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A 'forever' home



STORY BY BETSY ILER
PHOTOS BY KENNETH BOONE



Custom lighting fixtures, built-in cabinets and a stacked stone fireplace give the Rays' home a warm cabin feel

The lot was not for sale, but that didn't stop Bryan and Karen Ray from building their forever home on Willow Point's Lot 1 Phase 1, on the banks of Willow Slough.

"Bryan always loved this lot and used to say he would buy it and build on it someday," his wife said. "One day, he looked it up in the tax records and sent the owner a letter, saying that if they ever wanted to sell it, he would be interested. He got a letter back asking what he'd pay for the lot!"

Bryan drew up a floor plan for the house and took the design to a draftsman in Auburn. After making adjustments, they looked for a builder. "It was just a really good fit with John and Beth Mathews. They were willing

to work with us on the budget, and we couldn't be happier with the results. They really made the process a joy," Karen said.

The 5,900-square-foot home includes an additional 1,500 square feet in outdoor spaces; vaulted and tray ceilings; heated floors; a storm shelter that doubles as a media room; an open floor plan; and lots of personal touches.

At the outset, Karen gave Beth an idea book, a binder filled with color swatches and pictures of fixtures and finishes she liked. "I told her I wanted it to look like a home, not a

showplace," Karen explained. "Then, I would say, 'Give me three choices,' for everything. We decorated with stuff we already had. We repainted and used furniture from Bryan's dad, who is in the hotel business. We decided on the special things we wanted to keep and donated the rest."

Among the keepers are headboards and mirror frames that Bryan made from shipping pallets and pieces of wood leftover from the home's construction. He also made a large frame for a wall in the dining area. Karen filled the frame with her own photos of classic Lake Martin landmarks. On the

living room shelves, she keeps burlap roses her daughter made and photo frames her children fashioned with Scrabble tiles. There's a bedside table made from a wooden cable spool and a framed Auburn cheerleader uniform her daughter wore as a toddler.

These treasures mix well with the copper-topped console from Wellborn Industries and the custom lighting fixtures in the great room. The long farmhouse table with its church pew seating provides plenty of space for the family to gather at meal times.

The Rays carried the warm cozy-cabin feeling throughout their home

with vaulted pine ceilings, stained in provincial tones, white oak floors and a stacked stone fireplace with gas logs. They incorporated the kitchen into their open living space, and Beth blended the settings together with granite countertops, a copper sink, an autumn gold slate backsplash and stainless steel appliances behind an island with beautiful lake views.

With a financial background, Beth handles much of the business operations of the construction company, but says she also inherited a creative streak. "As a designer, it makes me happy to listen to clients' desires for their home and then be able to create a beautiful space that makes their ideas a reality," she said.

For the Rays, the result is a warm, cohesive design in subdued but organic tones.

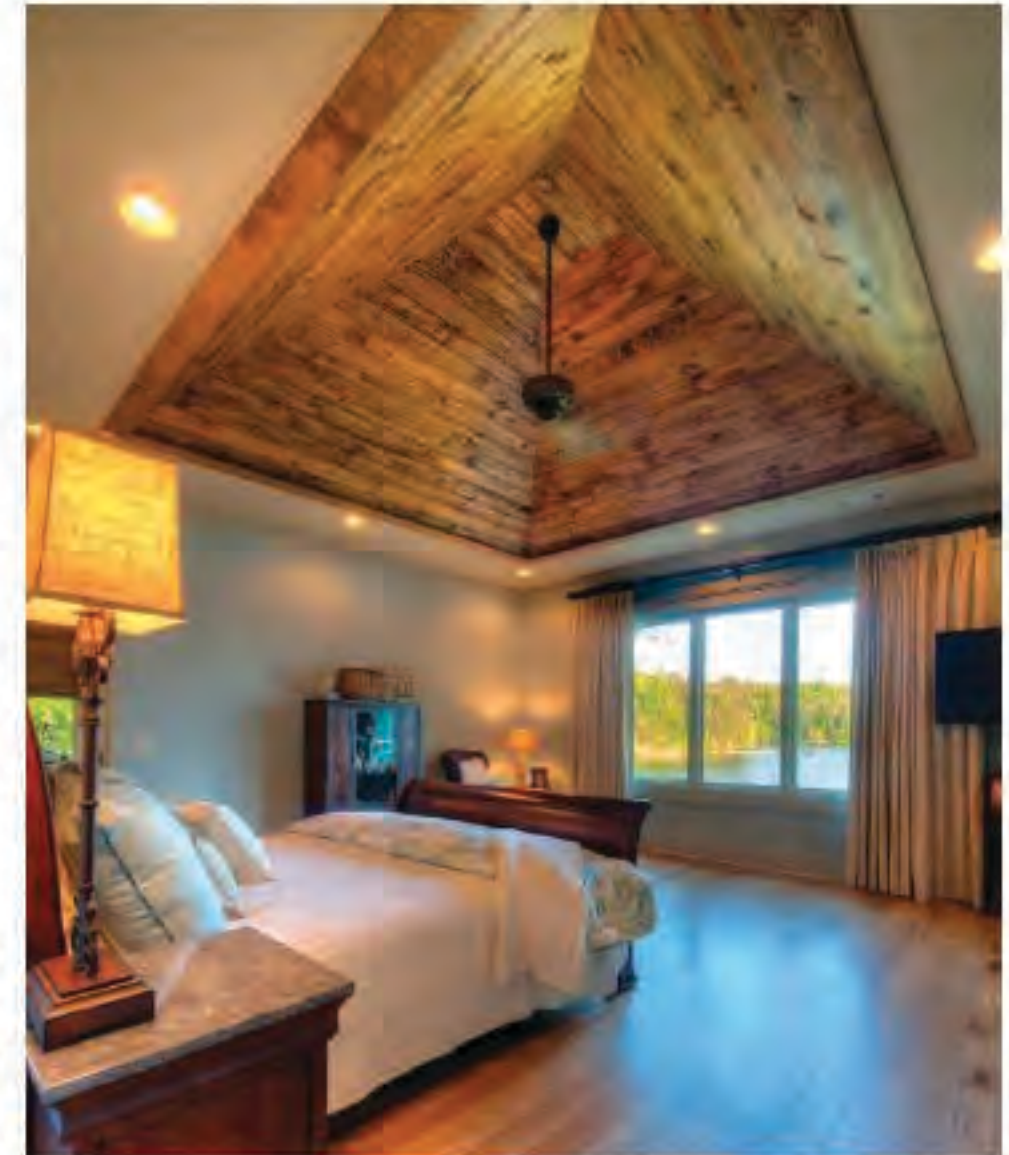
John Mathews incorporated green-building practices and products, including Low E windows, spray foam insulation, sustainable and reclaimed materials, and a radiant heat flooring system.

"What is so nice about this system is that it is thermostatically-controlled, so the Rays can adjust the temperature as needed and don't have to run the heater as much, which in turn leads to greater efficiency and energy savings," John explained.

"It actually radiates heat throughout



The plan includes 1,500 square feet of outdoor living space



Bryan made the guest room headboard from wooden pallets





LED lights under the custom dining area fixture direct light onto the table



The queen-size hanging bed on the screened porch is Karen's favorite place to relax

the house on cold mornings," Karen said.

Simple and serene, the master bedroom overlooks the lake, and a tray ceiling emphasizes the airiness of the setting. With no dressers, the bedroom is uncluttered and relaxing. "We built the dressers into the master closet, so we wouldn't have a lot of furniture in the bedroom," Karen said.

Their floor plan also includes a large hall closet that later will be fitted with an elevator. "We have aging family members who eventually will have trouble with the stairs," Karen explained.

The daylight basement includes bedrooms, bathrooms, an Auburn-themed game room with a bar, the media room/storm shelter, Bryan's office and a seating area leading to the screened porch where a queen-sized hanging bed beckons.

"We can all pile on it and just talk," Karen said.

"One night," Bryan added, "we watched the space station go by."

"It's one of our favorite places year round. Even in winter, we just grab a quilt," Karen noted.

The E-shaped seawall on Willow



The council fire pit takes center stage in an E-shaped seawall

Slough offers several options for boat storage and docks, but the Rays favorite feature is a fire pit made with rough boulders. "We call it the council fire," Karen said, "because that's where all of our important decisions are made."

Around the corner of the house is a storage room for boating and swimming supplies, along with an outdoor shower, for which Karen said her son made a special request. He equipped the shower with a pine bench that he made with the help of his grandfather. Karen said she came to appreciate the

shower early on.

"We had to use deer repellent spray to keep the deer from eating the landscaping, and let me tell you, that stuff does not smell good. It was a real blessing to have the outdoor shower and not have to carry that smell into the house," she said.

Much of the property across the lake and around their house is wooded, with old Russell cabins across the water and no house built on the adjacent land, which is not part of Russell Corporation's Willow Point develop-

ment.

"It's a quiet slough," Karen said. "One of the things we really enjoy is that on the weekends people come here to teach their kids how to ski. But most of the time, we can put the canoes in the water and paddle along the shore. We love to canoe."

Karen grew up in northern Virginia and met Bryan in Greenville, N.C., where the two were in college. They made their home in Auburn in 1994 when they purchased a Wendy's restaurant franchise. Eighteen months later, they built a Wendy's in Alexander City and moved to town. They stayed for nine years before moving back to Auburn to be closer to the store there, which needed more of Bryan's attention at the time. They returned to Lake Martin last December when construction of their forever home was completed.

"It's been a long-time dream to live right here, and we're just happy to be living that dream now," Karen noted.

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