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SPECIAL ISSUE

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Home Tour Hero

Owners of Mingle in Plymouth enlisted help of architect son to build their dream home

BY MOLLY GUTHREY

PHOTOS BY SCOTT AMUNDSON

Melissa Santrach was recently unpacking boxes at her newly constructed dream home on Lake Minnetonka — but there were some items she didn't need to lug around at all.

"I don't even have any fabric samples!" Santrach says. "I don't even have a binder!"

She sounded thrilled; she sounded free.

This is not how someone usually sounds after the lengthy process of designing and building a home.

What's her secret?

"Everything we needed to design our home we could find at Mingle and Studio M Interiors," Santrach says.

Mingle is a one-stop home showroom and design studio in Plymouth — and it's also the family business (the showroom-studio partners with Studio M Interiors, an interior design firm, and Residential Technology Services, a company that helps clients create their "electronic lifestyles").

Santrach and her husband, Peter, got into this business after remodeling the hard way.

"My husband called it 'showroom fatigue,' " Santrach says. "You literally spend days going from showroom to showroom. I had a Rubbermaid bucket in the back of the car for the samples I collected of tile, flooring, all things I'd carry around from one place to another."

Why, they wondered, couldn't it all be in one place? The tile, the flooring, the faucets, the furniture, the designers, the swatches?

"This was the main inspiration behind the creation of Mingle," Santrach says.

Tricia Hauser Tidemann, the kitchen and bath design manager at Mingle, was one of the team members on this project.

"They didn't have to go from place to place, repeating what they wanted again and again," Hauser Tidemann says. "We worked together, at the same meetings, in the same building."

The team had a vision:

"Our goal was to create a timeless East Coast shingle-style home," says Santrach.

A home that also showcases Minnesota products, like Cambria countertops and Dura Supreme cabinets.

"We helped them create a version of a Nantucket style on a Minnesota lake," says Mari Jo Mundahl, senior interior designer at Studio M.

FROM EAST TO WEST

The Santrach family's story begins in the east metro.

"I'm from Stillwater — born and raised — and my husband and I met at University of St. Thomas, where we were studying in the computer industry in its early days," Santrach says. "We raised our family in North Oaks for 25 years."

Once their three kids were grown, the nest got empty — really empty.

"Through business and our purchase of Mingle, we found ourselves on the west metro more often," Santrach says.

It was fun.

"As empty-nesters, we had time to go around the lake, to have dinner and meet friends on the west side of town," Santrach says. "It was all new to us ... If you live in the eastern suburbs, Minnetonka can feel as far away as Boston."

They liked "Boston."

"We thought, 'Why not have a new adventure?' " Santrach says.

The adventure started when they found a perfect spot on Crystal Bay.

"We saw the site and the beautiful view," Santrach says, "and we knew it would be perfect."

After their North Oaks home was sold but before their Lake Minnetonka home was built, the couple moved into an apartment above Whole Foods in Minneapolis.

Their temporary home made them realize just how much their lifestyle had changed.

"As time passed, we realized we didn't need all the formal spaces that we had before," Santrach says. "What was more important was one-level living — having the primary spaces on the main floor."

This doesn't mean they wanted to live in a tiny house.

"No one would ever consider 7,500 square feet small," Santrach says, "but the design is now more consistent with lake living — which is generally a less formal style."

The couple had a special assistant when it came to dreaming up their dream home. Their son, Mark, studied architecture at the University of Notre Dame and is now an architect in New York.

"We call him our 'Markitect,' " Santrach says with a laugh.

The "Markitect" certainly knew his "clients."

"Having lived with them for 18 years," he says, "I knew what they preferred, everything from the way they cook and clean to the way they like to store their extra stuff."

He didn't work alone, though: Mom and Dad also looped in Kathryn Alexander, president and owner of Alexander Design Group.

"It was a fun collaboration," Alexander says.

Part of what made it fun: "We had the same vision," she says.

The vision was inspired by the traditional architecture of the East Coast: Think the Hamptons, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard. It's a style that fits with Minnesota's grandest lake — and it's Alexander's niche as well.

"My firm is known for its East Coast look," says Alexander, who was born in Philadelphia. "In the last 30 years, we've done over 100 houses on Lake Minnetonka."

It's a special place.

"It's a phenomenal lake," she says. "It's almost as good as the ocean, it really is. I think that's why people are drawn to doing an East Coast look, because the setting reminds people of being on the ocean."

The palette of the house complements its lakefront setting.

"The color scheme is neutral grays and soft blues with pops of bright color," says Mundahl of Studio M.

THE HOME

They might be empty-nesters, but the Santrachs designed this home with their kids in mind.

"Our three 'kids' are now 26, 28 and 30 and they all live in New York City, but we are a

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close family and they like to come here to visit, so we wanted to make sure we had space for each of them," Santrach says.

This means that, in addition to the master suite on the main floor, there are three other bedroom suites on the lower and upper floors.

"Big enough," Santrach says, "for their future families and, hopefully, grandchildren when the time comes."

But this home was also designed with the parents in mind.

"I knew that my mom wanted the kitchen island to feel like the command center," Mark says, "and I knew my dad wanted his work bench in the garage. They also don't like having boxes out in the open, so there's finished cabinetry in the garage."

There's also a dog-wash station — although they don't currently have a dog.

"The house is ready for one now," Mark says.

This lakeside home also includes a wine cellar, a scullery (a separate "back kitchen" that hides any mess), a library and a his-and-hers office on the upper floor with views of the lake. The lake is also the focus of the porch, which is a kind of "convertible room" with automated screens and shades as well as infrared heat, a grilling set-up and a wood-burning fireplace.

"We do love to entertain," Santrach says. "We love boating and entertaining, and we wanted adequate space for all of that."

It would be a nice place to be invited.

"It feels comfortable but upscale at the same time," Alexander says. "It's a feel-good house."

Santrach credits the collaboration:

"We really have to call out our Mingle and Studio M design team," Santrach says. "In addition to working with Tricia on cabinetry design at Mingle, we spent many hours with our Studio M team, headed by Melissa Musgjerd, Studio M Interiors owner/partner, as well as interior designers Mari Jo

Mundahl and Linda Gerace-Skinner. Together, they coordinated all aspects of the cabinetry, furnishings and finishings and brought the home to life."

It's easy to entertain here — there's even an app for that.

"The home is fully automated, thanks to Residential Technology Services," Santrach says. "Lighting, shades, music and security are all controlled by the touch of a keypad or a smartphone."

THE TOUR

Just before the Santrachs moved in, the elegant shingled house was featured on the 2018 Artisan Home Tour in June.

It wasn't only the house that got the attention.

"I got a ton of comments about how literally every room has a lake view, including the laundry room," says Sven Gustafson, founder and CEO of Stonewood Homes.

The house is an example of energy efficiency as well, wrapped in the latest "exterior insulation" and using geothermal technology for heating and cooling.

There are simple pleasures here, too.

"The patio is perched on the lake," Santrach says. "It's got a gas firepit and Adirondack chairs and it will be a nice place to sit with a glass of wine."

The tour was an opportunity to share the power of collaboration — the message of Mingle — but for the family it's about something even more personal.

"Mark called me when I was walking through the house when it was under construction," Santrach says. "He just called to see how it was going and I said, 'Now I can see how this space is going to be.' Mark asked me, 'But how does it feel, Mom?' "

Her reply:

"It feels comfortable," she said. "It feels like home." ■

Molly Guthrey is a frequent contributor to Spaces.