

NORMAN CONQUEST

This Lake Minnetonka estate has a Normandy flavor—seasoned with a heavy dash of its owner's personality.

by JACK GORDON
PHOTOS by JILL GREER

The irregular stone exterior is designed to create a timeless look, as if this Wayzata house has stood here for generations.



THE WINDING LANES OF WAYZATA'S LOCUST HILLS neighborhood are liberally dotted with upscale dwellings, but only two lots offer actual Lake Minnetonka shoreline. One of them belongs to Dan Murphy.

His house, completed in 2011, affords numerous vantage points from which to contemplate his dock on Gray's Bay. Four main-level rooms—the master bedroom, library, living room, and 10-sided, indoor-gazebo-like hearth room—all offer close-up views of the lake. That is by design.

But then, everything about this house is carefully designed, down to the smallest details. Murphy, 65, retired from the U.S. Navy as a three-star admiral and then served for more than six years as CEO of aerospace and defense company Alliant Techsystems Inc. He has considerable reserves of energy and enthusiasm.

To illustrate: When he met and selected architect Peter Eskuche to design the house in late 2009, Eskuche introduced

him to auto racing. Within weeks, Murphy acquired and modified a BMW for circuit racing. A Porsche followed. Then he took up Formula F racing—open-wheel, Grand Prix-style driving on twisting circuit tracks. As Eskuche tells it, a few years ago Murphy ranked second nationally in Formula F.

Murphy says that is nonsense. "I only raced nationally for one year. I came in 23rd in 2011, based on points," he says. He has given up Formula F but still has a modified Porsche that he intends to drive in club races next spring.

Love fest

Eskuche and the builders say that Murphy threw all of that energy, along with his full attention, into creating the Wayzata house. To hear the principals describe it, the enterprise became a nearly two-year-long love fest involving Murphy; Eskuche; project manager Bruce Carnahan, executive vice president for general contractor L. Cramer Designers + Builders; interior designers Dawn and Michael Priem of Verve

ABOVE LEFT The living room features bifold doors that open to bring the outdoors inside. The screened patio and stone terrace provide ready access to Lake Minnetonka's Gray's Bay. RIGHT The 10-sided hearth room features comfy, overstuffed furniture made for relaxing near the fire. Walnut flooring, laid so that it radiates out from the fireplace, echoes the design of the dramatic beamed ceiling overhead.



RIGHT Newlyweds Dan Murphy and Suzanne Dillon and her daughter Kiernan lounge lakeside with the family dogs. **FAR RIGHT** The dining room and kitchen feature a wall with the same irregular stones and dry-stacked look seen on the exterior walls. **BELOW** The 10-foot front door opens to a foyer that features hand-scraped, cross-hatched walnut flooring that continues up the risers of the grand staircase. Carved limestone frames the doorways off the foyer.



Design Group; stonemasons; limestone carvers; finish carpenters; and more.

Murphy calls the overall design Normandy style. “Not the south of France,” he specifies, “the Normandy coast. Lots of stone and wood. That’s what I said I wanted.”

Architect Eskuche describes the style of the 8,574-square-foot house variously as storybook, European-inspired Normandy, and “Normandy with a touch of Montana.” But what it really is, he says, is “Dan Murphy style.”

Jennifer Cramer-Miller, a vice president with L. Cramer, calls Murphy “the ideal client.” He was so excited about the project and so eager to be a team player that his enthusiasm was contagious, she says. “He had always wanted to build a house, and now he had the time and money to do it. He really wanted to do it right. He paid complete attention to the details.”

Timeless

The house shows that loving attention to stunning effect. From the exterior, the meticulousness is evident in the curves and peaks of the cedar-shingled roof. It shows up in the three carriage-style garage doors, finished in cedar, that front the wide drive. (Another three-car garage hides on the basement level.) The eye for detail is especially apparent in the irregular dry-stacked appearance of the house’s stone walls, sloping pillars, and chimneys. The dry-stacked effect is even more striking when the stonework is reprised inside on an accent wall in the dining room.

“It isn’t easy convincing a stonemason that you want a deliber-

ately jumbled sort of look,” says L. Cramer’s Carnahan. Eskuche insisted on the irregular arrangement of stones because one of Murphy’s requirements was that the house look “timeless,” as if it might have stood there for generations.

The sense of timelessness is very much present indoors. Through the 10-foot front door, faced with hand-carved walnut, is a cove-ceilinged foyer that is splendidly baronial. Intricate, hand-scraped walnut flooring is laid in a cross-hatch pattern that continues in the risers of a curved staircase. Carved limestone arches frame the entries to rooms that open off the foyer.

One of those rooms is the spacious library, which features walnut paneling on the walls and ceiling as well as an enormous wood-burning fireplace framed in hand-carved limestone. The library’s big windows open to the expansive stone patio that runs along the lake side of the house. A concealed door in one of the library’s walls offers secret access to the main-floor master suite, with its gas fireplace and windows that also face the lake.

On the opposite side of the library lies the living room, with bifold doors that open fully onto a screened section of the patio, allowing Murphy to “bring the outdoors indoors”—a feature he requested. The living room, dining room, and gourmet kitchen all merge in an open-concept design featuring more hand-scraped walnut floors and beamed ceilings. Another semi-concealed door from the kitchen opens to a roomy butler’s pantry.

Completing the lake-facing section of the main floor is the cozy 10-sided hearth room. Its walnut flooring is laid so as to



radiate out from a point near the big stone fireplace, echoing the pattern of the vaulted ceiling above.

Wood floors continue on the second level, which contains a sitting room and three bedroom suites, one with a hidden door in its walk-in closet that leads to a concealed storage nook beneath the sloping roof. (That's at least three secret passages in the house, if you're counting.) The major surprise waiting on the second floor, however, is an enormous open space above the garage that is partially divided into a media room, a game room with wet bar, and a billiard room. The three sections are set off with brick archways.

To be continued...

Despite its personalized grandeur, this 2-year-old gem is on the market. Asking price: \$6.45 million. One reason is that Murphy was married in August to Suzanne Dillon, a recently retired registered nurse. (To the surprise of nobody who knows Murphy, the honeymoon took the form of a two-week safari in South Africa.) The newlyweds want a home closer to town that can reflect

both of their personalities. They plan to break ground in December for a house near Lake Harriet in Minneapolis.

It also appears, however, that Murphy has caught the architecture flu. In addition to the Lake Harriet project, the couple plan to build a substantial house in Ashland, Wis., on Lake Superior, and a smaller carriage house on another Wisconsin property.

The same team will regroup for all three projects: Eskuche, L. Cramer, and Verve Design. Everyone grins broadly with anticipation when talking about them. They clearly relish the thought of continuing to work together. As a client, Murphy has acquired a reputation for being a lot of fun. **MH**

JACK GORDON IS AN EDEN PRAIRIE FREELANCE WRITER.
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ARCHITECT: PETER ESKUCHE, ESKUCHE DESIGN
BUILDER: L. CRAMER DESIGNERS + BUILDERS
INTERIOR DESIGNERS: DAWN AND MICHAEL PRIEM,
VERVE DESIGN GROUP
LANDSCAPING: DAVID KOPFMANN, YARDSCAPES



OPPOSITE PAGE
A lighter palette rules in the main-floor owners' suite, where a marble-draped bath creates luxury spa ambiance.
TOP Bedroom amenities include a gas fireplace and French doors that face the lake.
BELOW Situated on one of just two Locust Hills lots with lakeshore, the house capitalizes on the view.

