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style & culture

june 2010

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FOR GARY**
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BY JEREMY GANTZ

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Three Oaks is NUTS ABOUT OPERA
Rick Kaempfer MEETS RINGO STARR
A Master Luthier RESTORES THE SOUND

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the house on firefly hill

A FRIENDLY FARMSTEAD RETREAT

Perched atop a ridge overlooking twenty acres of protected woods is Firefly Hill, the country retreat of Kelly McGrail and husband Jeff Goulette. The name came after an early experience. “Shortly after we closed on the property,” Goulette says, “we were there enjoying the sunset on a June evening, and the fields began to positively glitter with fireflies—more than we had ever seen in one place before. Fortunately that has continued, so we are treated to a spectacular display almost every evening in the early summer.”





A Chicago native, McGrail has fond childhood memories of her family's summer home in Michiana. "You could make a run for it on the weekends and during the summer," she recalls. "My mother and my siblings were [there] much of the summer, and my dad would either commute, or take long weekends." She and Goulette wanted a similar getaway when they started looking for a place to build a home. They finally found their spot near Buchanan—a wide open space with nice views.

Goulette, an architect with Sullivan, Goulette & Wilson of Chicago, got to work. Inspired by old farmsteads they'd seen in New England, the pair knew what they wanted. They blended farmstead elements with Shaker traditions to create a clean, "loft-like" atmosphere. From the outside, Goulette wanted the house to resemble a "complex" of farm buildings. The ridge itself, and the sun's movement, dictated placement. Goulette wanted to capitalize on light patterns for visual effect and for passive solar principles. The winter sun, for instance, is allowed in, while the summer sun is kept out. Goulette also wanted to make the most of the scenery. Much of the home is only one room deep, so windows allow views of both front and back landscapes.

The focal point of the home is the kitchen. Here, family and friends can gather around an oversized island made of reclaimed gothic white oak. Silver "fork and spoon" chandeliers hang overhead. Beams and columns, salvaged from an 1880s mattress factory, impart a feeling of "age and history" to the home, Goulette says. Antique hardware and a farm-





An enclosed porch opens at both ends to allow good views and breezes, with protection from the sun. A wooden stairway spills from the upper level [opposite top] to the kitchen area, stopping partway down for a reading alcove and library. A long table provides ample space for meals, and windows galore open the room to the out-of-doors. In the background, the kitchen sports an oversized island and work spaces. Antique Minton tiles and an antique mantel frame the fireplace opposite the bed in the master suite [opposite bottom]. Other antiques add patina to the room and windows offer vast views.

Three small sinks—salvaged, perhaps, from a school—lie in wait, just the right height for visiting children. Handpainted wallpaper dictated colors for the media room [opposite top]. The home's only TV sits on an antique Chinese fixture—so long, it had to be brought in through the window! Against the night sky [opposite center], the outline clearly resembles the farm building complex Goulette strove to emulate. Back inside [opposite bottom], McGrail and Goulette found a couple in Wisconsin making tiles. They knew right away they were what they wanted to surround the living room's Rumford fireplace.





house sink contribute to the country atmosphere.

A long dining area and adjacent living room complete the main living space. "We tried to keep it all open, but create differentiation between spaces and functions," Goulette explains. A Rumford fireplace in the living room warms the space, as do radiant-heat slate floors.

East of the kitchen is a den that serves as a media room. Windows are minimal, there is another fireplace, and handpainted wallpaper covers one wall. "We wanted to separate out the TV room," Goulette says. "There's one TV in the house, so this is where we watch TV."

Bedrooms are upstairs. The master bath sports William Morris wallpaper, and a salvaged sink and tub. An open wood-burning fireplace goes through to the master bedroom. An 1890 mantel and antique Minton tiles frame the fireplace on the bedroom side.

There are ample guest bedrooms and bathrooms, including a suite geared for the younger set—visiting nieces and nephews have their own smaller-scale bathroom fixtures.

McGrail likes the "patina" lent by salvaged items—things like the sinks, the tubs and the old warehouse dolly that serves as a coffee table. Other items throughout the home enjoy new life, including a stained-glass window she found in the garage of her family's home. "I toted it around for twenty years," she says, laughing, "and finally put it in something." It hangs in a window above the door to a powder room.

Both McGrail and Goulette enjoyed looking in local shops for just the right furniture and art. "One of the great 'funs' we had was going up and down Red Arrow [Highway] to places like Marco Polo, Lovell & Whyte, the Judith Racht Gallery, and Ipso Facto in Three Oaks," she says. They are also grateful that contractor Dan Jacob had the patience and the skill to install their finds and help them execute their ideas.

The couple spends their "alone" time at Firefly Hill reading and gardening. "We both like to putter in the dirt," McGrail says. "We can't do that in the city." They are anxiously awaiting the blooms of some 2,500 bulbs they put in (with help) along the drive. Great Dane Sophie gladly supervises.

A good deal of the time, though, they are not alone. "We have family and friends in the area," McGrail says. "That very much went into the design of the house, because we wanted a comfortable gathering place for everybody to get together—a place where when it was just the two of us, we were comfortable, but where we could also have family over." ❧

17TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF HOME & GARDEN

Firefly Hill is just one of several homes on the 17th Annual Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights Celebration of Home & Garden to take place throughout Southwest Michigan on Saturday, June 12, 2010. The home tour supports the organization's affordable housing programs. "We hope to have eight stops this year," says Suellen Long, cochair of the event. "One of the stops will be an organic vegetable farm that features a contemporary greenhouse, [and a] storage house with cleaning and cooling facilities." Tickets are available at heartlandalliance.org, or from Lovell & Whyte in Lakeside.