

THE RED RIVER VALLEY'S GUIDE TO INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR DESIGN

# DESIGN & LIVING

MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020

COMPLIMENTARY



*Stories*  
TO TELL

Learn the narratives  
behind homes that  
are more than  
just a pretty facade

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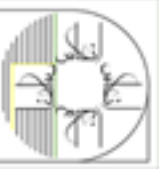
after



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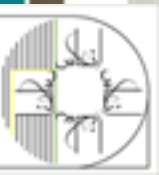
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# contents



## FEATURE STORY

### 24 **Stories to Tell**

Every home has a story. Some are custom builds with every detail planned out and others are a renovated work-in-progress. This month, we explored some homes with special stories to tell. From rebuilding after a devastating fire to designing and building a very first home, we are excited to share these homeownership stories with you!

### 20 **Designing with Joy**

In each issue of *Design & Living*, residential and commercial designer Christen Anderson of Live Christen Joy showcases a joyful project of hers. This month, Anderson showcases a home office design that is sure to get you feeling productive for the new year.

### 52 **Form & Function with Jackson Strom**

Architect Jackson Strom of Strom Architecture dives into a different important design element each month. In this piece, Strom, along with Home & Hearth's General Manager Darla Skaurud, share insight into incorporating a warm fireplace into your home.

### 54 **Artist Feature: Mitchel Hoffart**

Using paint, paper, pigment and photography, self-taught artist Mitchel Hoffart creates multi-medium pieces with a signature—often political—look. Read about how he approaches his art and how he has shifted his style over the years.

### 64 **Made of Steel**

Join contributor Paul H. Gleye as he provides insight into some of our area's most interesting architectural feats. This month, Gleye explored two "Lustron Houses," or homes made entirely of steel as a reaction to the post-World War II landscape.

### 71 **Spaces that Work: Bell Bank Headquarters**

Gorgeous offices need love too! Join commercial interior designer Becky Muller as she tours us through Bell Bank's brand new expansion on 13th Avenue. To accommodate for their growth (being the largest privately-owned bank in the region), Bell Bank needed a headquarters that reflected their values.

## ON THE COVER

These stylish orange books are chic and bold enough to make any bookshelf pop. See more of the room they sit in in this month's "Designing With Joy" piece by Christen Anderson. Read "High-Powered Home Office" on page 20.

## NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

For our April/May issue, we will be diving into the trending world of Eco-Homes! Sustainability is in. From the rise of decorating with antiques to the implementation of eco-friendly technology, homeowners have been looking into ways to live more sustainable and eco-friendly lives and we want to celebrate that.



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FROM THE EDITOR



# If These WALLS Could Talk

Dear Readers,

Welcome back and happy new year! It's felt strange not having published an issue in January, but here we are in the February/March issue! If you haven't heard, in 2020 we switched to a new publication schedule, producing issues bi-monthly. I know I'll miss producing content for you readers every month, but I promise this is a good change! This switch to a bi-monthly schedule allows us to focus on what this issue is dedicated to: Storytelling.

I've always thought that what makes *Design & Living* special is our dedication to storytelling and showcasing the personality behind the spaces we feature. If you want to look at beautiful homes, look at Pinterest. If you want to see stunning homes in your metaphorical-backyard and read the how, why and who behind them, *Design & Living* is your place. I find it much more interesting to dive into the personal and local connections of the homes right down the street than to just praise architectural feats.

In 2020, we at *Design & Living* are making it our priority to showcase the stories behind the homes... in addition to the stunning homes themselves. Did the homeowner change their flooring to accommodate for the addition of a crawling baby?

Did the family choose a certain fireplace because it reminded them of their childhood home? Is the home minimalist because the homeowners are accustomed to moving often? These are all the types of questions we will be diving into this year.

That being said, we still plan on showcasing jaw-dropping homes. It will always be our goal to highlight and honor the outstanding home-industry professionals in our area. We are so lucky to live in a community so full of talent and zest for the industry, it would be a mistake to overlook that. So even though our publication schedule has changed, we will always be your source for beautiful homes and interior design in the Red River Valley.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, don't hesitate to reach out to me at [alexandra@spotlightmediafargo.com](mailto:alexandra@spotlightmediafargo.com)

*Alexandra Martin*

ALEXANDRA MARTIN  
Editor



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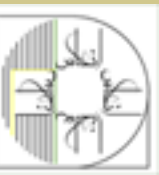
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**Becky Muller**

Social Media Coordinator  
North Dakota Interior Designers



ndid.org



**Melissa Rademacher**

President & CEO  
Downtown Community Partnership



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**2020**

*Design & Living Magazine*

# Editorial Advisory Board

We at *Design & Living Magazine* want to make sure that our content is accurate, unbiased and reflects the local home industry. That is why we meet with our Editorial Advisory Board, which is made up of representatives from local, statewide and national organizations. Each month, we listen to their feedback and discuss innovations in local art, architecture, home decor, interior design and landscaping.



**Rich Lahren**

Hardscape Committee Member, Past Board Member & Past President  
North Dakota Nursery, Greenhouse & Landscape Association



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**Chris Hawley**

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Photos by Hillary Ehlen and J. Alan Paul Photography

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# DESIGN & LIVING

MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2020

Design & Living Magazine is a free publication distributed six times a year. Our mission is to showcase all that the Red River Valley has to offer in terms of interior design, architecture and landscaping, profiling the people that make these possible. We also strive to provide a quality and fun reading experience and improve the way of life in our community. The publication is mailed to homes across the US and has stand distribution throughout North Dakota and Minnesota.

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# DESIGN & LIVING TEAM

At Design & Living Magazine, our goal is to create a publication that is just as much fun to read as it is to view. Here are the writers, designers, photographers and contributors who so affably use their time and talents to tell a story and give our pages purpose.



**KAYLEIGH OMANG**  
PHOTOGRAPHER

Kayleigh Omang is a Fargo native, photojournalist and dog trainer. She studied photojournalism and entrepreneurship at Minnesota State University-Moorhead. Outside of photography and dogs, Omang enjoys thrifting, playing bingo and hanging out with her two Siamese cats.



**CHRISTY GERMAN**  
MARKETING DESIGNER

German is the marketing designer for Spotlight Media. She is a native of Watertown, S.D. and Northern State University graduate with a BFA with an emphasis in Graphic Design. In addition to designing marketing materials for print, she also is the graphic designer behind *Design & Living*.



**BECKY MULLER**  
CONTRIBUTOR

Becky Muller is an Interior Designer at ICON Architectural Group and Social Media Coordinator for North Dakota Interior Designers with a passion for designing commercial spaces. In her spare time, the South Dakota State University graduate travels with her husband, visits breweries and record stores and spends time with her family and friends.



**JACKSON STROM**  
CONTRIBUTOR

With over a decade of experience, Strom's passion for the architectural profession led him to found Strom Architecture in 2019. Within his new firm, Strom Architecture strives to elevate the ordinary elements that exist in all projects. Outside of the office, Jackson loves to spend time with his wife, Lindsey, and their son, Sully.



**PAUL H. GLEYE**  
CONTRIBUTOR

Gleye is a professor of architecture at North Dakota State University. His fields of expertise include historic preservation and urban design, and he leads the architecture school's term abroad program in Europe each spring semester.



**CHRISTEN ANDERSON**  
CONTRIBUTOR

Anderson is a Minnesota native with an eye for decor and design. She is the owner of Live Christen Joy and is known for her exceptional remodels, expert staging and accessorizing high-end living spaces. Anderson is also a passionate art collector, world traveler and home cook who frequently entertains friends.

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## TAKE A LOOK AT Spotlight's Other Magazines

### FARGO MONTHLY

With Valentine's Day on February 14, the whole month of February turns into a celebration of amore. Whether you have been married for years, are fresh into a relationship, are pining after a crush or celebrating Galentine's Day, February is a time to embrace those around you whom you love. And what better way to celebrate love than to get out of the house and go on a special date? We've compiled a variety of date night (or day or weekend!) events to be sure to take your special person to.



### BISON ILLUSTRATED

## Coming Soon!

2019 was a season of questions for North Dakota State football. Was this program in rebuilding mode? With a new coach, a new quarterback and a host of new faces on both sides of the ball, the rest of the FCS was salivating at the thought of knocking the Bison from their perch. But what ensued in 2019? The Bison only won 16 games. That new quarterback? He was named the Walter Payton Award winner...as a redshirt freshman. Perhaps most importantly, the FCS programs that were hungry to knock the Bison out were left licking their wounds as the Bison devoured opponents en route to their eighth title in nine seasons. Not bad for a rebuild, huh?

### FARGO INC!

It is important for your business to stay as efficient as possible in order to keep up with the fast-paced business world we live in. The best way to do this is usually through the implementation of the right technology. However, with so many options these days, it can be difficult to sift through the duds and find the right pieces of technology for your company. That's where we come in, we interviewed some of the most forward-thinking technology companies in the Fargo-Moorhead area to find out what pieces of tech they're using to make their operations run smoothly.



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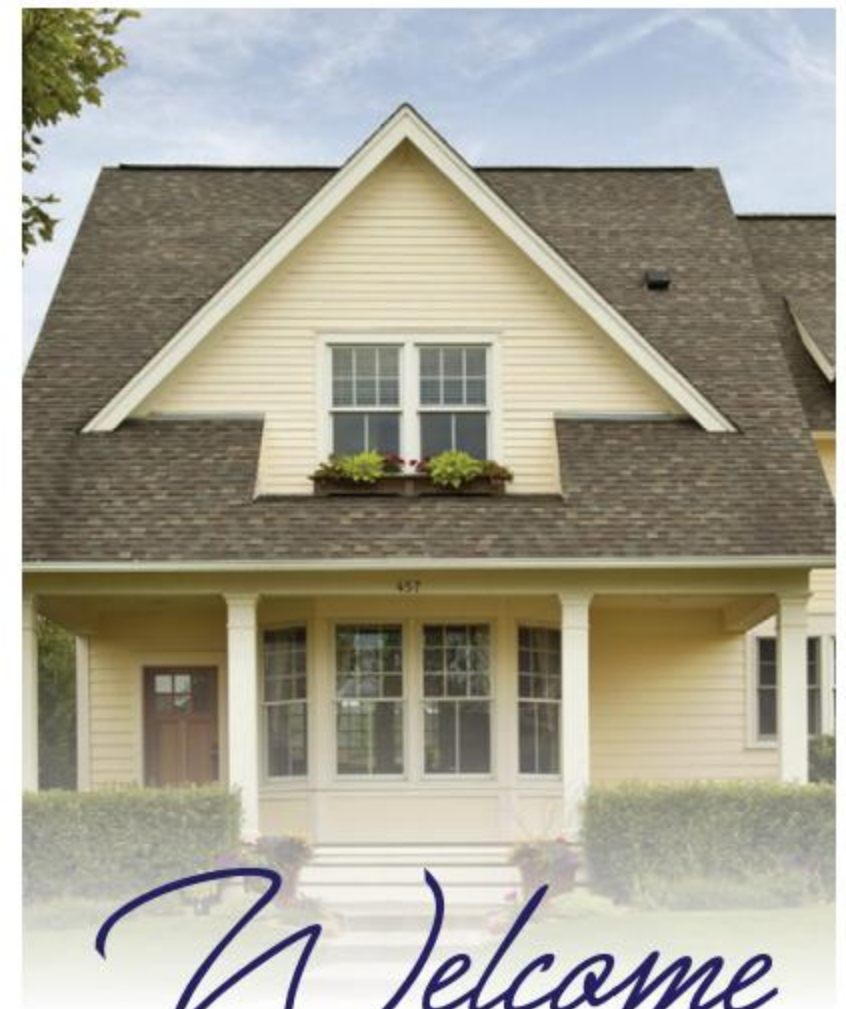
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HELLO  
Spring

RED RIVER VALLEY  
**HOME  
& GARDEN  
SHOW**



**I**t's February. Spring is so close yet feels far, especially with the piles of snow on the ground. Home Builders Association invites you to shake off those winter blues while making plans to refresh your home or yard at the Red River Valley Home & Garden Show Feb. 28 – March 1 at the Fargodome.

The 2020 show is unveiling fresh, new features designed to mix things up a bit and provide a welcoming atmosphere. Here are my personal top five favorites for this year's show. Learn more about all of them at our brand new website [www.homeandgardenshowfm.com](http://www.homeandgardenshowfm.com)

**1. Tap Into The Experts**  
Several exhibitors are offering surprises, experiences and innovation you won't want to miss. Just one example is

Accent Kitchen & Bath with on-the-spot free kitchen and bath design using 3-D software, so be sure to bring your room dimensions.

**2. Fun For Kids**  
We've created a "Kids Corner" tailored for the little ones. Stop by to play games, color, build with Legos, take a selfie with Titan Machinery and learn about gardening through activities with the Fargo Public Library

**3. Playhouse Challenge**  
We invited middle schoolers to work in teams to tap into their imaginations for innovative designs and build models to be voted on by you! Cast your ballot for your favorite playhouse designed by kids, for kids!

**4. Workshops**  
They check all the boxes: gear up for a remodel with Accent Kitchen & Bath, plan grilling strategies with NDSU BBQ Boot Camp or learn to improve your yard with Don Kinzler, gardening columnist with The Forum. Plus, we've got sessions

on smart homes and green homes too.

**5. Beer Garden**  
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See you at the show!

by Darrick Guthmiller,  
Kochmann Brothers  
Homes, Inc.  
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Darrick Guthmiller is current Home Builders Association of F-M president. He is a partner in Kochmann Brothers Homes, Inc., specializing in new custom homes, remodeling and lake homes.



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## high-powered HOME OFFICE

A fresh new start to 2020 is underway and it's time to set the stage for a positive and productive year. In interior design, productivity is the result of a well-designed experience. Great design engages your senses and elevates your life in all areas.

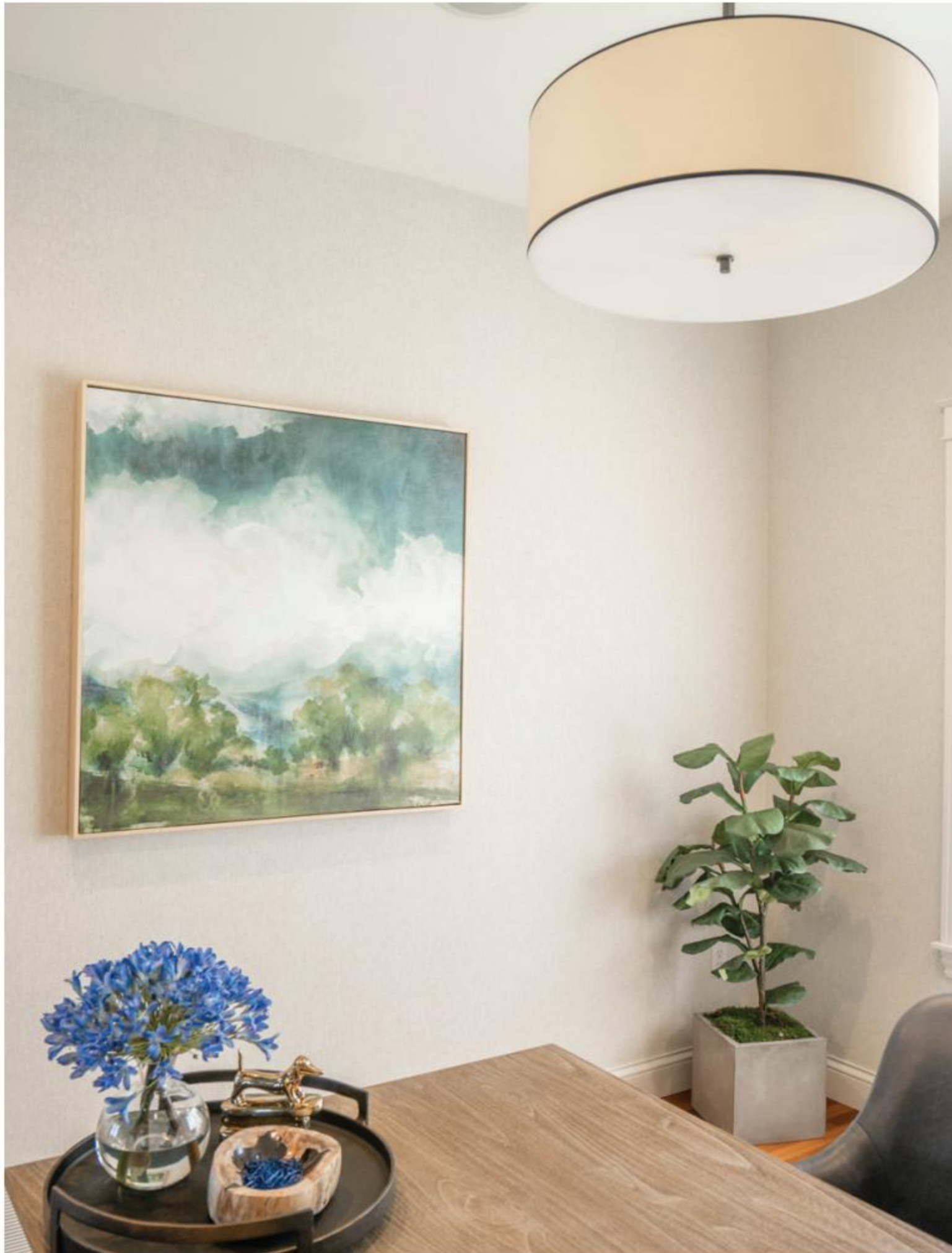
BY Christen Anderson | PHOTOS BY Hillary Ehlen

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When I'm working in beautifully designed spaces I feel more energy, find more inspiration and focus effortlessly to create dramatic results for clients. Because I know and appreciate the power of great design, I was thrilled when a well-known Fargo business owner hired the Christen Joy team to transform her home office upon selling her successful business. It was an opportunity to work in my own newly designed home office to create an extraordinary space for her with the perfect ambiance to set and crush new goals.

### 1. LIGHTEN UP

Look up at the lighting. Chances are you don't have enough and should consider adding more types or layers of light. In fact, most homes and businesses lack proper lighting and many people who use the spaces each day don't realize how lacking the lighting is.

In this Osgood office, natural sunlight floods the room during beautiful summer days, however, in the winter months and on long workdays, it had dim light with only a two-bulb light fixture to brighten the space.

Recessed cans are great in office spaces where a central fixture is used as a focal point. The recessed lights provide ambient, even light in areas the fixture does not illuminate. On this project, we added four cans on dimmer switches to control the amount of light and updated the light fixture to a two-bulb hanging shade. To stay consistent with other light fixtures in the home, we chose a bronze finish with matching gorgeous bronze details on the shade.

Lighting is one of the most important elements, so don't skip this step or save it for last. Ample lighting allows you to be alert and focused, is much kinder and healthier for your eyes and prevents headaches.



## 2. SINK IN

With the lighting done, we focused on something soft to sink your feet into after a day in heels — or something for your feet to enjoy when working from home! From an aesthetic standpoint, I was eager to tame down the medium-dark floors since we wanted the space to feel light and bright. Minimizing the floor tones provided a space where more weathered wood felt cohesive. A large rug was selected with a subtle pattern and muted tones for a warm, soft and welcoming feel.

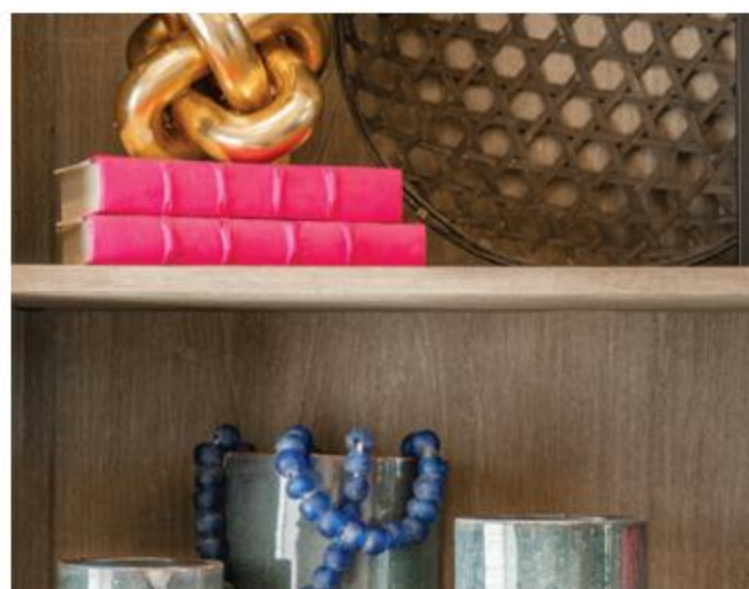
## 3. BE COMFORTABLE

Comfort is king when it comes to office furniture. If it looks good but doesn't feel good, you'll end up regretting your purchase quickly and loathing it forever.

In the Osgood office, a swivel chair in a soft, supple leather was selected in a weathered blue (a color pulled from the rug). The base is constructed in a weathered wood to complement the new desk and storage unit, as well.

The client wanted desk space with book storage and somewhere to hide electronics, including a printer. We selected a peninsula-style desk with side storage. The deep drawers have optional file hangers included. The desk left space for pretty pops of color, personal mementos and carefully selected art pieces to build a curated look. The flexibility of the furniture was a perfect fit. The gray wash finish provided the perfect evergreen backdrop for adding personality in other accessories.

When choosing a home office desk, ask yourself what you need to store. Do you really need paper file folders or can you switch over to electronic versions? How about bookshelves? Inventory the items you're going to keep, then search for flexible systems. Some provide drawers or cabinets to hide bursting binders, books and electronics. Remember to measure your room to make sure it will fit and select a neutral finish you can be happy with for several years.







#### 4. STAY INSPIRED

To bring personality to a room, I add texture. In the Osgood office, a neutral grasscloth wallpaper was selected for warmth, elegance and classic style to enhance the patterned rug and artwork. Two dark-toned baskets fit perfectly in the bottom storage space to corral any clutter and add texture and interest.

The client wanted color and Christen Joy brought it! Fresh flowers, interesting accent books, layered art and accessories elevated the workspace and can be changed out by season or travels to keep the space interesting and updated.

Stylish alternatives to traditional organization pieces including pencil and mail holders in a beautiful "agency navy" and cognac colors echo the muted blues in the rug and chair and accent the warm tones in the grasscloth wallpaper. Everything flows in the space to create a special experience and provide a launchpad for new entrepreneurial ventures.

So, hello 2020! This office and its fearless leader are ready for a positive and productive year.



Meet Christen Anderson of Christen Joy: Inspired Interiors & Events

Anderson is a Minnesota native with an eye for decor and design. Christen Joy specializes in new-construction commercial projects, exceptional remodels, furnishing high-end living spaces and creating memorable special events. Anderson is also a passionate art collector, world traveler and home cook who frequently entertains for friends.

XO-Christen Joy

Join me on Instagram and Facebook to see my latest projects and email me at [christen@livechristenjoy.com](mailto:christen@livechristenjoy.com) for design inquiries.

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# Stories TO TELL

Every home has a story. Some are custom builds with every detail planned out and others are a renovated work-in-progress. This month, we explored some homes with special stories to tell. From rebuilding after a devastating fire, to designing and building a very first home, to sharing home-tales on social media, we are excited to share these homeownership stories with you!





Kupper

# A Fargo Farmhouse, SQUARE BY SQUARE



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### TAKES THE PRESSURE OFF FAMILY MEMBERS

It's easier for surviving family members to deal with the details of the funeral, including the financial burden if you choose to set aside funds.

### LETS YOUR LOVED ONES FOCUS ON HEALING

It can be extremely stressful when you are mourning the loss of a loved one to try to figure out what they would have wanted for their final arrangements. Sharing your final wishes allows your family to focus on grief and healing.

### PEACE OF MIND KNOWING FUNERAL EXPENSES ARE HANDLED

Whether you prepay for services or set aside money to pay later, planning ahead helps establish a budget and consider your financial arrangements before the time comes.

### HAVE YOUR FUNERAL

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BY Alexandra Martin | PHOTOS BY Kayleigh Omang

The Kupfer family's modern's farmhouse has been carefully documented on Instagram, as homeowner Lauren gives followers an authentic look at living a well-designed life.



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If you're one of Lauren Kupfer's over 3,000 Instagram followers, this article in the magazine will come as no surprise to you. In the days leading up to *Design & Living's* visit to the West Fargo modern farmhouse, Kupfer's Instagram stories began to feature her signature selfie-video clips. With her face to the camera, she recorded herself humorously "freaking out" and speed cleaning the home to prepare it for our cameras.

When Kupfer isn't working at MSUM or shuffling her two kids, Peyton and Owen, around to activities, she runs an Instagram account, @FargoFarmhouse. Here, she documents her home design process, along with authentic musings about life, motherhood and, of course, home decor.

On her Instagram feed, you see pristine, stylized vignettes of her black, white and neutral home. But on her Instagram stories, she shares humorous videos showcasing behind-the-scenes footage of special projects, homeownership blunders, parenthood tidbits and even updates on their cat Violet and dogs Frankie and Yogurt. This authentic mix between her carefully curated snapshots of the home mixed with the reality of everyday life make Kupfer and the Fargo Farmhouse stand out in a sea of "Instagram houses."

Upon us reaching out to feature her home and Instagram brand, Kupfer excitedly shared the announcement with her followers online. That initial excitement quickly turned to panic as she expressed the need to make the home pristine. Kupfer's commentary on the social media app included, "The kitchen is clean. I'm gonna have to rehome my family 'til after our photoshoot Friday," and, after us rescheduling thanks to the weather, "We're having a blizzard! Magazine shoot is rescheduled, work is closed, and the whole family is home destroying my photo-ready house YAY."

As we entered her home, we'd like to think that these worries dissolved. Kupfer candidly talked about the home building process, what she loves about the result, why she decided to document the home online and, for a surprising amount of time, we even discussed Violet the cat, who chimed in with meows.

#### BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

It was in April of 2019 that Lauren and husband Chris Kupfer moved into their newly completed home. The Kupfers had always lived in older character homes, so building and living in a brand new home was a new experience for them.



"I love driving up to our home every day. I love that it feels like we live out in the county, but we are literally 10 minutes from Target. I love that my kids have plenty of room to run around, a huge yard to play in and that our neighbors are always watching out for each other's children. I love that our home and community feel safe and I love raising my family here."





While they were shopping for a new home, the ones they found within their budget did not have the space they needed for their family of five. After not finding what they wanted in the current market, they decided to build. In this new home, their upstairs has four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a laundry room—something they never would have been able to find in a historic home. Since they were accustomed to having the unique touches of character homes in their previous houses, this building process ensured that they could include the aesthetics of an older home with the amenities and efficiencies (read: space!) of a new home.

When deciding to design a unique and a bit out-of-the-ordinary home, they also made sure that the space wasn't too off the wall. "It was important for us to have details that we liked for our new build, but also for our home to have a classic look that would stand the test of time," said Kupfer. From living in and loving the older homes they'd owned, the family took note of the details they wanted to ensure were incorporated into the new build. Some of these details were high ceilings, thicker trim and not-so-open floor plans.

Their fireplace is one such stand-out feature that marries their dedication to old-meets-new. At the heart of their living room, there is a brick fireplace, made of the same brick that's on the exterior. While sleek, flat fireplaces are trending, the Kupfers wanted to dip into their roots and go traditional with their fireplace. This centerpiece is put together with a messy mortar method and includes a raised hearth. Both of these features

were things that their mason joked that he had not been asked to do in 30 years. The "messy" application and traditional setup make the fireplace a standout in the otherwise sleek and modern floorplan.

#### THE LAY OF THE LAND

When looking for the right place to build this modern-meets-traditional dream home, the Kupfers leaned on their Realtor, Lucas Gunkelman of Hatch Realty. Gunkelman helped them find a lot that was in their price range but also included all the neighborhood features they desired. "We found our ideal location in Eaglewood – with a pond in the back, a park in the front, excellent schools and easy access to shops and restaurants," said Kupfer. "Our neighborhood has a wonderful sense of community – there's a fabulously organized Halloween night, block parties and more. Overall it's been a great place to live."

Right now, the neighborhood is still in development, meaning that the Kupfers' home stands virtually alone. Kupfer joked on Instagram that, she is taking advantage of not having nearby neighbors yet, and enjoys posting photos of the home that make it look like a true farmhouse out in the country.

#### A CLEAR AESTHETIC

The exterior of the home is modern farmhouse, with black window frames, white board and batten and cedar columns. "I honestly had no idea that modern farmhouse was even a style before we started building – I just knew I liked the way black windows with a white





exterior looked," said Kupfer. But after doing some online research, she noticed a theme amongst homes falling under the "Modern Farmhouse" umbrella.

While the exterior is true to the modern farmhouse aesthetic, the interior falls into a mix of farmhouse, bohemian, traditional and a sprinkle of eclectic style. When decorating, Kupfer gravitates towards black, white and woods and neutral tones. "I had a photography business at the time [of the build], so natural light and all-white appealed to me," said Kupfer. She noted that once she discovered her love for the black-and-white trend, she was able to pull a lot of inspiration from Instagram and magazines (including *Design & Living's* very own "High Contrast Homes" issue from September 2018).

#### IN THE BUDGET

Pulling from her inspirations, Kupfer took what she had seen others do and made it her own, all within their budget. When it came to the finishes of the home, Kupfer noted that many of the home's details come from online, particularly Amazon. "I ordered a lot online, a lot from Amazon. At first, I didn't know we would be able to find stuff and just have it delivered here," she said, adding to her previous statement that she and her husband did not know much about the home-building process. By ordering things like light fixtures, kitchen cabinet hardware and doorknobs from online, the Kupfers were able to stick to their budget while also achieving their desired look.

By saving on small, easily-changeable things, the homeowners could splurge on the things that really mattered to them. One of those things being a large number of windows throughout the home. The windows all have signature black frames on the interior and exterior. In fact, the decision to have windows like this was one of the first choices the couple made when embarking on the custom-build process. Kupfer even joked that the large, black-framed windows were one

detail they decided on first. "Our windows are larger than 'standard' and we based our whole interior décor design around them. I still love them and am so happy that we decided to go with them," she said.

#### DOCUMENTING THE PROCESS

Watching the whole house come together, Kupfer created the @FargoFarmhouse Instagram account as a way to document the process of custom-building. However, she has since become part of a much larger home-enthusiast community. Through Instagram, Kupfer shares her home while connecting with like-minded moms, Target-aholics and décor enthusiasts.

"I created my Instagram account as a way to document and vent about the good, bad and ugly about our build. You can see in earlier posts that there was a lot of frustration and tears about our build," said Kupfer. Having never built a house before, the couple shared that they didn't have any experience with it and didn't know what to expect. With this shroud of mystery around the project, this home-building process came with some surprises.

Luckily, Kupfer found an online community to help answer some of their questions, commiserate with and compare stories. "Once I began following more accounts [on Instagram] and connecting with other people who were also in the process of building their homes via this platform, I noticed that I was surrounded by a whole community of other people who were experiencing the same things that I was, making some of the same decisions that I was, and were all supporting each other along the way," Kupfer shared. She explains this as an amazing discovery for her and that it came at the right time. By following more and more like-minded accounts, she could discuss ideas and tips and gather inspiration in a new way. "Now I am lucky enough to consider a lot of them my friends and am constantly inspired by them and their design choices," she added.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

As many custom-home owners have come to learn, projects are never quite done. This is no different for the Kupfers. Some upcoming projects they have up their sleeves include designing the guest bedroom around a newly purchased murphy bed, coming up with the perfect DIY kitchen backsplash option (coming off the coattails of a peel-and-stick tile mishap), adding something fun to the walls of the main floor's half bath and determining a game plan for the unfinished basement. "There's always something new and fun going on!" said Kupfer. To stay tuned with these new and fun additions to the Fargo Farmhouse, be sure to follow along on Instagram and see how these visions come to life.

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Kupcho

# Learn TO GROW

BY Alexandra Martin | PHOTOS BY Hillary Ehlen

Brooke and Noah Kupcho have step-by-step been letting their modern, custom home evolve into their dream home.

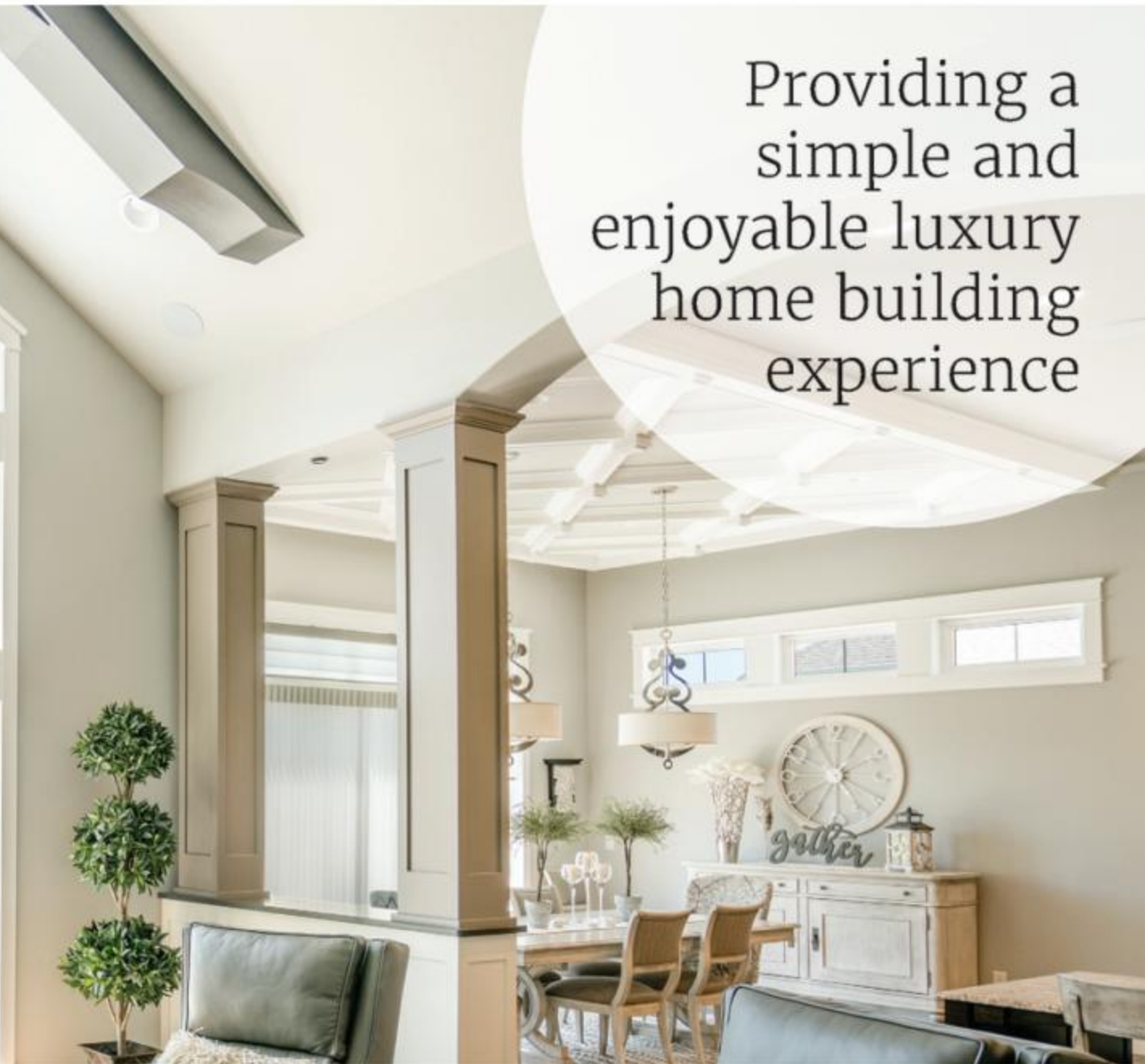
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In a neighborhood lined with conservatively-sized, 1920s homes, there stands the modern and captivating home of Brooke and Noah Kupcho. In the coveted Horace Mann neighborhood of North Fargo, the young couple has been living in their head-turning custom home since its completion in 2016.

#### THE HOMEOWNERS

Both hailing from rural Hazen, N.D., homeowners Brooke and Noah Kupcho have been together since they were 15 and married for eight years. Impressively, they got married at age 22, bought a lot for their future home at age 23 and built the house at age 24. They share their North Fargo home with their dog, Zia, and will be welcoming in a baby boy in May. Noah is the Lead Creative at Tellwell, a Fargo marketing agency, and Brooke is a high school teacher at Fargo North High. Together, they enjoy traveling abroad, eating good food, hiking and rock climbing (which is evident by the rock climbing wall in their garage).

#### THE PLAN

When the couple first got married, Noah sketched out on graph paper a "dream home" for them. At the time, they didn't truly believe they'd ever build it, but things fell into place. A desirable lot opened up, a builder was found and pennies were pinched. Soon enough, they were living in a home completely custom-designed by them. "We are so thankful for the experience. It was fun seeing Noah's drawing come to life and it was fun dreaming it up with him. When we moved into the house, it didn't feel real," said Brooke, adding that, to them, it first felt like they were staying in an Airbnb on vacation...that it couldn't possibly be THEIRS.

Building a custom home is a difficult enough task, but doing so when young and having never owned a house before is a whole other set of circumstances. Through the struggles and decision-making process of building from scratch, the couple looks back at the process fondly. "I have never regretted building. The house isn't perfect, but the whole experience of doing it together and that it is fully ours...that has been a really cool thing," Brooke said. The end result is special and unique to the couple, even with the bits of "reality" sprinkled into the plans.

Brooke playfully joked that she didn't think 24-year-olds should build houses. "I was so oblivious and overwhelmed by the whole experience," she said. "I never had even decorated anything besides a dorm or a tiny apartment! And all of a sudden we had this house and it was like, 'Oh I have to pick out flooring? Not just pick out something I'm going to hang on the wall, but something that is going to BE in the house for the next 10 years?'" Even though it might have been stressful at the time, the eclectic and exciting home that now stands is a testament to their innate good taste and impeccable teamwork.

Through the challenges, the couple learned a lot, and fast. The things they learned during this process brought them even closer together and they'll be able to take these lessons with them if they ever decide to build again.

#### THE LOCATION

When ready to move out of their downtown Main Avenue apartment, that graph paper sketch Noah drew out at the beginning of their marriage wasn't really in the plans yet. "We were set on the downtown area, or as close to it as we could be since Noah works downtown and I work in North Fargo," said Brooke. "We were just starting our careers and, after looking at homes downtown and in North Fargo that were in our budget at the time, we felt awfully discouraged." They had a modern aesthetic that pulled from their international travels and the signature look of the homes of Bozeman, Mont. Such design elements cannot easily be found in Fargo, let alone in their budget at the time. When not finding what they were looking for, they even considered moving cities completely.

But before packing their bags, luck found them when they serendipitously caught themselves in a conversation with the city planner at a Christmas party. Brooke laughed as she shared the story, involving her complaining about the current housing market in town, only to find the man she was complaining to was the city planner. He told her that if any lots in North Fargo opened up, he would let her know.

He stayed true to his word and about two weeks later the Kupchos heard from him about a lot that just opened. Knowing that this was a rare opportunity, they purchased the lot and saved money for about two and a half years before building on it.





### ROOM FOR GROWTH

Working within a young-professional budget, the Kupchos had to make some hard decisions on where they would cut costs in the build. Certain splurges, like the five long, horizontal windows making up the focal point of the facade, were necessary to the overall vision of the home, so they got to stay in the plans. However, other details such as the kitchen countertop and cabinets faced being put on hold. The couple knew they could save up and replace these economically-minded selections later.

The Kuphos enjoy the fact that they have elements they want to change down the road, and they look forward to the home growing with them. As they hit landmarks in their life, they can embark on new projects to better the home for their needs. "We built it 'imperfectly' together and have been able to build so many precious memories since then. Now we are updating things we didn't have the money for the first time around, and nesting for the new babe!" said Brooke. Such updates they plan on making include redoing the kitchen, finishing the guest bathroom upstairs, replacing the furniture with more modern and mature pieces and determining how to make their now-concrete floors more "crawling-friendly."





#### IN THE DETAILS

While the structure of the home itself is original, sprinkled throughout the vibrant interior are many more personal touches.

What greets you when you enter the front door is a textured, green sculpture by Minnesota-based artist Casey Hochhalter. While they were still building the house, the duo purchased the piece from Ecce Gallery. They wanted a stand-out piece to serve as a focal point, and now the piece will always be a reminder of their home-building process.

Off the kitchen, there are two built-in shelves, acting part as a bar cart, part as a bookshelf. These rustic shelves aren't just decorative though. The wood of the two shelves are made of pieces of western North Dakota telephone pole from where they grew up. Since they have known each other since kindergarten, this piece of their hometown reminds them of their journey together. Another nod to their childhood together, hanging on the living room wall is a large and colorful elementary-school-style map of the United States.

Yet another sentimental piece is the centerpiece of the living room, a live edge wood coffee table. They commissioned this piece of furniture to be made from a tree that Noah cut down their first Christmas together.

Alone, each of these well-thought-out elements is special, but all together, they really make the place "home" to the Kupchos. Of all the sentimental details woven into the space, Brooke noted, "I think those are the things that make houses."

#### UNIQUE ASPECTS

Personal details aside, the home's architecture alone is pretty outstanding. The footprint is relatively small, but each space is optimized and laid out efficiently. The first floor comprises of high ceilings, the home's signature windows, a powder bathroom tucked behind the kitchen and entry to the attached garage. Having an attached garage in their neighborhood is unique enough, and Brooke noted that they are the only ones in the alley who have one.

It's arguable that the sizable, horizontal windows are the focal point of the home. While they are bold, the couple has never regretted going big on this choice. "It's a statement maker," said Brooke. "When I sit in the living room and read in the mornings on the couch, the sunlight comes in and you get these beautiful shadows all throughout and on the walls."

The second floor holds three bedrooms (a master, nursery and guest bedroom), two bathrooms, a laundry closet and a balcony off the master bedroom that overlooks the entire first floor. The house has the space and amenities of a home, but the character of a loft-style apartment. "We [previously] lived in a loft apartment downtown and we really liked it. I love being able to throw things down from the balcony or peer down and see what's going on," Brooke joked. "I've always liked the feel of a lofty house."

With such unique details and the shared experience of building a home together so early on in their marriage, the Kupchos really have created something special. The risk of building a home that "sticks out" in a traditional neighborhood more than paid off, and the memories of the process will last well beyond its metal exterior.



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Brown

# Learn THE ASHES

BY Alexandra Martin | PHOTOS BY Hillary Erlen

After facing a devastating house fire in early 2019, the Brown family used this opportunity to design a house that they truly love.

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Suzanne Brown jokes that her family home is the classic West Fargo Rambler — quartz countertops, subway tile backsplash and an overall appearance where "there are probably eight other ones just like it on this street and 50 more in the neighborhood." But the Brown household holds a story unique from any other homes along the strip.

In February 2019, only months after moving in, Suzanne and husband Kyan Brown were devastated by a house fire that destroyed everything. Following this calamity, the family had to rebuild and replace every detail, from flooring to furnishings to bedding to blankets.

Looking on the bright side of the event, they took the empty framework of their post-fire home and redesigned everything in the 2016 home to their own tastes and liking. The once traditional Rambler that stands in the West Fargo lot is now a modern farmhouse with the coziness of a traditional farmhouse, but the intentional minimalism of a modern home.

#### THE FAMILY

The Brown home consists of Suzanne and Kyan, their three children, Khloe (15), Caleb (12) and Sophie (9) and their two dogs. The family found themselves in Cass County thanks to Kyan's job as a basketball coach at NDSU. His career as a college basketball coach has taken their family to Tulsa, Okla.; Fort Smith, Ark.; Springfield, Mo.; and, now, to West Fargo, N.D.. Suzanne works as a paraprofessional educator for West Fargo Public Schools, but on the side enjoys home decorating and design.

Having moved to Fargo from Tulsa, Okla., the Browns consulted friends on what area of the Red River Valley they should live in. Following suggestions, they settled on West Fargo, thanks to the great school options for their three children and the neighborhood's feel. "We were going in blind. So we rented for a while in this area and then we realized we really liked this area," said Suzanne. "We loved the idea of living on the outskirts of town, but still close to everything we needed. Our lot backs up to a pond with a walking trail and park and we love that for our family and dogs."

#### THE FIRE

When moving to the area and selecting this home, they partially chose the 2016-built home because they wouldn't have to do much updating and it wouldn't be too much of a project. An ironic thought looking back, now that they had to redo the entire interior thanks to the fire.



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Just three months before the incident, the family had finished the basement, including a bar area, common room and a bedroom for their eldest daughter. With the paint barely dried, they had to finish the basement all over again. The new carpet was destroyed by ash and soot, the ceiling had to be replaced thanks to ruined ductwork and the walls all needed to be repainted. "It was basically like doing what we had just done all over again," said Suzanne.

"That was probably the silver lining of the whole thing, was that we had done the basement how we wanted already—with the colors we wanted. And we were planning on redoing the upstairs to match the basement." This process of remodeling the whole home just came a bit sooner than expected thanks to the fire. Having just selected all the finishes they wanted when redoing the basement, when it came time to redo the whole house post-fire, they already were fresh on this decision making.

Suzanne joked that she is normally indecisive when it comes to home-design matters. But in the process of having to replace and design everything all over again on a quick timeline, she had to make her decisions with less inner back-and-forth.

#### SHARING THE STORY

On her Instagram, @northandnomad, Suzanne has shared the experience from fire to rebuilding. She had previously begun sharing images of her home, but when the fire happened, she said, "I can't really take pictures

of my house when it's burnt to the ground. The whole inside is a hot mess! And I was just not in the right frame of mind to continue documenting everything, and I honestly didn't know if I wanted to share anything at all. I just wasn't in the headspace to add one more thing to my plate and keep up with all that."

But after the encouragement of friends and neighbors, she was inspired to share the rebuilding process. She found that people were curious about the process and wanted to see what was going on. "So I started the page so that people could see. For the people who were curious about what happened to us and what happened to our house and our living situation. Because who doesn't like to know what's going on?" she said.

At first, Suzanne felt strange about sharing all her new furniture and decor, but then she saw it through the lens of rebuilding after a terrible accident and she knew people interpret it as "showing off" all her new things. "Our neighborhood was incredible after everything. People brought groceries and grocery cards and kept our dogs when everything was getting sorted out. I almost felt like I sort of owed it to them to show them what happened, to show where we were, where it is going," she added.

Through Instagram, she found inspiration for the rebuild and a community, saying, "like follows like." Through documenting her rebuild process, she noted how she has found others with a similar style as her own. "I still get ideas for different things, and hopefully people will





look and maybe they'll say, 'Ok I like that she did that!'" She hopes that by sharing her own design discoveries, she can inspire others who are looking to refresh their homes and inspire some good out of this otherwise sad situation.

#### THE AESTHETIC

Following the modern farmhouse aesthetic, Suzanne tries to only bring in things to the new home that add to their lifestyle. This echoes modern design aesthetics, boarding on minimalism but adding the personality and comfort of farmhouse design styles.

By having to replace completely everything in the home, she was able to make all of her new purchase intentional and in the exact style she wanted. "We don't live in a humongous house, it's a very typical house. But its how you can make it yours and put your own spin on it, your own touches," she said. In doing this, Suzanne embraced shopping locally and from small businesses. She shared that much of the home's furnishings are from Eco Chic, Baker Garden and Gift, local thrift and vintage shops and Etsy.

#### ENTERTAINING

Hosting and gathering groups of people in their home is important to the Browns, making the home's layout particularly important. "To me, this house is home because of how it serves the people I love," said Suzanne. When they first purchased the home, Suzanne noted that she didn't love all the finishes, but it was the layout of the space that drew her to it. "I really liked the layout of the house and I saw the potential," she said. She knew that she could eventually replace the countertops and cabinets, but the layout itself was perfect.

What made the floorplan ideal for the Browns was the open-concept living space, with the heart of the home being the kitchen, living and dining room all in one place. This space makes for a great place to gather, where everyone can be together, even if they are doing different things. "We like to gather people in our home, so my thought in designing and decorating is always 'how will this serve others when they are here?'" she added. With the finished basement, complete with a bar and comfortable seating area, the goal of making a home ideal for entertaining was complete. "Everyone has a place here and that's important to me," said Suzanne.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

"I always have projects, it's the decorator in me," laughed Suzanne. What's next in their home process is to add details to their laundry room. While it is technically "finished," they hope to make it more functional for their family.

Right now, the Browns have all their new furniture and bedding, but they are working on adding in accessories and decor now. Starting the decor process from zero, Suzanne said, "I want to be international about the things I'm bringing in and making sure I have a place for them [...] I like to take my time picking things out, so I am always hunting for just the right items to bring in," she said.

With many homeowners who are designing and decorating their own homes, the process of adding and taking away is a constant. Part of the joy of living in a custom-curated space is the process of the curation itself, and this is true to the Brown home. Looking at the impeccably designed modern farmhouse, the stranger's eye might not even be able to tell that the space recently faced disaster. But backstory or not, you can't deny the fresh and clean beauty of this home.

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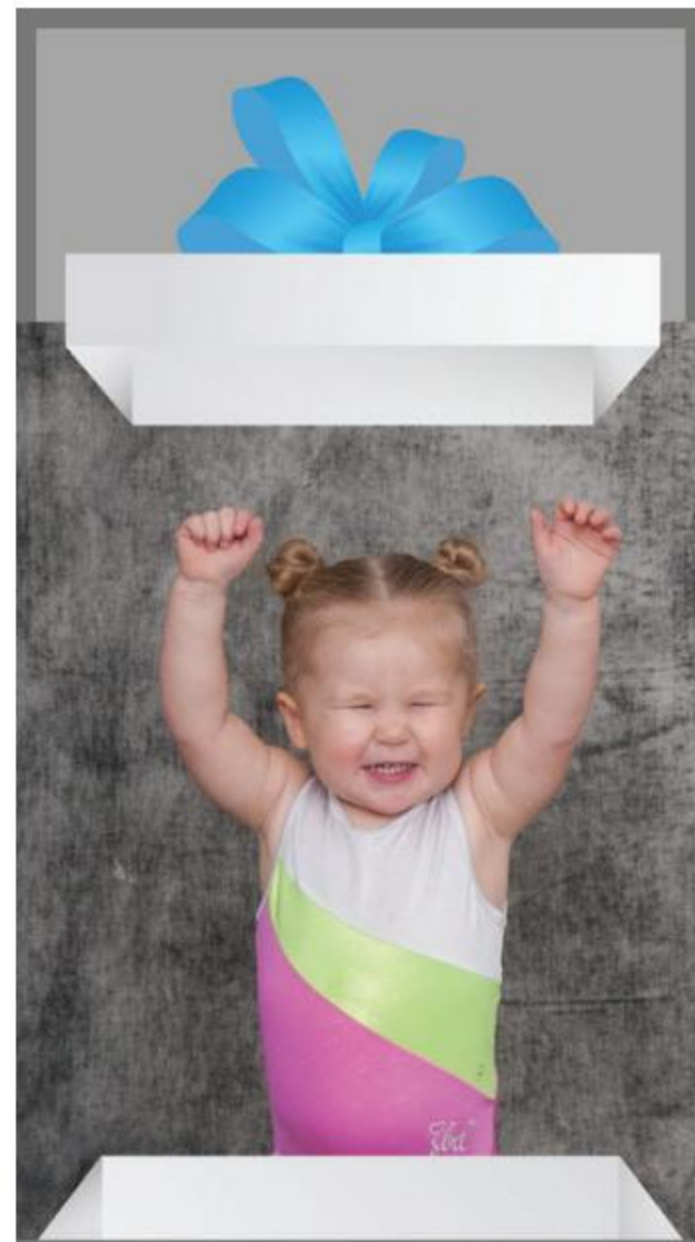
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The Gefroh and Perhus House

# Made of STEEL

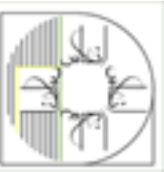
Contributor Paul H. Gleye is a professor of architecture at North Dakota State University, his fields of expertise including historic preservation and urban design. This month, he explored two "Lustron Houses," or homes made entirely of steel as a reaction to the post-World War II need for housing with industrial technology. Come see these unique South Fargo homes of couples Ian Becker and Jenna Miller; and Tyler Gefroh and Josie Perhus.

BY Paul H. Gleye | PHOTOS BY Hillary Ehlen

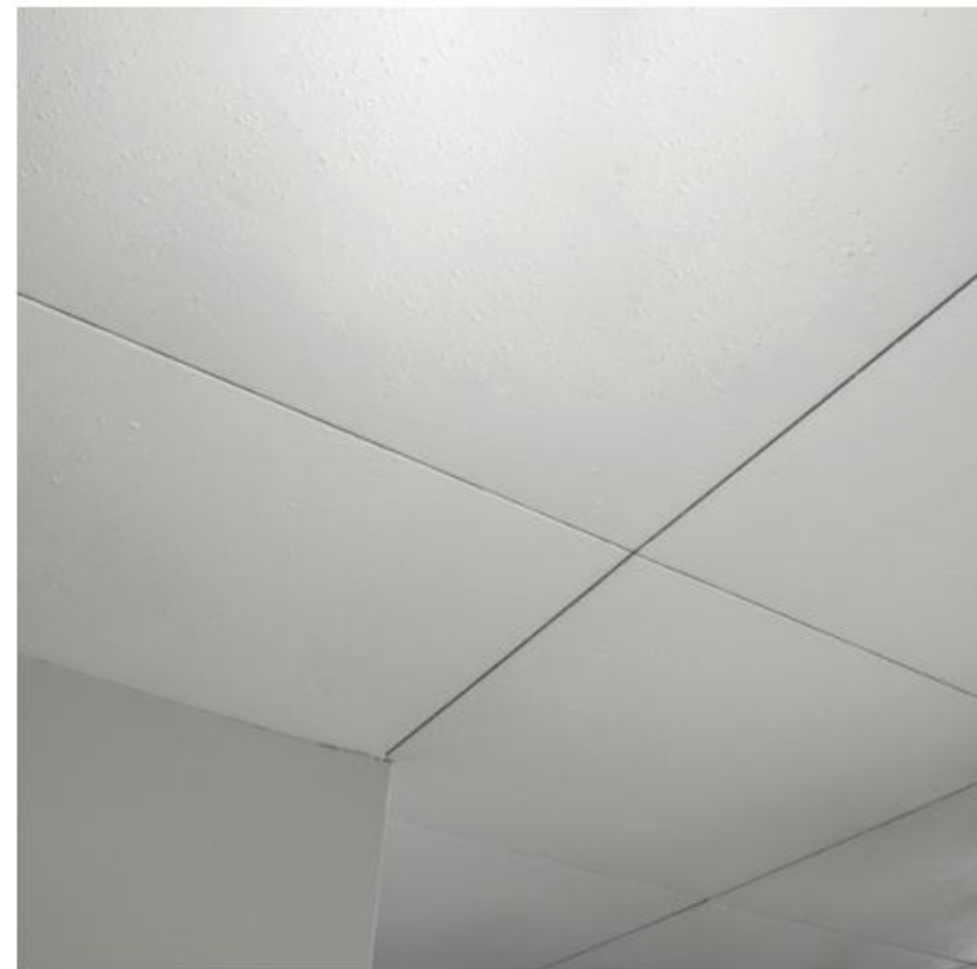
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Houses made entirely of steel? Yes, about eight of them stand today in Fargo, all built around 1950. Industrialist Carl Strandlund, who built prefabricated gas stations using enameled steel panels, wanted to apply his expertise to help meet the intense demand for housing right after World War II. His Lustron Corporation set out to mass-produce modest homes constructed of enameled-steel panels that would "defy weather, wear, and time." From his factory in Columbus, Ohio, Strandlund built about 2,500 Lustron homes and had them transported by truck to building sites around the country. Lustron offered four models of single-story homes, ranging from 713 to 1,140 square feet, and they came in four colors: Surf Blue, Dove Gray, Maize Yellow and Desert Tan, all with prominent ivory-colored window frames. They were recognizable by their square-paneled steel exterior walls and roof, and their inset front porch with a "zig-zag" steel pillar at the corner.

Lustron homes were intended not only for efficiency in production, but also efficiency in living. They were advertised to offer "far more hours" for mothers, "fewer worries" for children, and "more leisure for dad." Interior doors were all sliding pocket doors to maximize space. Pictures could be attached to the steel interior walls using magnets; no need to poke holes. And enameled steel walls were easy to clean. Even the bathtubs, sinks, and built-in vanities and cabinetry were stamped out of steel at the factory. Casement windows, even the living room bay windows on the larger Lustron models, were of aluminum – the latest trend in 1950. All houses had radiant heating in the ceiling.





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Unfortunately, though technologically advanced, steel homes could not compete in price with conventional wood-frame housing, and the company ceased production in 1951.

In the intervening years, newer homes became ever larger and adopted trendy styles of the time – ranch, split-level, Modern – and the modest steel Lustron homes did not lend themselves well to remodeling. Many were demolished and turned into scrap steel. Others were “modernized” by covering interior walls with gypsum board, exterior walls with various kinds of siding, and roofs with shingles. Kitchens and bathrooms were remodeled to adhere to later trends, and open corner porches were enclosed. A new challenge that could not be foreseen in 1950 is that cell phone service inside all that steel is often not the best.

However, recent years have seen a Lustron renaissance. Homeowners are removing later alterations and rediscovering what a steel home can offer. Of the eight remaining Lustrons in Fargo, two examples of the “Westchester Deluxe” model are of particular interest. The home at 1501 5th Street South (in Dove Gray), still has the original Lustron garage. And the Lustron at 1621 6th Street South (with a Desert Tan exterior and Dove Gray interior) retains much of the built-in steel cabinetry. Both homes, still with their zig-zag porch pillars, are being carefully restored by their new owners to recapture as much as possible of the original character. Though the Lustron proved to be a financial failure in the 1950s economy, it showed the way toward truly innovative prefabricated housing that can withstand the test of time.



The Miller and Becker House

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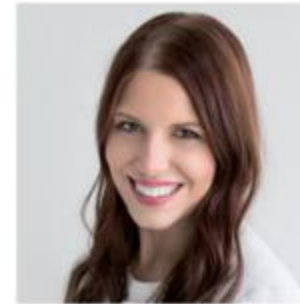
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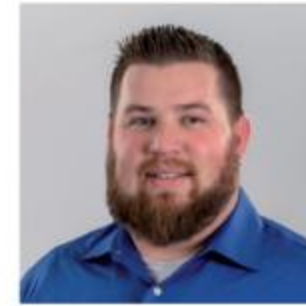


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ARTIST FEATURE

# Mitchel Hoffart's Art Tour De Force

BY Alexandra Martin | PHOTOS BY Hillary Ehlen

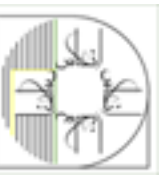
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sing paint, paper, pigment and photography, self-taught artist Mitchel Hoffart creates multi-medium pieces with a signature—often political—look.

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In artist Mitchel Hoffart's basement studio in Moorhead, he shuffles around unfinished pieces of art, tossing them on the floor to be stepped on when trying to find what he is looking for. Three of the walls in the L-shaped home studio contain eye-level works-in-progress, neatly in a row and thumbtacked to the paint-smudged sheetrock. This process and the studio itself are representative of the work Hoffart creates: organized yet messy. Distracted yet attentive. Light-hearted yet political. These juxtapositions are not to the hindrance of his work, but rather to its benefit.

The artist's portfolio of work includes multi-medium pieces, ranging from abstractions to the naturally-inspired to figurative mixed media. His understanding and admiration for color theory are one of the threads that tie all his work together. That, and his predisposition to use just more than one medium at a time.

Hoffart's pieces reflect his rural North Dakota upbringing while also providing commentary on political and environmental issues. The abstract nature of his work involves a process of layering and editing. For example, an array of oil pastel markings covered by paint, and then revealed again when scraped away by fingernails. Through this method, he reveals new messages and meanings in the work as he covers and uncovers marks, previously hidden to even him.

While Hoffart is currently self-represented, he is thankful to Mark Weiler at Ecce Gallery for his efforts in marketing his work over the years. He added, "Without [Weiler's] efforts, I'd have a basement full



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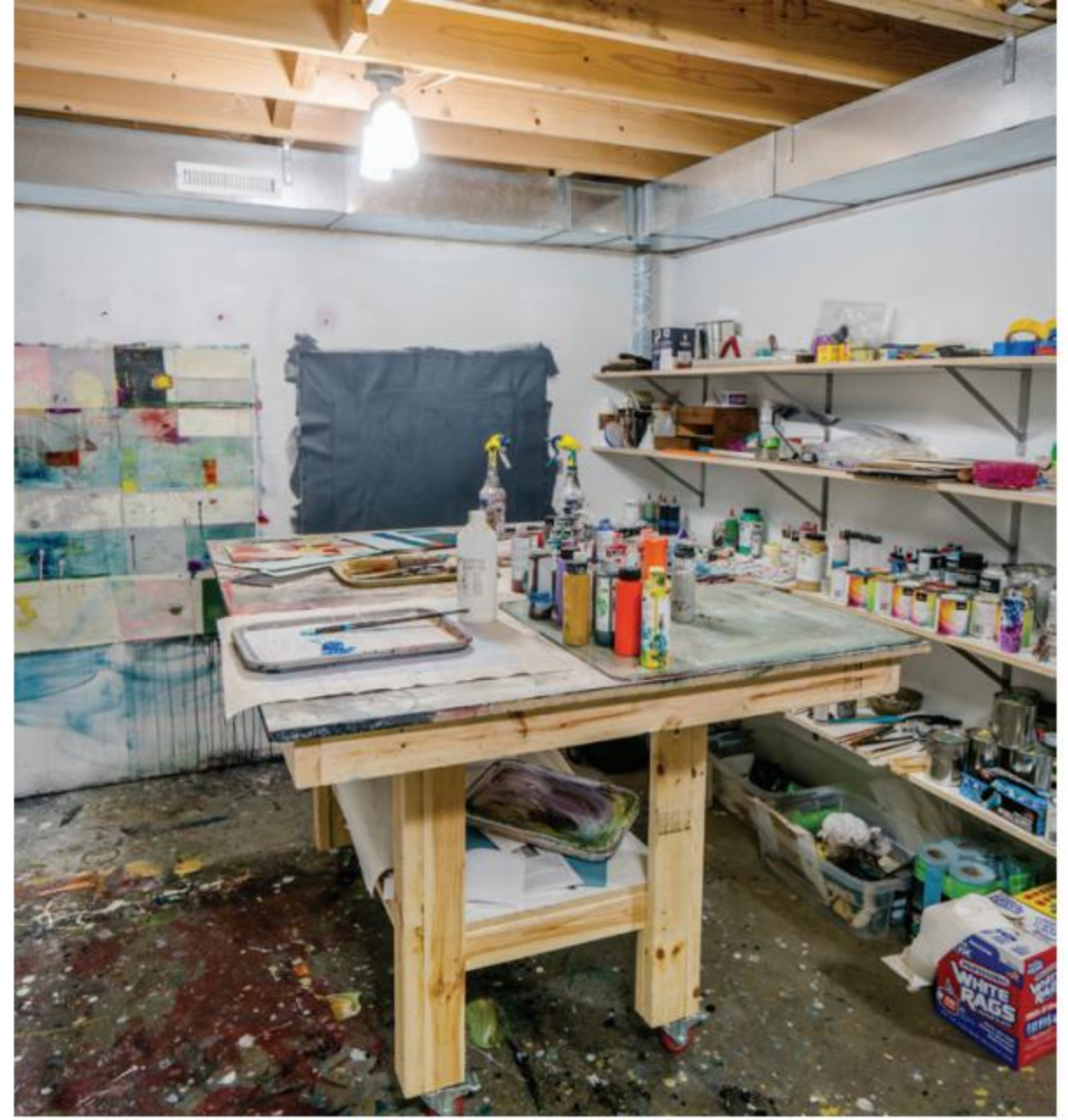




of art and no way to pay for paint." In the past Hoffart found success with his figurative works, with pieces held in numerous notable collections. These places include two in West Acres' permanent collection, two in North Dakota State University's permanent collection, three in Catalyst Medical Center, one in Gate City Bank, four installed in the new Dillard apartments and two in North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum's private collection. After establishing his figurative style, Hoffart is branching out of the familiar and lending his talents to abstract works.

"It's been very challenging because I don't know anything about abstract art," Hoffart said, outlining that he is still learning what makes a piece of abstract art good. Throughout his portfolio, you can see an infatuation with geometry and the structure of straight lines. In teaching himself this genre, Hoffart is learning how to take his linear style and shift it into the flourishing and sweeping brushstrokes that are often associated with abstract work.

He credits part of his love for geometry and straight lines to his computer science background. Contrary to what Hoffart's quickly-selling portfolio of work implies, he is not a full-time professional artist, but rather an Information Systems Technologist at North Dakota State University. He's been in this position for 25 years and views art as a hobby he came across when looking for a way to spend his time at home.



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"There are certain principles in art, design principles of form, shape, movement, color, contrast, chroma...all these different things go into making a good piece of art and anyone can learn to do it. You just have to put your mind to do it," Hoffart said. To him, realism is much easier to accomplish than abstract art. "Anyone can learn it, anyone can learn art," he said. Throughout his life, he has been drawing. But it wasn't until 1996, when he got married, that he decided to learn how to seriously draw. Once he comprehended how to technically draw well, he spun off into developing his own style from there and has been evolving his style ever since.

Looking around his workspace, one can see Hoffart's abstract progress honing in. In his previous work, Hoffart's process was more linear than it is now. He would design a whole piece out with Photoshop and mentally lay out each step he'd need to take to accomplish the final product. His work was deliberate, or as Hoffart would say "tight." Now, he strives to work loosely, saying, "I still haven't made the complete shift, because I'll work very tight and then I'll stop and back away and decide to not go there anymore." He added that he is tired of creating artwork that is so calculated and tedious. It's time to loosen up.

Now, Hoffart's process involves multiple works-in-progress at a time. Often, the timeline for a piece is indefinite, with Hoffart working on each one for up to a year. Since his process is so reliant on the craft of adding, covering, uncovering and adding again, the endpoint is up to his interpretation.

Amidst this seemingly-chaotic process, Hoffart meticulously documents his work. He gives each piece a serial number and tags the works with that hashtag on Instagram so that he and others can track the progression. He credits this meticulousness to his computer science background, adding that he strives to be as professional as possible with his work as an artist.

He pulls up older pieces on his computer—carefully organized in folders upon folders—and he zooms into the works. It's a treasure hunt as he reveals the easter eggs hidden within each piece. Every mark is intentional, yet no mark is intentional. Any attempt to get Hoffart to explain his process leaves him rambling and never landing on a finite answer of how or why he does what he does—it's innate.

Fingering through a portfolio of his work, he jokingly describes one particularly in-depth work as a mixed-media tour-de-force, having involved virtually every art method he practices in one piece. Detailed painting, photo emulsion transfer, stencils and collage...he included it all. Perhaps this impressive combination of methods was the final straw that made him step back and create loose, abstract works.

Away from the computer and his portfolio of finished work, Hoffart returned to the works hanging on his walls. He stared at a piece that is most likely the closest one to being deemed "finished" and mused, "I love it now, I just want to know...I always ask myself, 'Can I be better? Is the mark I'm going to make going to detract?' If something I'm going to do is going to detract..." he trailed off as he explored it. Coming back to it, he said, "I don't consider any of these shapes sacred. I can paint over anything."



Regardless of whether these shapes are figurative or abstract or anything in-between, Hoffart has one mission. "What I want is for the viewer to be stopped. I want them to walk by a painting and stop and look at it because it is compelling. Not because there's some sort of overriding message to it, but that it moves them in some way where they need to stop and take a second look at it."

Before wrapping up the discussion, he paused to note that he should have offered us old t-shirts to wear so that we could have helped throw some paint on one of his canvases. We would have been honored.

Mitchel Hoffart  
[www.hoffart.art](http://www.hoffart.art)  
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## “Should I Paint or Replace My Siding?”

If you're deciding between painting or replacing the siding on your home, carefully consider the pros and cons. It's a decision you'll live with for many years. Here are some tips to help you decide.

### Cons of Painting

Prep work before painting is labor intensive. If there's damage, entire sections must be replaced. Wood needs to be scraped or sanded and repaired. You have to tend to those things to get satisfactory results.

If you're considering selling your home in the near future, keep in mind today's buyer is seeking low-maintenance exteriors with minimal upkeep more than ever before. Your siding could impact a purchasing decision.

### Pros of Painting

Painting is less expensive than full siding replacement. If done correctly, it can give your home a fresh look at a relatively low cost. You also have limitless paint color options. Wood and steel can all be painted over, with the right preparation, primer and type of paint.

### Cons of Siding Replacement

Siding replacement costs more than repainting. Prices vary depending on the material and style. The color selection for siding products is generally good, but it's still not as extensive as paint colors mixed in a can.

### Pros of Siding Replacement

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# FORM & FUNCTION

WITH JACKSON STROM OF  
STROM ARCHITECTURE

## THE HEARTH OF THE home

BY Jackson Strom, Principle Architect at Strom Architecture  
PHOTOS BY Hillary Ehlen

Architect Jackson Strom of Strom Architecture dives into a different important design element each month. This month, Strom, along with Home & Hearth's General Manager Darla Skaurud, share insight into incorporating a warm fireplace into your home.



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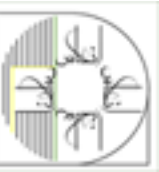




*A modern take on a built-in gas fireplace option, made by Heat & Glo.*

When starting a home design, one of the first things that crosses my mind is where to locate the fireplace (especially this time of year). Does it sit across the room from the range hood with beam work tying the two together? Does a two-sided fireplace separate the living from the dining spaces? How does the TV relate to the fireplace — above or beside? There is always an opportunity for a fireplace to interact with a home's layout to enhance the experience of our daily lives.

Historically, fireplaces were used out of necessity—to warm the home or cook— but today most are designed to provide a visual focal point. Whether you're sitting next to one, or can simply see the glimmer from the next room, the feeling of a fireplace burning in your home provides an experience that cannot be rivaled. Although the style of the fireplace may be the first thing you notice, there are many things to consider before you're ready to start the fire. Burning type (wood, gas, electric), room size, style and clearances are some of the crucial factors that need to work together to provide the homeowner with the experience they desire.



When planning for a specialty item, like a fireplace, we like to engage the expertise of local professionals to ensure we are not missing any crucial details, such as ensuring the unit is appropriately sized for the space or coordinating the venting and clearances per the fireplace manufacturer. Darla Skaurud, the General Manager at Home & Hearth, is one of the local professionals we often engage with to ensure we are on the right track. "Homeowners come in and they aren't aware there are so many differences between fireplaces. We ask if they will be using the fireplace more for looks or more for heat? Are they looking for a more modern or a more traditional fireplace? Are they planning to put a TV above it? If there will be a TV above, we recommend fireplaces with lower mantel clearance to prevent the TV from getting too high. Asking these questions helps us narrow down which fireplaces to show them," said Skaurud.

#### Fireplace Type & Size

Homeowners usually have strong feelings on whether they prefer wood-burning, gas or electric. Some won't settle for anything other than a real wood-burning fire, even if it takes more time and effort, others prioritize time and efficiency, preferring gas, while others opt for the ease of the install and budget the electric option offers. You will want to select a unit that fits with the aesthetic of the space. Often linear units lend themselves to modern spaces, whereas taller, rectangular units lend themselves to more traditional spaces.

Regardless of the style, we study the massing and size of the fireplace with the scale of the room, ensuring the proportions complement each other. When the proportions and scale are appropriate, you can wrap the massing with any material and not compromise the design. These are the details that architects review to ensure the final product and overall space feel right.

#### In The Details

While selecting the unit may feel like the finish line, most units offer many additional options to choose from: fronts/doors, interior panels, LED lighting and even some with Bluetooth speakers. Our initial thought process regarding options is, when in doubt, keep it simple! We try to simplify the fireplace unit and let the surrounding materials provide the design. We feel that many simple elements should add up to form the full picture, rather than each element competing for attention.

One element that is often present in fireplace design, but overlooked, is the mantle. "A lot of times, people don't realize they should have a mantle between the fireplace and the TV (if the TV is above the fireplace). TVs make their own heat, and don't like heat—no electronics really do. The fireplace puts out great heat, heat rises and the TV is usually above it, so by putting the mantle there, it takes the brunt of the heat and deflects it from the television," she said. Regarding proper clearances, Darla explained that she often likes to draw the proposed fireplace design in front of the client, asking for their ideal TV height and working with dimensions from there. Similar to Darla's approach, we draw the fireplace elevation, detailing the exact materials, dimensions and clearances, often taking it even a step further by providing a 3D model that will allow the client to see exactly what will be built.

#### Size of Space

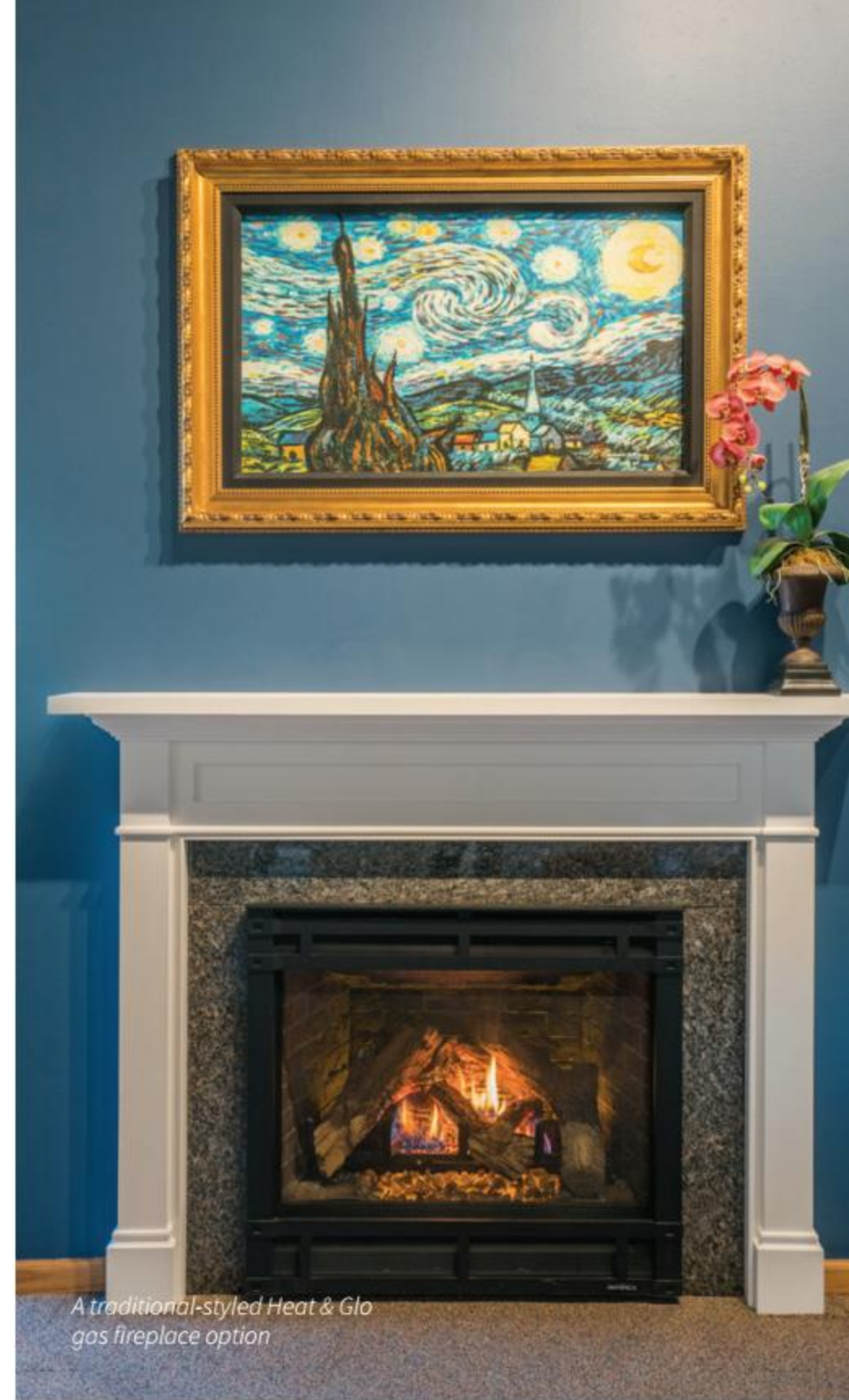
Always ensure the fireplace unit that was selected is not only aesthetically fitting, but more importantly appropriate for the size of the space, as we have had homeowners revise their fireplace selection based on the size of the space that will be heated. "The common question is 'how big of a room are you looking to heat?' Are you wanting it more for heat or for looks? Is it in the basement or on the main floor? Basements are tough to keep warm

## Compare the options and what is important to you

- **Wood Burning:** Takes more time and effort, but provides an authentic and cozy fireplace experience. Be sure you're ready to supply firewood and be ready to clean up the ash residue. However, the payoff is the sound of the crackling fire and the highly desired smell of a warm fire.

- **Gas:** Gas fireplaces are time-efficient with instant satisfaction, as you can switch them on and get a fire immediately. They are also energy-efficient, as they can heat a whole space, if placed right. However, if you don't already have a gas line installed, you'll have to include that into the installation costs.

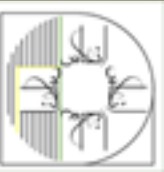
- **Electric:** Electric fireplaces are the least expensive option and the easiest to install. However, the look and feel aren't as authentic and the "flame" is more obviously artificial. The impact of an electric fireplace is on par with a space heater and works better for smaller spaces. Installation by a licensed professional isn't required, saving you on installation costs.



*A traditional-styled Heat & Glo gas fireplace option*



*This electric fireplace is customizable, allowing buyers to choose between clear crystals or glowing driftwood logs for the interior*







When installed in this manner, electric fireplaces can look and feel similar to their gas and woodburning counterparts

here in the winter, but on the main floor, not so much," said Darla. "I often tell customers I would rather see you purchase a fireplace too small, allowing you to use it frequently, versus something too big, and you need to turn it off after a short period of time. We definitely want people to use their fireplace."

#### Making the Choice

"Do the research, visit the showroom and stand in front of the fireplaces, get an idea of what ceramic glass versus tempered glass feels like, look at the options. Design the fireplace wall

first, or have an idea of how you want the wall to look, and whether you're going to put the TV above it or not." Darla laughed, "We're thankful for Pinterest, Houzz, architects and designers."

When planning a fireplace for your project, we feel it is worth your time to engage a fireplace professional, an architect or both. We can help ensure that you love your final product, both in design and heat output, and you can trust the important specifics of venting and clearances have been coordinated.



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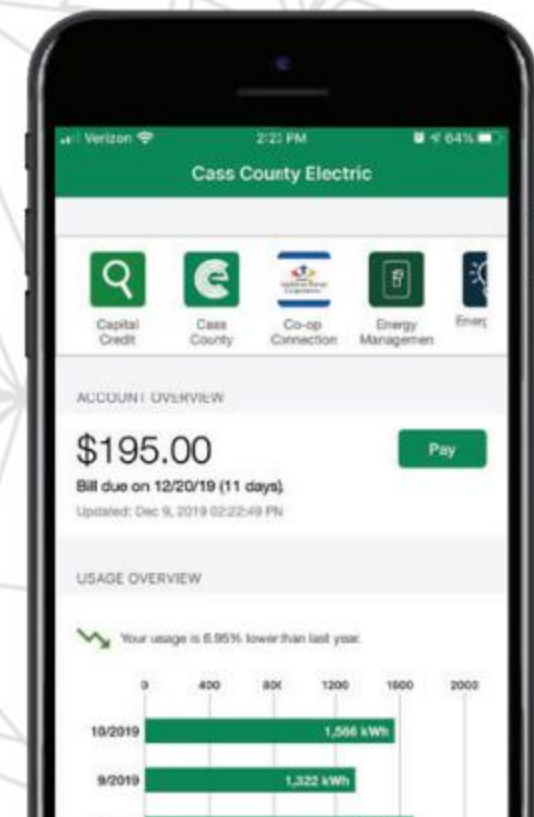


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# Building with the Mullers: Phase II

BY Alexandra Martin  
PHOTOS BY Kayleigh Omang and Hillary Ehlen  
RENDERINGS PROVIDED BY Benjamin Custom Homes

**W**e've watched HGTV, we've created mood boards on Pinterest and we've, of course, carefully perused the pages of this very magazine to gather dream home inspiration. With such access to options and styles, many homeowners are attracted to the idea of going the custom home route, starting from scratch and having a hand in every step of the home-building process.

But where do you even start? Sure the idea of a custom home sounds great, but that certainly sounds like a big undertaking for a novice homeowner. If you've ever considered building a custom home, or are just curious about the process, this series is for you. Join Evan and Becky Muller as we follow them from beginning to end of all that goes into creating a custom-built home.

This month, get to know the couple, learn about the pre-approval process, see how they selected their lot and dive into how they chose what builder to go with.

The Team  
Homeowners: Evan and Becky Muller  
Builder: Benjamin Custom Homes  
Realtor: Mari Santoya Perry - SoliMar Real Estate - BHHS Premier Properties

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## PHASE I

In case you missed it...in Phase I of "Building with the Mullers," we discussed who the homeowners are, getting financially pre-approved, lot selection and choosing Benjamin Custom Homes as the builder.

To recap, the homeowners Becky and Evan Muller are highschool sweethearts from rural South Dakota, now living in Fargo. Currently, Becky is a Commercial Interior Designer at ICON Architectural Group and Evan is a Financial Planning Analyst at Aldevron. They initially intended on Fargo being a brief interlude, but as they now both have jobs they love and are happy with the community here, they've decided that their "five-year-plan" of living here is now a forever plan. And with this plan to plant roots in the area, they've decided to embark on building a custom home. Since Becky is an interior designer and works in the industry daily, the couple had a head start in what to expect and what they wanted out of this process.

They chose their lot location in Kindred, N.D. out of a love for the rural environment they grew up in while also being an easy drive into Fargo. Their new home will marry their rural upbringing while also embracing their modern style. Evan joked, "The style is 'I'm millennial, but I grew up on a farm!'"

As for selecting Benjamin Custom Homes as their builder, the couple needed a builder that would accommodate their unique circumstances. As a commercial interior designer, Becky has access to discounts and special offers with suppliers of flooring, countertops, tile and more. With such unique relationships, it would be foolish for the couple to not take advantage of these money-saving connections. While many other custom home builders have set contracts of whom they will work with, Benjamin Custom Homes was more than happy to work with Becky and her contacts to give the couple their vision.

## SELLING THEIR CURRENT HOME

Since our last check-in with the Mullers in December, they have begun preparing their current home for sale. Their Realtor, Mari Santoyo Perry of SoliMar Real Estate, recently walked them through their existing house and told them what things they should do to improve it for sale. She gave them tips on how to hide clutter and make it presentable for showings. So far, they've luckily found nothing major they need to fix.

They are currently adjusting to make the home ideal for showings. This includes finding the right balance between making the house look like a home, but not being too cluttered or too empty, where a person couldn't envision their own belongings in it. Staging a home for showings is a fine line.



"You definitely need to have some sort of idea of what you're wanting. If you have no idea, I could see this process taking months."

Having had an eye on the market, Santoyo Perri deemed February as an ideal time for the couple to list their home. With people wanting to move in by the spring or summer, this is the perfect time to start the listing and selling process for the Mullers.

"We don't know what to expect yet," said Evan. "You can put a price out there and nobody could want it or 30 might want it. And then you're like, oh now we have to move into an apartment. Or then if nobody wants it and then you question if you listed it too high." Anyone who has sold their home before knows the nervous uncertainty that comes with listing a home and trying to create an ideal timeline for the process.

"If it sells quickly, that is a good thing, it means that they are paying what we want," said Becky. However, selling quickly would mean the couple would have to move twice—once into a temporary apartment and again when the new house is ready.

## EXTERIOR RENDERINGS

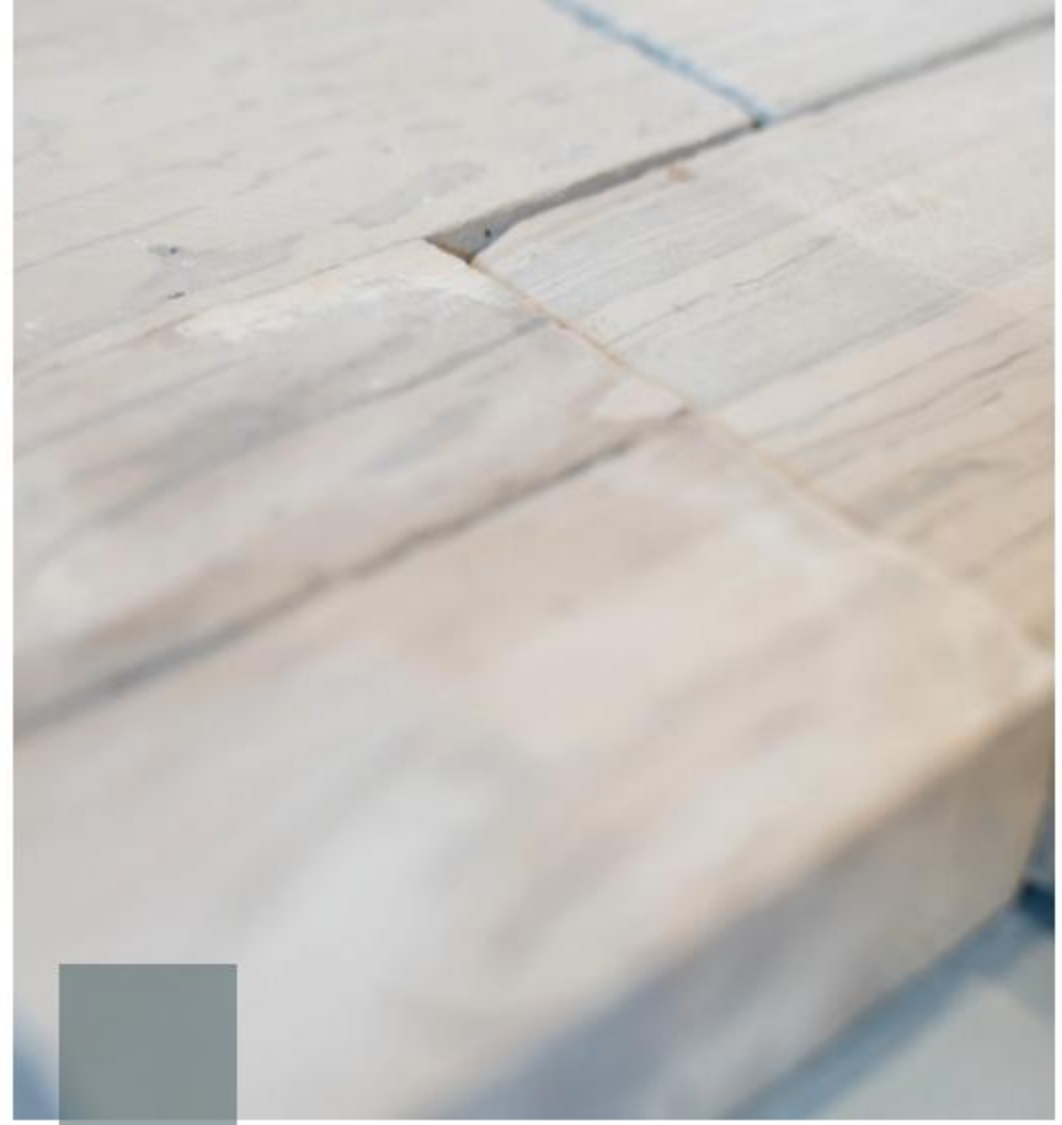
Next in this timeline of building a custom home comes the exterior renderings. To start off, Benjamin Custom Homes brought the Mullers a variety of samples to look at. These samples included siding colors, hardy board choices, garage door samples and anything else you can imagine that would complete the exterior of



a home. The Benjamin Custom Homes team laid out all the choices and the Mullers picked and chose what they were drawn to. As they selected options, designers Kara Skarphol and Melanie Anderson put up examples of the samples on the large TV screen in the office. In real-time, the Mullers were able to see what their different selections would look like on their exterior. "We could see the changes instantaneously, so that really helped us make up our minds," said Becky. "It was nice to be able to see everything change right away so that we didn't have to email back and forth about options and having to wait for responses and examples."

In addition to seeing virtual renderings of their selections, the Benjamin Custom Home team provided a list of previous Benjamin Custom Homes houses nearby that had some of the finishes the Mullers were leaning towards. This way, the couple could drive around and see how the photos of finishes they like looked like in reality.

Since our article about Phase I, the Mullers have made some changes to the exterior. "Ben [Anderson, owner of Benjamin Custom Homes] has a really great talent of being able to look at a house and be super close to guessing its value," said Becky. "And ours turned out being a good amount over what we wanted to spend. So from the last article, we downsized a little bit." They kept the home a similar shape and design concept, but just omitted an office on the first floor and shrunk their loft size and laundry room size. They ended up taking out about 400 square feet and worked with the team to land on a spot that was within their budget.



Lastly in the exterior rendering process, they also had to take into account how much landscaping they wanted to do right away versus over some time. This included porch finishes and deciding how the lot would look as a whole. Would there be planters under the windows? Would there be a walkway lined with bushes? Did they want maintenance-free or concrete or wood steps? All of these decisions were taken into account at this point.

## THE BIDDING PROCESS

The bidding process of creating a custom home is where the rubber really meets the road. In this step, visions and wishlists become reality as homeowners narrow down on product selections and see what it will all cost.

The bidding process for the Mullers included a long meeting at the Benjamin Custom Homes office. In this meeting, the builders had multiple spreadsheets, detailing everything. While the homeowners didn't need to pick out the exact colors of everything, this was the time to select things like what type of flooring would be installed where, what the door styles would be, the height of the ceilings, if the cabinets would reach all the way to the ceiling or not... basically if something was to be in the house, they talked about it.

"It boiled down to, literally, the nuts and bolts of the house, and putting a price on it all," said Evan.

The Mullers tapped into the Benjamin Custom Homes team's expertise to make the best, most economical choices. The team was able to make recommendations and use their experience to guide the homeowners into what decisions were the smartest. They pointed out the things that were not easily changeable versus the things the homeowners could change later down the road if they felt like it. For instance, ceiling heights cannot be altered, but door hardware could easily be switched out as their style evolves. This process involved lots of picking and choosing and determining which elements mattered the most to them versus which elements weren't priorities.



"They were able to help with these choices. We knew we were going to have a lot of cabinetry, so we were like, ok where else can we save?" said Becky. One suggestion from designer Kara Skarphol was to omit interior window frames. Not including these got rid of a lot of extra materials. "Doing that saved us a ton of money and it actually looks more contemporary and more our style anyway. It was really helpful because it was not something we would have thought of ourselves," said Becky.

## PRODUCT SELECTION

While Becky plans on using her industry connections to select vendors, there are still some areas where the couple needed guidance. With all of their builds, Benjamin Custom Homes has suggestions on what vendors they have had good experiences with and ones that match the needs of the homeowners. Once the initial bidding process is in a good place, Benjamin Custom Homes takes the spreadsheets of choices and

presents them to such vendors they know provide good quality and pricing. After that, the homeowners can decide which vendor suits them best in terms of budget and style.

While Benjamin Custom Homes has an internal list of vendors they've had good experiences with, those suggestions are not the final say. They ask the homeowners if they have any connections or previous experiences with any vendors and let them make those choices. "They really let you take the reigns on that and will work with anybody, which is good. They are very flexible," said Becky.

So far, the Mullers have met with Wendt Custom Cabinets, Hebron Brick and Showcase Floors to further discuss these product selections and installation costs. They've been impressed with how helpful these vendors were with making suggestions and easing the stress of the decision-making.

Even for homeowners familiar with the industry, Becky and Evan noted that the selection process can be a bit overwhelming at times. "You definitely need to have some sort of idea of what you're wanting. If you have no idea, I could see this process taking months," said Evan. "If you are indecisive, then your timeline needs to reflect that. So if you're in a hurry to buy and build a house immediately, you might be looking at a more stressful process than what you thought you're getting into versus if you had that time built-in."

Thankfully, the team at Benjamin Custom homes was there to help the Mullers alleviate some of the stress that came with making those decisions. Benjamin Custom Homes designer, Melanie Anderson, even would pull up Becky's Pinterest board during meetings and would reference things Becky had saved, reminding the homeowners of styles and touches they were wanting. When provided a sea of choices, these reminders were incredibly helpful to focus in on and stay on track.

# Phase III

This month we discussed selling their current home, exterior renderings, product selections and the bidding process. Up next, the Mullers have to make the decision of what bank they will use for their home building loan, put their current home on the market officially, continue saving money and seeing what the bidding process comes in as.

Once the bids come in, they will have a better idea of how to proceed with the next steps. "We definitely plan on having to adjust something. What? We have no idea," said Evan. "I would be shocked if anybody did this process and they didn't have to adjust something at this stage." Knowing they'll have to adapt and make a few more edits is just another part of this process.

For our third phase, we will discuss finalizing the interior design and starting the construction process. Stay tuned and get excited to follow along with the process of what it takes to build a custom home, from ideation all the way to moving in.

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# *What Gives Neighborhoods Their* SENSE OF IDENTITY?

Contributor Paul H. Gleye is a professor of architecture at North Dakota State University, his fields of expertise including historic preservation and urban design. Each Fargo-Moorhead neighborhood has its own personality. Join Gleye as he delves into what makes a neighborhood it's own character.

BY Paul H. Gleye | PHOTOGRAPHY BY Hillary Ehlen

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Fargo and Moorhead are cities of neighborhoods. The City of Fargo officially recognizes 38 neighborhoods within the city, each having a slightly different character from all the others. Often a neighborhood is organized around a school, or it is surrounded by major streets or natural boundaries that define the edge. But what, exactly, gives these different neighborhoods their sense of identity?

#### Size & Character

A cohesive neighborhood is defined, it seems to me, by three things. First, the houses generally share a recognizable size and character. Prior to about 1920, larger homes were tall and formal, with a prominent front porch and entry door that faced the street. They were set back from the sidewalk about 25 feet so that the home could present itself impressively to passers-by. Parcels were typically fifty feet wide so that even large homes stood close together along the street.

#### Street Pattern

Second, the street pattern serves to define a neighborhood. Neighborhoods developed before 1930 usually nestled within a grid of streets forming square blocks. Alleys through the middle of each block were devoted to unsightly uses such as trash collection, garages and workshops.

#### Passage of Time

Third, time defines a neighborhood. For some things, there is no substitute for the passage of time. The huge elm trees lining the streets of older neighborhoods take a half-century or more to mature, and they are irreplaceable. Lawns and shrubs also take time to mature.

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### Rise of the Garage

Neighborhoods established after World War II had a very different character. The single-story ranch house or the split-level became the norm, with the bedrooms on the ground floor rather than upstairs. Parcels became ever wider – 60, 70, 100 feet wide – and shallower, losing the alley and bringing the garage to the front of the house. Indeed, the garage became the home's most prominent feature, as the front door was pushed aside and placed behind a small canopy rather than a generous porch. The garage often became the main entrance to the house, since most residents arrived home by car. The traditional front door served only as a ceremonial entrance for the occasional guest. Sidewalks disappeared in many neighborhoods of this period, as did canopies of street trees. They were seen as expensive luxuries. Street patterns themselves changed from the traditional grid to winding streets and cul-de-sac bump-outs, leaving every parcel a different shape.

Neighborhoods newly developed in more recent years have recaptured some of the traditional neighborhood character. Larger homes again have two stories and often exhibit complex roof forms, façade features and even prominent front porches. Newly planned areas of some cities have even returned to a traditional grid and require sidewalks and street trees, as walkability has once again become a desired feature of urban living. Though design features change through time, the concept of the neighborhood continues to endure.

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# SPACES THAT WORK

BELL BANK



Each month, we are excited to feature spaces that work. *Design & Living* has always been a community resource to all things home and design. As more and more outstanding commercial spaces throughout town have caught our attention, we cannot overlook

BY Becky Muller, Interior Designer at ICON Architectural Group | PHOTOS BY Hillary Ehlen

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Headquartered in Fargo, North Dakota, Bell Bank was founded in 1966 with only one location in the Northport Shopping Center. Since then, Bell has grown to have more than 20 full-service banking locations and multiple mortgage offices. They are not only the largest privately-owned bank in the region but one of the largest in the nation. In 1992, the large building we all see on 13th Avenue became Bell Bank headquarters. Over the past two years, Bell's facilities team has been working hard on designing and remodeling two floors to better suit the company's growing needs. This project totaled around 31,550 square feet of remodeled space with the help of TL Stroh Architects & Interiors, Dakota Construction, Smartt Interior Construction, Christianson's Business Furniture and many more dedicated team members.

#### About Bell Bank

Bell Bank's roots stem from two families that grew up in the rural farming communities of North Dakota: the Snortlands and the Solbergs. Their core values include family, unequalled service and paying it forward in the community. Thanks to these commitments, Bell has been named Best Place to Work, Best Bank, Best Customer Service and has received many more company awards — locally and nationally.

#### Flexible Design

Before the remodel, stepping off the elevator on to the lower level of Bell's headquarters was not very welcoming and didn't fit the culture of Bell. The colors and finishes were dark and dated, plus the staff's needs for this floor had changed over time and they were not using the space to the fullest. It was the design team's primary goal to create a grand entrance by opening up the space and to design flexible and multifunctional spaces for their employees and clients. When you step off the elevator today, you see an open lounge space with comfortable furniture (also known as the "Living Room of Bell Bank"), Bell's mission statement proudly displayed over a modern fireplace, "Bell Outfitters" — where Bell employees can purchase clothing and specialty items, a small Bell library and a beautiful wall with embedded technology.





Bell's four new consecutive meeting spaces all have DIRT Leaf Walls that fold open, creating one large gathering space if needed. With state-of-the-art technology present at the front of each room, the separating walls have integrated marker boards and tackable surfaces to suit the needs of whoever is using the space. The furniture in each one is also moveable, allowing teams to change the function and layout of the rooms as needed.

Directly outside of the meeting spaces is a break room and multiple small break-out zones. Previously, Bell had one large break room with a lot of tables and chairs. Their new design includes a beautiful island with stools, high-top tables and chairs, low tables and chairs and booths — enough variety to meet the preferences of each and every employee that wishes to use the space. Whether for an impromptu meeting, a morning break or watching the news over their lunch, employees have a beautiful and vibrant space away from their desks. A hidden catering kitchen also allows Bell to host a plethora of meetings, seminars or client events. Other rooms throughout the lower level include a wellness suite, mailroom, supply room, their records and facilities departments, additional break-out meeting spaces and storage for Bell's infamous cookie dough!

#### Culture is Key

Carrie Nett, Vice President of Facilities, was involved in every step of the design process, making sure that all internal goals and objectives were met and that each design decision reflects Bell culture. From displaying Bell's mission statement to naming each meeting room after the ownership families, the design team went above and beyond, holding true to Bell's identity and history. Paying homage to the ownership team and where they started, each wall inside and outside of the meeting rooms is lined with photographs (taken by photographer John Borge) from the towns of Finley and Sharon, where the Snortland and Solberg families

have their roots. The main cultural focal point is a large mural by Shane Anderson of Anderson Illustrations. The graphic painting took two weeks to hand-paint and has many different points of interest, each representing Bell's history and everything the company believes in.

"When new employees start, they typically travel to Bell's Fargo headquarters, where they are able to learn more about Bell's origins and history, understand its various divisions, meet one or more of Bell's majority owners and tour the headquarters building. Someone from each department explains what their team does and how they serve the bank and its employees. This is an opportunity for new team members to see how we bring culture into all of our spaces," said Nett, explaining the dedication to culture that is instilled in employees from day one.

#### "Happy Employees! Happy Customers!"

Bell's simple yet strong mission statement says it all. The newly designed lower level and second floor IT department took employees into consideration with every decision. Their wellness suite includes multiple beautifully-designed spaces that allow employees to take a break from technology or work and step away into a peaceful and calming environment. From phone booths for private conversations to integrated TVs in the break room booths (where employees can watch their shows without disrupting other people's conversations) to the ergonomic features in each individual workstation, the design team provided a variety of amenities to ensure happy employees. The new space is light and bright and always the floor is busy with activity and the meeting rooms are constantly booked. Nett stated, "If our employees aren't happy, our customers aren't going to be served. They wouldn't come back and Bell wouldn't grow. This new space is a true testament to our mission statement."





### The Remodel Process

When it comes to remodeling an existing building, there are always restrictions. For this project, it was the low ceilings and no natural light in the lower level, column locations, the overall shape of the building and relocation of staff during the construction process. With a building of this size and magnitude, it's very busy with a lot of moving parts. Bell's facilities team had to make sure that everyone who showed up for work, was able to work. This meant vendors working after hours, extra security measures, temporary furniture and desk relocations and more. By putting in an immense amount of hours on evenings and weekends, Fegely Services played a huge part in installing and moving temporary workstations and furniture, allowing employees to do their jobs with minimal disruption.

### Meet The Team

With a complex remodel like this one, communication among everyone involved was crucial. The facilities team is a diverse group of 12 people with backgrounds in architecture, furniture, construction management, interior design, HR and IT. They worked hand-in-hand with the TL Stroh team and many sub-contractors to deliver this successful project. In the two years it took to design and construct these two floors, the Bell facilities team had anywhere from 46 to 62 projects going on across the country!

Donna Wiger, interior designer with TL Stroh, has worked on many Bell projects. Her relationship and familiarity with Bell's standards and design process helped to make this remodel more efficient. Wiger stated, "It was such a fun project to be a part of. Bell gave us the design freedom to use some cool interior finishes combined with the latest technology so we could accomplish the function and aesthetic they wanted. We also specified furniture, fabrics, lighting and accessories to complete the project." As Bell continues to grow, it was important for them to design this space not only for the now but for the 15 years from now. They have a ton of initiatives throughout the company for growth across the nation, and with this new and improved headquarters, they are more than ready.

**Bell Bank Fargo Headquarters**  
3100 13th Avenue South, Fargo  
bell.bank



Programming and Design - Bell Bank Facilities Department  
Interior Design and Decor - Donna Wiger, TL Stroh  
Architecture and Electrical Design - Devin Mogck, TL Stroh  
General Contractor - Dakota Construction  
DIRTT Walls - Smartt Interior Construction  
Furniture - Christianson's Business Furniture  
Furniture Installation and Staging - Fegely Services  
Flooring Installation - Fargo Linoleum  
Acoustic Ceilings - Far-Moor Acoustics & Floors  
HVAC, Mechanical and Plumbing - Accel Mechanical  
Electrical - JDP Electric  
Live Edge Wood Tables and Shelves - Finnu Designs  
Bell Culture Mural - Anderson Illustrations  
Graphics, Artwork and Photography - John Borge  
Artwork - Art Partners, Emily Williams Wheeler

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