



Homes Curated



During the home's renovation, original red oak joists were left intact and complemented by an entirely new staircase and rail system. The carpets on the dining level were removed and replaced with 7-inch, engineered, pre-finished oak.

In recent years, the verb “curate” has escaped the halls of museums and been used to describe the way a home is put together. Each of the homes featured here displays the owners’ commitment to selecting, organizing, and presenting their private spaces for maximum satisfaction and ease.

One couple radically reimagined the house they renovated in the 1980s so they could age in place—every facet of the new incarnation is intended to make their lives easier. Another home—referred to as “two empty rectangles” by the husband—has been transformed into a handcrafted work of art by his wife. A beloved traditional home holds the memories of three generations of a single family; its current owners regularly renew their vow to preserve its craftsmanship and architectural integrity. Finally, a house previously deemed “hideous” has become a home now proclaimed “magical” by its owner. Four very different homes with one common denominator—the owners poured their hearts into creating places that bring them joy every time they cross the threshold.

with Heart

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An Astounding Adaptation

In 1985, when Marsha Herman-Betzen and Keith Betzen told their daughter, Rachel, then 8, they were going to buy a ramshackle, four-story house on 10 wooded acres near Unionville, Indiana, she wept.

Marsha recalls Rachel sobbing, “Why can’t we just live in a normal house?”

From leaky roof to flooded basement, the structure was afflicted with broken windows, unfinished subflooring, frozen pipes, and a tattered tarpaper exterior.

“It didn’t have a kitchen, toilet, ceiling, or walls. But it did have the awful smell of a seven-year party house,” remembers Keith, an inventor and retired veterinarian. “But Marsha and I could see the potential. After 11 months of hard work, with the help of a friend, we were able to make the house livable and financeable.”

Years passed. Rachel grew up in the house and went off to college. Marsha and Keith, now in their late 60s, were still in love with their home’s beautiful setting, but they knew the house needed some adaptations if they were going to remain in it.

“Keith grew up in West Texas—the flattest place on earth,” says Marsha, who is retired from her position as executive director/CEO of Association of College Unions International, based in Bloomington. “I grew up in a part of New Mexico where the tallest tree was a piñon. We fell in love with the rolling hills and deciduous trees of southern Indiana 32 years ago. Coupled with the quality of life found in a college town, we knew there was nowhere on earth we would rather be than Bloomington. We discussed moving, but figured, to heck with that. We wanted to figure out a way we could age in our home.”

The couple consulted with Barre Klapper of Springpoint Architects in spring 2016 and drew up a list of priorities for an extensive remodel, including an elevator to access all four floors. Loren Wood Builders took on the project in two phases, the first of which was a reinvention of the kitchen.

Marsha, a passionate cook and baker, is thrilled with her new dream kitchen that features cork flooring and continuous-grain, quarter-sawn white oak cabinets built by John Stoll of Stoll’s Woodworking in Odon, Indiana.

“I wanted the countertops clear and everything hidden, but also maximum efficiency and accessibility,” Marsha explains. “I researched pull-down and pull-up inserts for the cabinet interiors so if, God forbid, I end up in a wheelchair, I can get to everything.”

In April 2017, with the kitchen complete, the Loren Wood crew began the rest of the home’s transformation, a challenging year-long remodel. During the process, part of the roof was torn off to create a stunning master suite with a bathroom that includes a heated tile floor and a curbless shower in a space that had previously been a screened porch. Windows were switched out and more were added to enhance the spectacular views. A floor was raised, the elevator installed, and extra-wide doorways built throughout. Whenever possible, the new construction incorporated repurposed materials from the 1980’s version of the home, including original red oak floor joists.

“We couldn’t be more delighted,” Marsha says. “We wanted to bring the outside in. Barre’s design and Loren’s crew made that happen.”



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1. Marsha Herman-Betzen and Keith Betzen radically altered the four-story home they bought and rehabbed in the 1980s so they could age in place.
2. Marsha and Keith both have roots in the Southwest and fell in love with the rolling hills and woods of southern Indiana 32 years ago. They were determined to stay on the 10 acres that surrounded their home near Unionville.



3. Loren Wood Builders addressed the home's remodel in two phases, the first of which was the kitchen. The wheelchair-accessible space features continuous-grain, quarter-sawn cabinetry by John Stoll of Stoll's Woodworking in Odon, Indiana; cork flooring; and spectacular views of the surrounding woods.
4. The interiors of the kitchen cabinets are outfitted with pull-down and pull-out shelving systems to eliminate the need to reach for ingredients and cookware.
5. The living room features engineered white oak flooring and a wall of windows, as well as access to the outside deck. Marsha found many of the home's furnishings at Relish before the store closed in October 2017.

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6. A bright, welcoming guest room.

7. The renovation's second phase included removing the home's roof to create a spacious master suite. A screened-in porch was transformed into a master bathroom with phenomenal views, a heated tile floor, curbless shower, and custom mirrors.

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8. Loren Wood Builders raised a portion of the floor to make the master bedroom one level and created a walk-in closet and elevator access. Every window on this floor was replaced, and many were added throughout the entire home.

9. The dining area with a spectacular view. One of the goals was to make the surrounding scenery a feature that accentuates the minimalist interior and brings the outside in.

A Creative Sanctuary

Sharon Porter-Phillips and Alan Phillips' home boldly stands on a corner of South Washington Street and signals to passersby that it has an interesting story to tell. Sometimes a curious person will stop and ask to hear it.

"Recently a woman knocked on our door and asked if she could come in and take a look around," says Sharon, an actress and the owner-guide of Misguided Tours, which offers theme tours of Bloomington. "She said my husband said it was okay." Alan, pastoral care minister at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church, meets a lot of people, so Sharon graciously let the woman in and gave her the nickel tour.

The home's exterior most resembles a church, which it actually was before the couple bought it in 2010. Before that, the 1930's structure had been a grocery store.

"When we first came to Bloomington in 2001 [from Washington, D.C.] for Alan's job, we lived in a farmhouse in Ellettsville, but I always yearned for a big, open space with high ceilings—like a New York City loft," Sharon says. "This building fit the bill. It had one huge room, original oak flooring, great natural light, and soaring ceilings. The bonus was a full basement where I could make a mess with my ongoing projects."

Using her background in theater set design and her passion for repurposing materials, Sharon has transformed the home's interior. She used a 12-foot-long oak bookcase (found at an auction for \$50) to divide the original sanctuary into living/sleeping spaces. The bookcase is topped with several aquariums in which colorful tropical fish serenely glide back and forth. A boomerang receptionist's desk found at Habitat for Humanity ReStore now serves as the kitchen island. Two glittering crystal chandeliers (purchased for \$80 each from New Life Church when it was installing new light fixtures) add a dash of palatial glam.

In addition to having an eagle-eye for great thrifty finds, Sharon is fearlessly hands-on when working with found materials. She has embellished virtually every surface—the kitchen backsplash, floors, coffee tables, and doors—with intricate mosaics of rocks, pennies, chunks of colored glass,

1. Formerly the church's sanctuary, the living room is a celebration of creatively repurposed materials and resale finds. Sharon embellished the three-tiered coffee table with a mosaic of colored glass.

2. The home's distinctive front façade hints at its former life as South Washington Church of Christ.





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3. The kitchen is divided from the living area by a long, curved receptionist's desk Sharon found at Habitat for Humanity ReStore. She created the textured backsplash from river rocks.

4. Alan and Sharon will celebrate 48 years of marriage this summer. He marvels at his wife's ability to turn "two big empty rectangles" into their work-of-art home.



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mirrors, and even 5,000 CDs, which nearly cover the two-story wall that leads to the basement.

"I need a taller ladder to finish this wall," gestures Sharon, looking up at the monolithic rainbow reflecting the sunlight. "I always say, '90 percent of this house is 90 percent done!'"

Alan, who claims he has no artistic vision, is clearly proud of (and possibly amazed at) what Sharon has created. The couple have three grown children and will celebrate 48 years of marriage this summer.

"This place was just two big empty rectangles when we bought it. I just sort of let Sharon do what she wants," Alan chuckles. "The only things I insisted on was a high shower head—because I'm 6'4"—and a comfortable chair to relax in when I get home. Everything in this place has a story. We love it and wouldn't trade it for anyplace."



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5. The master bath has a soothing aquatic sensibility and celebrates Sharon's favorite color: blue. "I saw the tile in the aquatics department at Petco, and I searched until I found it," she says. "It's one of the few things I splurged on."
6. Wide stairs in the vestibule were narrowed to create a sitting/sleeping area.
7. Bold beech tree wallpaper creates a woodsy vibe in the second bathroom.
8. Another view of the staircase leading to the main living area. The wall at left separates a sitting area that can accommodate overnight guests.
9. Faux marble vinyl tile, a hot pink settee (with built-in ice bucket), and crystal chandelier—one of two Sharon purchased for \$80—lends baroque panache to the front entrance.
10. The master sleeping space is separated from the living area by a 12-foot oak bookcase topped with glass blocks, which serve as a base for large aquariums containing brightly colored tropical fish.

A Beloved Family Heirloom

When David McCrea recently returned home after scouting houses for a colleague relocating to Bloomington, his own abode took his breath away.

“I told Liz, ‘I can’t believe what we have here,’” he recalls. “Every wall is poured wet plaster and there are five arched doorways in our main hall. The fireplace is a work of art. In these new subdivisions, there might be four floor plans, and the homes have no craftsmanship.”

David’s parents, Dorothy and Robert McCrea, bought the circa-1929 Tudor Revival-style house in Elm Heights in 1957. In 1980, David and Liz purchased the home from Dorothy, then a widow.

“My dad just loved this house—he was so proud of it,” says David, who practices law with his oldest son, his brother, and his nephew at McCrea & McCrea, the firm his father started in 1946 after returning from serving in the South Pacific during World War II.

David’s parents learned that the house was built for William Hubbard, an executive with the Bloomington Limestone Company, for approximately \$16,000—a hefty sum on the eve of the Great Depression. Along with its limestone exterior, complete with soaring chimney, it has other high-end amenities that were rare for homes of its era.

“It has two upstairs bathrooms and a two-car attached garage,” explains Liz, an emerita clinical professor in the Indiana University Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences. “The garage was originally built for Model T-size cars and was extended at some point to accommodate longer cars.”

Under the stewardship of the McCrea family for 60 of its nearly 90 years, the home has retained its original character and has been updated to accommodate their changing needs. In 1963, patriarch Robert built a freestanding screened porch in the yard where he would relax and watch baseball games on a small black-and-white TV. In the early 80s, David and Liz finished off the third-floor attic as a bedroom for their oldest son; today, it serves as Liz’s workspace where she’s currently finishing writing a book. To spare aging knees, the washer and dryer were relocated from the basement to the second floor near the master bedroom a few years ago.

“We finally converted our wood-burning fireplace to gas logs, and we’re so happy we did,” Liz shares. “Previously, we had to carry logs all the way through the house to the fireplace. Now every night we just flip a switch and sit there and enjoy the warm glow.”

Before the family moved to the house, David grew up on nearby Maxwell Lane and his ancestors were among Monroe County’s first settlers. As he’s watched Elm Heights change over the course of his lifetime, he feels its essence has stayed the same, and cherishes memories of the idyllic childhood he had there.

“It was a neighborhood where dogs ran free and parents mingled. I loved riding my sled from the top of Maxwell Lane hill all the way to Woodlawn—back and forth all day long,” he chuckles. A little more seriously, he says, “I would hope that one of our sons would end up with this house. I couldn’t bear to see it go out of the family.”

1. Built for Bloomington Limestone Company executive William Hubbard, this circa-1929 Tudor Revival-style home in Elm Heights has been owned by the McCrea family since 1957.

2. Liz and David McCrea purchased the home from David’s mother, Dorothy, in 1980 and raised their two sons there.



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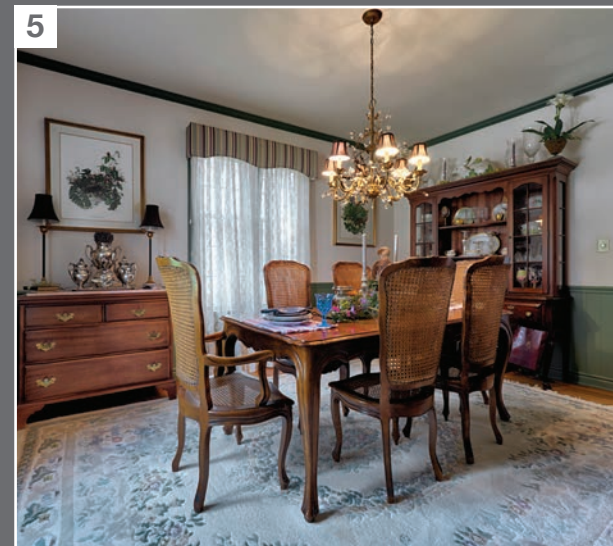


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3. The living room enjoys great natural light through double-hung windows with original glass, and features 8-foot ceilings, original oak flooring, poured wet plaster walls, and crown molding. The McCreas furnished this room and all others with well-loved family pieces and artwork.

4. The kitchen features original cabinets (left). When the McCreas updated the kitchen in 1980, they hired a cabinetmaker to make new cabinets (right wall) that resembled the original ones.





5. The traditional dining room is full of personal touches. The buffet-server was formerly Liz's mother's dresser. David and Liz purchased the sideboard at Kittle's Furniture 40 years ago.



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6. The spacious 15-foot-by-22-foot master bedroom enjoys the same dimensions as the living room. Its 8-foot ceiling makes it just possible for the tall walnut wardrobe, a McCrea family antique, to fit against the far wall.

7. The front hallway features a wide staircase and five arched doorways.

8. The McCreas used the upstairs bathroom's original black-and-white tile as inspiration for the room's newer touches—floral wallpaper, beadboard wainscoting, new fixtures, and a hanging cabinet.

9. When she isn't working on her book manuscript on the third floor, Liz gravitates to this cozy room off of the kitchen, which she calls "the snuggery."

10. In 1963, David's father, Robert, had a freestanding screened porch built on the property, and often relaxed there watching baseball games on a small black-and-white portable TV. The large brick fireplace renders the space inviting even on chilly autumn evenings.

1. Kirsten Lee's immaculately preserved Lustron home is one of seven still standing in Bloomington.

2. The kitchen features some of the home's original metal cabinets; newer base cabinets were chosen to complement the originals.

A Magical Little House

Kirsten Lee has a confession to make about her house.

"I thought it was hideous the first time I saw it!" she says. "But back then I was completely uneducated on the history of Lustron homes."

Kirsten is something of an expert on Lustrons now. In 2015, when her boss, Trent Jones, owner of Platinum Development, purchased the house, she assisted him with its extensive renovation. In the process, Kirsten discovered just how rare Lustrons are.

Of the thousands of Lustron homes built in the United States between 1948 and 1950, only about 1,500 still exist. There are approximately 180 in Indiana, and just seven in Bloomington. Although some are on the National Register of Historic Places, many have been altered beyond recognition. Kirsten's pristine Lustron is a rarity.

Jones painstakingly restored the home's metal exterior, much like one would a vintage automobile—by grinding out rust spots and filling them, pulling out dents, priming, and painting. Kirsten was responsible for selecting period-appropriate paint colors and fixtures for the 1,150-square-foot interior, which seems much larger because of the home's space-saving built-ins.

After the work was complete, Kirsten donned her Realtor hat and began showing the home to potential buyers. It wasn't long before she realized she had fallen in love with the house herself.

"Whenever I walked through the front gate, I would get this feeling of good energy," recalls Kirsten, now a home stylist for West Elm, a furniture retailer in Indianapolis. "I had been house hunting myself, and I realized it was the perfect house for my daughter, Maddy, and me."

It's been almost two years since Kirsten and Maddy moved into their cozy metal charmer. They are at the stage, says Kirsten, where they are making subtle changes so their home reflects their tastes and needs in more personal ways.

"After the initial rush to move in and get settled, we've had time to think about how we flow through the space," Kirsten says. "I tell my clients that you need to fill your home with things that you love and make you happy. So now we are in the process of sprucing things up and making changes that reflect who we are. For example, I've finally added the gallery wall I





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3. Lustron homes feature metal ceilings and walls. Shallow, built-in shelving on the living room wall (left) is perfect for displaying cherished mementos and photographs.

4. The Lustron's large windows allow an abundance of natural light. This view from the living room shows the dining area (right).

5. Kirsten Lee and her daughter Maddy, 8, love their Lustron, which they call their "little house of magic."



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- 6. The wall that divides the dining area from the kitchen has built-in shelving.
- 7. One of Kirsten's favorite spots is this cheery little sunporch, which doubles as a convenient space to hang coats and store off-season items.
- 8. An original built-in vanity runs the length of one wall in Kirsten's bedroom.
- 9. Now that she and Maddy are settled in their home, Kirsten has been enjoying sprucing up various nooks and crannies with fresh paint and décor. The home's only bathroom got a recent makeover.
- 10. Maddy's bedroom is airy and fanciful.



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wanted. There is nothing in our home that doesn't have personal meaning."

Kirsten and Maddy's infatuation with their Lustron extends to its sun-dappled private yard, which they love most in the spring. Just weeks ago, Maddy celebrated her eighth birthday with a group of friends in her fairy garden.

"We have three bunny rabbits that live in our yard, and occasionally a deer pops in to see us," Kirsten says. "You hear birds chirping at all hours of the day, and Miss Maddy still believes the fairies in her garden watch over us. We call this our little house of magic." ✨