

Full House

By Zlata Kozul Naumovski | Photo: by Werner Straube | July 6, 2017

What started as a minor redo turned into a major architectural redo of a Grand Beach, Mich., vacation home, with help from two of the community's members, the husband-and-wife duo behind Morgante-Wilson Architects.



Morgante-Wilson Architects turned a casual vacation home into a grand entertaining space for a Chicago family. A coffered ceiling and custom millwork add architectural detail to the dining room, while custom light fixtures and a table from McGuire fit the home's new transitional style.

They say it takes a village, and such was the case for a Wilmette couple with three children when planning a small renovation of their Grand Beach, Mich., home. Originally purchased for quick family getaways, the house soon became part of the traditional community and when it came to changing the look of it, the homeowners listened to suggestions from their neighbors, architects Elissa Morgante and Frederick Wilson, principals of Morgante-Wilson Architects.

"They wanted a totally different experience for us in Grand Beach than when we're at home in the city," says the husband, a business owner who works in Chicago.

They got that and more. Neutrals were replaced with vibrant color schemes, transitional architecture was introduced and contemporary prints were incorporated. New light fixtures became a favorite topic of conversation among houseguests and visitors. "We originally just wanted to update the home with a new kitchen, bathrooms, carpet and paint," the wife says of the seven-bedroom home built in the 1950s. "But once Morgante-Wilson started a new architectural layout, we got very excited."

The brick two-story home, though large with a spacious backyard for privacy, lacked architectural details on both the interior and exterior. "It was a ho-hum house," says Morgante. "It was a nice property in a good location with big, gracious rooms but no character."

To update the look of the Colonial-meets-New Orleans exterior, Morgante made significant changes to improve street appeal. Her architectural firm replaced the cladding on the exterior, added new windows and painted the brick. Additionally, the architects created a new front entry with columns and replaced the second level's existing decorative iron porch with warm wood. "We redid the porch so it has a more consistent language for the house; a more transitional Colonial feel."

In the back of the house, the firm added a screened-in porch that overlooks the swimming pool and a cupola to create a year-round space in the shade. "We probably spend most of our time in the screened-in porch room," the husband says. A smattering of mature trees gives them views of nature, while a grilling station with a ceramic Big Green Egg smoker awaits languid 12-hour cookouts involving brisket or pork shoulder.

Inside, the firm tore down a wall to open up the kitchen to the family room. "We wanted the first floor of the house to flow from room to room," Morgante says. "There are no formal spaces and no fussy fabrics. It's all about comfortable living." The team at Morgante-Wilson also helped select furnishings, art, accessories, even bed linens, providing for a turnkey experience.

The fireplace in the living room was transformed from "a heavy-handed thing to a more refined, lighter piece," as Morgante describes, with built-ins added around it. "There was not a lot of inherent character to the house," she says. Helping to alleviate that, her firm coffered the ceilings in the dining room and installed custom millwork.

In a departure from their permanent residence, the new kitchen features bright white cabinets, polished nickel hardware and Iceberg quartzite countertops. Contemporary light fixtures, including a pair of wrought-iron pendant spheres in the dining room, keep the house current. "The guests always mention the light fixtures," the husband says. "They are the most talked-about feature in the home."

Lots of sleeping options accommodate umpteen cousins and extended family, who easily make the trek to the beach community in under two hours. The girls' bunk room (able to sleep eight!) is outfitted with trendy red-and-white bedding, while guest rooms, each with an attached bathroom, are painted soft shades of blue, pink and purple.

"Our vacation home is more vibrant with color," the husband says. "They purposely made the home different than our permanent residence so it really feels like a vacation home."

DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE

Single-family home

LOCATION

Grand Beach, Mich.

ARCHITECTURE

[Morgante-Wilson Architects \(http://morgantewilson.com\)](http://morgantewilson.com)

INTERIOR DESIGN

[Morgante-Wilson Architects \(http://morgantewilson.com\)](http://morgantewilson.com)

BUILDER

Stephen P. Meyer Construction
269.326.1000

RESOURCES

[BAKER \(http://bakerfurniture.com\)](http://bakerfurniture.com)

Coffee table in family room

[CASA SPAZIO \(http://casaspazio.com\)](http://casaspazio.com)