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Photo by Michael Jacobson

Tim and Julie Rittenhouse constructed this new house overlooking Lake Koronis (part of an old sports camp) in 2006, moving into their new home just before the Fourth of July.

Family constructs new home overlooking lake

By Michael Jacobson

When they married in 1987, Julie and Tim Rittenhouse planned to live in their old house in Hawick for five years. Then two kids came along... nearly 20 years went by... "It was time," said Tim of building a new house overlooking Lake Koronis. "We were always waiting, saving money, and we thought we'd just do it," added Julie.

Their house in Hawick is next to the extracting plant for their honey business. It was built in the 1950s by Tim's grandfather, who moved to the Paynesville area from Elmore, Iowa, to find better territory (more dairy pasture) for his bees, bought the old Hawick creamery for his extracting plant, and built the house nearby.

Sitting on a hill - on the site where the sports camp used to be located - their new house features views to the south of nearby Lake Koronis, plus wildlife visi-

tors (including wild turkeys and deer) from the surrounding woods. "It sure beats the view from my window in Hawick, where I just looked at where I worked," said Julie.

Tim and Julie considered adding on to their house in Hawick, but they didn't think that remodeling would have a corresponding impact on its resale value. Plus it is located on the same property as their plant, making it hard to sell, they thought.

Then, they set their sights on purchasing property where they could build a new house. "We looked for a long time to find land. It was right when everything was selling," said Julie. "If you weren't right there when somebody was selling, it was gone."

They wanted to be in the woods, to have privacy, and to have a larger lot. Their kids, said Tim, were used to riding four-wheelers and dirt bikes in the gravel pit near Hawick, so they wanted more space.

They had purchased a lot already when they were

approached by the Lake Koronis Assembly Grounds about a 10-acre lot at the old sports camp. They had kept bees on the property for years and had asked about purchasing the land about a year earlier during their search process.

They ended up buying 11 acres, including a shed and the field where they keep their bees. They were just in the "right place at the right time," explained Tim. "We were just ecstatic when they called," said Julie, though the sale took longer to complete due to the church procedures required by the LKAG to sell.

Their purchase was finalized over the winter of 2005, they cleared trees where they planned to build in the summer of 2005, they started building in the fall of 2005, and they moved into their new home in the week of the Fourth of July 2006.

They knew right away where they wanted to build their house on the lot. "We just wanted to stay on the hill and wanted to keep the rest as natural as possi-

ble," said Tim.

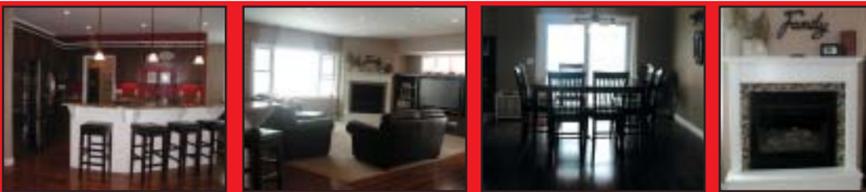
The house may appear gigantic from Crest Ridge Road, where a three-story side is visible, but it is really just a story and a half with a full basement, noted Tim, totaling around 4,800 sq. ft.

They poured concrete walls in the basement in the fall of 2005, contractors framed the house in December 2005, the exterior was done by February 2006, the sheetrock was installed in March, and the family did the painting in April. It was a mild winter to build, and they had time to help in the winter, too. "It worked out really good for us," said Julie, "because our bees are gone in the winter."

They had a whole folder of house plans that they considered, each having some (but not all) of the features that they desired. "There was never a plan out there that was exactly what we wanted," said Julie. "Then we had to hire someone to alter the plan."

RITTENHOUSES - see page 2C

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Photo by Michael Jacobson

An archway separates the living room (above) from the dining room and kitchen (see page 4C). After living in an older home with lots of small rooms, the Rittenhouses wanted an open floor plan for their new home.

RITTENHOUSES – from page 1C

The major change to their house plan was adding an office on the main floor, which necessitated changing the size of the other rooms.

Other key factors in their house plan were the open flow between the living room, dining room, and kitchen. They also liked the angled garage. “It seemed to fit the lot,” said Tim of the design.

Their old house was small (27’ by 20’) with the staircase in the center of the main floor. It had many small rooms, tiny bedrooms, and an unfinished basement. His grandparents went south to Louisiana in the win-

ter with their bees, said Tim, and lived in a trailer house there, so it probably seemed fine to them. But with all the small rooms and walls in their old house, “everything was sectioned off,” he said.

After living in their new house and returning to their old house in Hawick, their son Sam told his parents that: “I feel so big in here because it’s so small.”

“It’s big, but it’s cozy,” said Julie of their new house. “When we were building, it seemed huge, but now that we live here it doesn’t seem so big. I guess we use all the space.”

On the main floor of their new house, the Rittenhouses have: a front entry, open stairway to sec-

ond floor (as well as a stairway to the basement), living room, dining room, kitchen, half bathroom, laundry room, mud room to three-stall garage, hot tub room (which was supposed to be a screened-in porch), master bedroom, and master bathroom with a walk-in closet. “Everything we need, Tim and I, is on the main level,” said Julie. Even the hallways are large enough for wheelchairs, she noted. “When you get old,” added Tim, “you don’t want to climb steps.”

They wanted “lots of windows facing the lake.” Their view of Koronis is especially good in the winter, when the trees are without leaves. “It’s nice when the sun shines in the winter,” said Julie of their south-fac-

ing view. “It warms up (the house) so good.”

They have nine-foot ceilings on the main floor and eight-foot ceilings upstairs. The front entry and the living room both have 20-foot-plus peaks, with two levels of windows in the living room facing the lake.

They put a board around the living room at the level of the second story, which breaks up the wall and allows them to have two colors of paint in the living room (one above the board and another below it).

The Rittenhouses – who hope they have constructed their first, and last, home – found that building a house involves “so many decisions.” “It’s a lot of deci-

RITTENHOUSES – see page 4C

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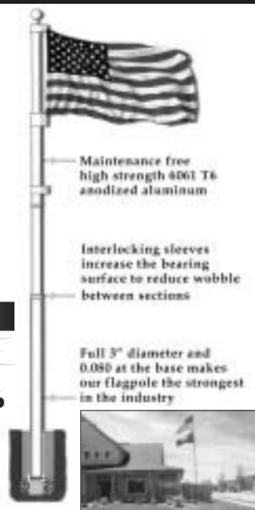
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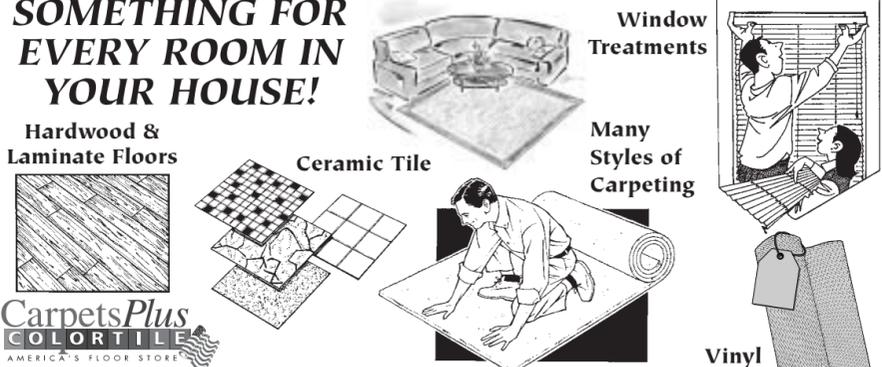
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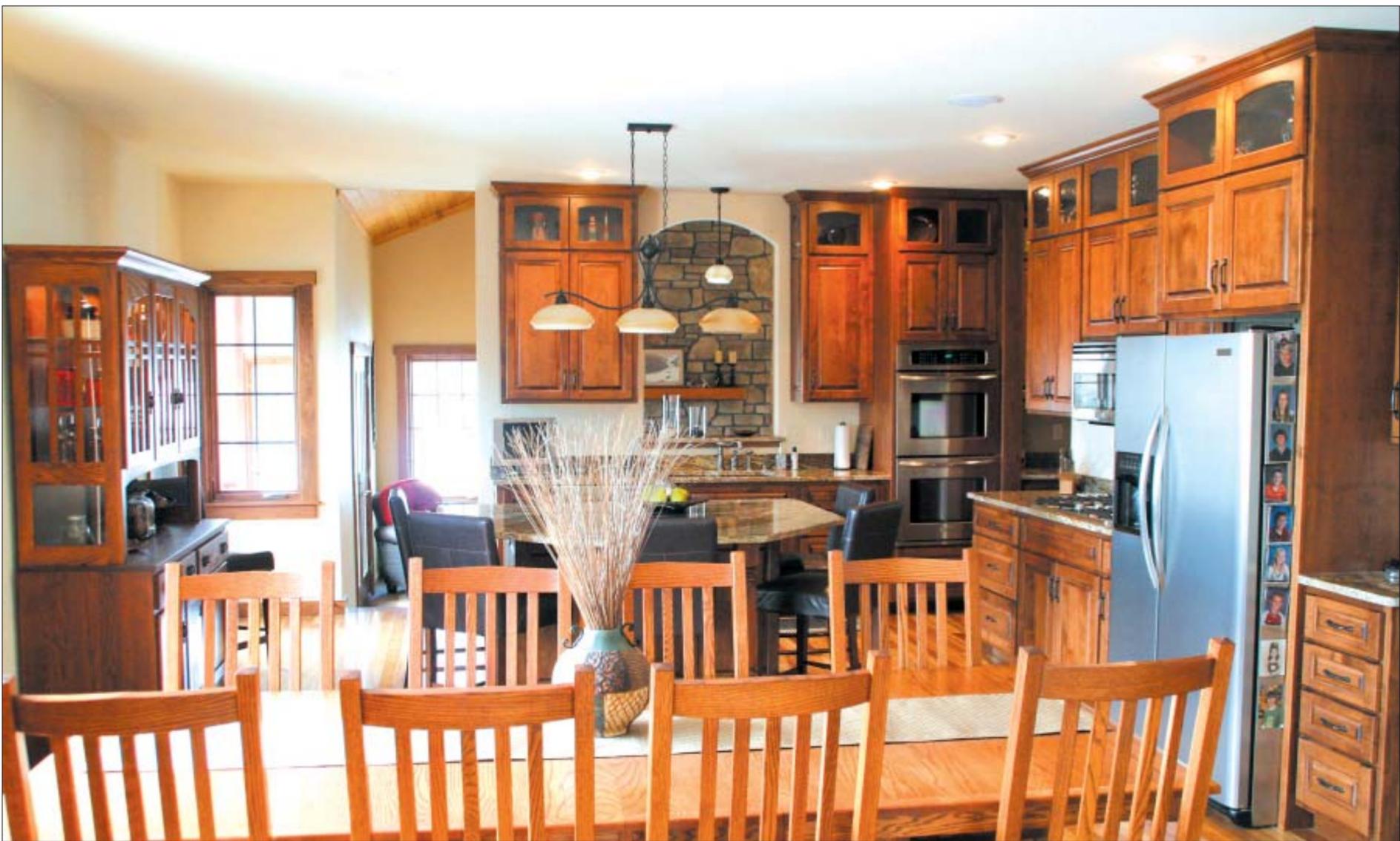


Photo by Michael Jacobson

The Rittenhouse's dining room and kitchen feature Brazilian teak floor and Brazilian granite countertops. Just to the right of the double oven is an extra hallway suggested by their builder, leading to the garage.

RITTENHOUSES – from page 2C

sions to make. What sort of light switch covers do you want? And where do you want them?" explained Tim.

They were pleased with all the expert advice they got from their contractors. A key suggestion by their builder was to build a smaller pantry and use the space to have a hallway from the kitchen to the garage. In the plans, the pantry separated the kitchen and the garage entryway.

Between the smaller pantry and the extra kitchen cabinets, they have plenty of storage space, said Julie, and the direct hallway saves walking down a long hall, through the living room and dining room, and around into the kitchen. This shorter route is especially nice when carrying groceries into the kitchen.

In the kitchen, they took some extra money and decided to go with granite counters. They like how their Brazil granite counters complements their teak flooring, also from Brazil.

Their builder also suggested enclosing a screened-in porch on the west end of the house, which became their hot tub room. Since they already had the walls and roof, it would be usable all-year round if totally enclosed, their builder told them. Then they turned a window in the kitchen into an alcove to hot tub room, which Julie enjoys because she can see the gas fireplace from the kitchen sink.

The gas fireplace has cultured stone facing. Tim thought about having a real fireplace but was convinced to go with the ease of gas when asked how long he wanted to split and haul wood.

The family enjoys soaking in the hot tub, so, underneath it, they had sloped concrete installed, with exposed aggregate on top that allows water to drain and run away from the hot tub.

They used cedar paneling by the hot tub but a pine ceiling, stained to look like cedar. They did the staining and varnishing themselves over the winter when the house was built. In the kitchen, they liked the

look of cherry and opted to have alder kitchen cabinets, stained to look like cherry. When they built, alder was cheaper than oak, they said. They also used knotty alder upstairs as well as oak trim throughout the house.

They added a small screened-in porch facing the lake, connected to the hot tub room by glass French doors. They enjoy the screened-in porch, with a table and grill, since the woods can be buggy in the summer. "It's perfect," said Julie. "We love it. We sit out there a lot."

Julie's favorite flooring in the house is the slate in the front entryway and main floor hallway. She loves its natural colors, the way it looks, and the way it feels. In the winter, it feels warm on your feet, she said, and in the summer it seems cool. "I had seen it at a house and loved it," she explained. "It doesn't show dirt. I love the mix of colors and the natural look."

The slate-floored hallway connects the garage entry

to the hot tub room, kitchen, laundry room, half bath, main living area, and master bedroom suite. Julie is glad that she doesn't have to carry laundry up and down from the basement anymore. Her new front-loading washer spins out so much water that she thought the first load was dry before she put the clothes in the new dryer.

In the master bedroom, Tim and Julie wanted a tray ceiling, and their builder was able to construct one using a less expensive method. They also have built-in dressers in the walk-in closet, a jacuzzi in the bathroom with two sinks, a shower without door, and a small separate room for the toilet.

Their master bedroom furniture is arriving soon, they still need a cabinet for the office, and Julie still wants furniture for the second-story catwalk. Since their new house is so much bigger than their old one, Julie knew she had to budget for more furniture, including a dining room table, etc. She also enjoys

RITTENHOUSES – see page 6C

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RITTENHOUSES – from page 4C

While living in the old house, whenever she went shopping, she had to think about where she was going to put something before buying it.

The catwalk opens to the front entryway and the living room. Their two teenagers – 17-year-old Sam and 13-year-old Rachel – have their bedrooms on the second floor. “They have so much room,” said Julie. “Their uncles gave them old couches. They almost have apartments.”

Their shared bathroom has two rooms: the shower and toilet in a private back room and two sinks on opposite sides in the front. The door allows someone to use their sink while the other showers, etc.

Another suggestion by their builder was to sheet rock a small alcove off Sam’s room, and he uses the cave-like space as a dark corner for video games. And, above the garage, they created a large playroom for their teenagers out of space that they originally weren’t planning on utilizing. This room has a separate furnace, so it can be kept cool until someone wants to use the ping pong table, other games, two drum sets, other instruments, stereo, or couch.

Their builder also suggested finishing the basement. If you did it later, it would be dusty and messy, they were told. “That’s one thing we got talked into, too. We were going to just leave it unfinished,” said Tim. With their newest arrival – newborn baby Valarie in February – it’s good that they have the extra space, said Julie.

The family room in the basement has a big-screen TV that is good for watching movies. They have surround-sound speakers in the basement for the home theater and ran speakers throughout the rest of the house, connected to a stereo in the office.

They installed plumbing in the basement for a bar someday. There’s also an extra laundry room downstairs for work clothes (with a stairway leading directly from the basement to the garage) plus a bathroom and a storage room for work and hunting clothes.

Last summer, they did most of the landscaping around their house before hosting Julie’s brother’s wedding reception. They would like to pave their driveway someday. About their only regret in building their new house is that their garage faces north, meaning snow and ice are slow to melt in the winter.



Photos by Michael Jacobson



An extra room above their three-stall garage was turned into a playroom for their children with two drum sets, other musical instruments, and ping pong.

Tim and Julie Rittenhouse – at the suggestion of their builder – decided to enclose this hot tub room, which was designed to be a screened-in porch, to add year-round living space to their new house. At left is the family’s hot tub, at right is a gas fireplace, and in the back is a smaller screened-in porch that was added.

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In the basement, the Rittenhouses have a family room with a home theater, plus two bedrooms, a bathroom, storage room, and a second laundry for work clothes.

The Rittenhouses wanted to live in the woods, with room to be outdoors, and were pleased to purchase 11 acres for the new house.

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