

HOMESCAPES

WEEK OF FEB. 25-MARCH 3, 2009

A GUIDE TO SOUTHWEST FLORIDA'S HOMES AND GARDENS

Historic home 'speaks' to new owner



◀ The expanded kitchen is the heart of the home, its checkerboard floors is marble.

COURTESY PHOTO

House transformed to suit family's needs



▶ The addition of a cozy nook adds visual intrigue to the home's second floor.

COURTESY PHOTO



◀ The living room's fireplace surround was designed by Karen Benson, ASID.

COURTESY PHOTO

BY LIBBY MCMILLAN

Florida Weekly Correspondent

"I didn't go looking for an older house," says Becky Markgraf, of the historic home her family now shares near the Fort Myers County Club. Markgraf, an O.R. nurse, her husband Kurt, an anesthesiologist, and their two children were living in a contemporary home in Town and Country when she decided that having a yard might make up for seasons she calls "hot and hotter," versus those she had enjoyed in Alabama.

What Mrs. Markgraf found, instead, was an historic estate home on a gracious street, which instantly spoke to her. So did her contractor. "You're crazy if you buy this house," he said, not seeing her vision, but focusing instead on the

home's dark interior, small rooms, and uneven ceiling heights.

The plucky Markgraf could see beyond the home's limitations, however, and already had professional help in her corner. Designer Karen Benson had done the Markgraf home in South Fort Myers; her husband is architect Lowell Benson.

"It took a lot of bottles of wine to get through this house," Ms. Benson says with a laugh, locking her arm in Ms. Markgraf's, "but we drank them together."

The home had great bones: the living room had a fireplace and French doors leading to a side room. A porte-cochere had been enclosed to make another living space, and a previous owner had added a huge family room on the south end of the property. An uncaged pool made use of the adjacent lot behind the house, which stretched the

SEE HISTORIC, D4 ►

HISTORIC

From page 1

property all the way to the next street. A separate building held an apartment and garage space. And the large yard — which had started the hunt — was the original criteria that brought the Markgrafs to this new home.

The original kitchen was tiny, with massive cabinets. “In my opinion, the kitchen has been the biggest change in the whole house,” says Benson. “The layout didn’t suit Becky’s family: two children, a husband and a dog. It’s now the heart of the home.”

Benson opened up the space by co-opting an adjoining breakfast room and its sunny, east-facing window; the elegant but cheery marble floors anchor the room’s new cherry cabinets, textured granite countertops in black, and a large custom banquette.

“Because it’s black, it continues the visual line of the countertops,” says Ms. Benson, “and the mass of it balances all the kitchen cabinetry. The room wouldn’t work with just chairs here.” A shimmering gold pattern in the wallpaper above the banquette also reflects the sunlight, another clever touch by the designer.

Ms. Benson explains how the kitchen got its stunning checkerboard floor of gleaming marble.

“Becky’s a b/w girl at heart,” she says,” noting the color scheme the family had enjoyed in parts of their former home. “The floor was a classic way to pull that in again. It fits the house.” Ms. Benson says marble is “hard to keep up,” but the beauty of marble is that it doesn’t have grout joints. A regular buff and polish keeps it looking beautiful for

the lifetime of a building.”

“The general contractor pulled his hair out,” admits Ms. Markgraf, “because the original kitchen floor was so uneven, it was a challenge. So the kitchen floor is two inches higher, but I don’t care.” A tiny wooden transition piece in each doorway eases family members into the cheery kitchen, which contains a former bath, now converted to a walk-in pantry. A tile backsplash over the stove echoes the pattern of the floor, with its alternating tiles in brushed and polished stainless steel.

As often happens, the home’s entire renovation started with a single inspiring object: the light fixture over the dining room table. “That was the first thing we bought after we moved in,” says Ms. Markgraf. “We found that, and fell in love with it, but didn’t know if it would fit in anywhere.”

With help, it certainly did; the Benson team made the entire house fit the family’s active lifestyle. By cleverly removing a closet next to the staircase, they created a breezy hallway — a shortcut to the kitchen, previously accessible only via a circuitous route through the living or dining rooms. Next, they addressed the former portecochere and adjoining patio space, conceiving a fabulous bar and wine room, as well as a catch-all mud room, luxurious laundry room and a half-bath. Mr. Benson also raised the ceiling of the ground-level family room to match that of the original house, while his talented wife designed two fabulous fireplaces, real focal points



Becky Markgraf and Dottie, hanging out at home.

COURTESY PHOTO

Kurt and Max in the evenings and on weekends; entertaining is a breeze with the adjoining bar, its counter-top designed wide enough to hold hors d’oeuvres. The Markgrafs have already hosted three parties with more than 100 guests, in their accommodating home.

The second floor renovation was successful as well. “We took turns sleeping downstairs our rooms were being done,” explains Ms. Markgraf. A bathroom door directly at the top of the stairs was moved to the side, eliminating an eyesore. A dreamy window seat was added in an alcove just outside the Markgraf daughter’s bedroom. The master suite now offers the ultimate respite behind a sliding door: a large walk-in closet and a hotel-like bath, all in marble.

Dottie — an energetic Jack Russell terrier — barks, urging Ms. Markgraf to throw her red ball across the yard. The Markgrafs obviously enjoy their space, and being based near Lee Memorial, a big plus on workdays. Their home’s location is just as handy when the couple wants to enjoy an evening alone together. “We’ll go to the Edison, every now and then,” says Ms. Markgraf, of the popular restaurant and bar at the Fort Myers County Club, just steps away. “We’ll walk over there, have a drink, have an appetizer, and walk home.” ■

for each of the primary living spaces. “That’s what I think I do that’s different from most designers,” she says. “I’m not an architect, but the design I do has more to do with space, and not just colors and furniture.”

The family room’s pool table entices

to the Edison, every now and then,” says Ms. Markgraf, of the popular restaurant and bar at the Fort Myers County Club, just steps away. “We’ll walk over there, have a drink, have an appetizer, and walk home.” ■

ROMA

GRANITE US

GRANITE COUNTERTOPS

starting at **\$35** per SQ/F

- Financing available with up to 12 month NO Payments NO Interest.
- Upgrade Edges FREE.
- Free Sink with this Ad.
- Free Granite Cutting Board.

Roma Granite US

239.332.2228
Fax: 239.332.4228
3580 Metro Pkwy
Fort Myers

www.RomaGraniteUS.com

HURRY! LIMITED TIME OFFER

FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN GET A FREE DECORATIVE IMPACT DOOR *

Make a Statement! Replace your front door!

*With purchase of \$4,000 or more

Insulated Low E Windows starting at **\$90**

Impact Windows starting at **\$200**

Variety of Window & Door styles to every need • We’re a local company beating national prices • Largest selection in SWFL of windows and doors by a variety of manufacturers!

WINDOWS | INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR DOORS | HARDWARE | MOULDINGS INCLUDING CROWN, CHAIR RAIL, BASEBOARDS AND CASING | WINDOW AND DOOR REPLACEMENT AND REPAIRS | IN HOUSE INSTALLATION, SERVICE AND DELIVERY

G S W
GREAT SOUTHERN WINDOW AND DOOR
www.gswindow.net

239.332.7170
VISIT OUR SHOWROOM OR SCHEDULE AN IN-HOME CONSULTATION • 2900 HUNTER ST. (OFF METRO PKWY) FORT MYERS, FL