a woodworking room in the "shop," their nickname for the storage shed halfway down the driveway. Glenda says Walt has "lots of projects waiting to be done," and this year's project is to put up white fences so they can eventually get horses and a dog.

"We have also been blessed to be able to help with the new men's and women's Bible Study Fellowship satellite class in Detroit Lakes," she adds, "and have met some wonderful people through the class and our church."



But mostly, they're both enjoying the solitude, peace and quiet of the area.

"When we first moved here, we were awestruck by the night sky and its darkness. You can almost feel the darkness, and on other nights it's lit up with thousands of brilliant stars. People may wonder why we retired here, but I think God wanted us to be here. He drew us here that early Sunday morning when we drove back to Fargo to teach Sunday school." ~L&H



A graphic advertisement for Blair Westrum Landscape Construction &amp; Design. At the top is a logo with a maroon border containing the text "BLAIR WESTRUM LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION &amp; DESIGN" around a central image of a landscape with a blue sky, green hills, and a brick path. Below the logo are two photographs: on the left, a stone patio with a fire pit and wooden chairs; on the right, a light blue house with a grey roof and a paved driveway. At the bottom, a maroon banner contains the text "DETROIT LAKES MINNESOTA" and "218-234-7693" in gold lettering.

## Renewable Energy

With spray foam insulation and exterior insulation for added 'R-Value', this home also has geo-thermal heating and cooling throughout, installed by GEOthermal Solutions Inc.

"Walter and Glenda wanted a system that was dependable, durable, and would save them money as they move into the retirement stage," says Bryce Bjerke of GEOthermal Solutions.

It takes electricity to power the unit to provide the heat (at a 350 percent efficiency ratio), so a back-up gas system was installed for emergency in case of power outage.

"Since there are higher up front charges for the construction of the well field system, geothermal heating and cooling may not be the perfect fit for every situation," he adds. "But when it's done properly, and it fits the needs of the homeowner like it did in this situation, I don't think there's anything out there that's going to beat it."

## How it Works

(from the GEOthermal Solutions Website: [gsibiz.com](http://gsibiz.com))

Geothermal heating and cooling utilizes the earth's core temperature. And no matter the climate you live in, the core temperature of the earth stays constant. A series of pipes are installed in the ground, and transfer ground heat to and from the building, providing heating and cooling.

When used for heating, a geothermal system extracts heat from the ground by using the underground pipes. This heat is distributed throughout the building as warm air, usually through a duct system. This method of heating can also be used in water heating.

Geothermal cooling is the reverse process of heating. The geothermal system takes hot air from the building and circulates it into the underground pipes, where it is cooled. This cooled air is then circulated through the building, and the process is repeated.

