

GREAT LAKE STORY

CHAPTER FOUR: CRAFTSMANSHIP

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Today, as I walked in to the living room and looked up 20-plus feet to our amazing barrel-vaulted ceiling — still under construction — I suddenly felt like I was in church, swept away by the soaring, detailed grandness of it.

But while it may be a work of art, Jim and I agree it makes our living room feel anything but formal. The whole space, opening up to Lake Michigan through a nearly wall-sized, arched window, feels ... spiritual, in a way. Embracing.

How can I explain it?

Wayne Visbeen, our architect, had originally envisioned this design element — a combination of painted arched beams and pine-panel beadboard stained hickory to complement our dark wood floor and mantel. Inspired, Jim and our interior designer, Melissa de Alvare, suggested expanding what began as a partial barrel across the room's entire expanse of 20 feet to add even more character.

Every piece of it is custom-crafted and installed by hand — incredible to watch these artisans at work, high up on that scaffolding, so meticulous it makes me stand straighter.

And now the ceiling's just as much a focal point as the floor-to-ceiling fireplace. I love this, too ... I love the roomy hearth, the big corbels beneath our simple box mantle, the way the chimney gradually narrows all the way up to the ceiling — and the stone! It's also what we picked for our home's exterior, country ledgestone in a palette of clay and caramel, smoke and slate.

Our mason, Jon Potts out of Holland, is a wonder with that stone. He fits and fashions every slice of it like a puzzle, exchanging this piece out for that one. The end result looks like it grew right up out of the earth.

But what's impressed both Jim and me about our construction team isn't just what can be seen. It's the thoughtfulness they put into everything — from how they hang the doors to the mitered joints. They understand our standards because they share them: I really do feel as if they're all crafting this home as if it was their own — the air is filled with this electricity of pride.

That's key, I'm sure, to why our home is evolving so beautifully.

Oh, I should note we'd almost done it to ourselves! When we decided to put a grilling area on the lower level's

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patio, we hadn't considered what might happen once Jim started turning those steaks. Right above is the deck flooring of our three-season room, off the den upstairs. With its outdoor fireplace and wide views of the lake and lawn, it's a wonderful space for entertaining or just reading.

But it wouldn't be so inviting with smoke from the grill coming up from the floorboards.

Construction director Ken Vander Zee and his crew, including Scott Bekins — who provided many of our appliances — pointed the potential problem out to us. We agreed to their suggestion of installing an exhaust fan that will push the smoke right up the chimney.

We're going to have to have these folks over for burgers!

Photography of Jim and Susan Buda's Great Lake Story will be featured in Michigan BLUE Magazine's 2010 Fall Issue. To learn more about the businesses making this dream home a reality, visit www.mibluemag.com. To see more sketches of the Budas' home, go to www.visbeen.biz. To see construction photos, go to www.boshomes.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY GARY W. ODMARK

