

# Empty Nesting

After the kids moved out, the Nelsons chose to remodel rather than move from their home of 34 years.

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Photo by MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG





The Nelsons updated their kitchen with new lighting, cabinets, granite countertops and wood floors to give it a brighter, more modern look.

## WHEN WENDY AND RALPH NELSON BEGAN PLANNING THEIR NEW HOUSE ON ANDERSON LAKE,

their builder advised them to build a place as big as they could afford, investing in a home that would meet their needs for years to come. That was in 1976 when Heather, their daughter, was one year old.

They took the advice, building a house big enough to hold their growing family—another daughter, Heidi, and a son, Brett, soon joined their ranks. They made the most of their beautiful setting by incorporating panoramic windows along the back of the house, bringing seasonal views of the lake and wooded lot into their family room, kitchen and dining room. The Nelsons enjoyed the family-friendly space they had created as their children grew, hosting many team parties and

gatherings of friends over the subsequent hectic and fun-filled years.

One by one, the children left home to build lives of their own, until Wendy and Ralph were left on their own with a pressing question, to stay in their empty nest or to go? It was a difficult decision. After thirty years, with only superficial changes made to paint, carpet and wall-paper, the house felt dated and even the big windows couldn't seem to bring in enough light.

For five years the Nelsons explored the Parade of Homes. "We'd see nice use of granite and woods and saw nice warm color tones in the paint," Ralph says. Periodically they went so far as to explore with a Realtor, hoping to find something that suited them. "We are rather particular and we could just not find what we wanted," Wendy explains. "We couldn't duplicate the things we love the most about this space, this lot."

Realizing that the home they were in still had a lot of potential, not to mention many treasured memories, they began to consider what changes they could make to improve it. They focused on the spaces they live in and value the most: the kitchen with the adjacent dining room, and the beloved but gradually eroding back yard.

"We were happy with the footprint here, we didn't want to bump walls out; the challenge was bring a new and fresh look to the existing space," Wendy says. They wanted to replace the well-used original kitchen linoleum and oak flooring in the dining room, change the dark wood kitchen cabinets, and trade the neutral Formica countertops for a natural stone.

After checking out a few remodelers, they chose to work with Mark and Mary Mackmiller from Mackmiller Design+Build ([mackmiller.com](http://mackmiller.com)), whom they had met at a fundraiser for the Eden Prairie Arts Center. The Nelsons shared the specific things they wanted to accomplish, but the professional remodelers gave them even more ideas to bring their redesign to the next level. "The relationship [with the Mackmillers] was very good," Wendy says, "It was a collaboration of ideas and design."

First to go: the kitchen, down to the studs. Energy-efficient "closed foam" insulation was sprayed into the wall cavities, and when the walls were replaced, the soffits, which had suspended the old cabinets and made the space feel crowded, were not. The old cabinets, which were in good condition, found a new home in a Habitat for Humanity project, and the new cabinets, painted ivory with a chocolate brown glaze, reach the ceiling, providing more storage. Matching crown molding and custom millwork added to the kitchen and dining room lends continuity between the rooms and creates a classic effect.

The basic kitchen layout, efficient for many years, remains the same, but the Nelsons enjoy special new features, such as the concealed wine rack and cork-boards, and custom roll-out towel racks, shelving, garbage and recycling bins. New lighting fixtures over the kitchen and dining room tables combined with under-cabinet lights and recessed lighting in the kitchen ceiling increases illumination. The ceilings had a facelift, when the old popcorn surface was removed and repainted a clean, smooth white. Underfoot, the linoleum and carpet in the two rooms made way for "character-grade" American black walnut, which the Nelsons chose for its distinctive color variation and knots.

Selecting the granite for the countertops proved more difficult, requiring several outings to find the perfect slab. "We had it narrowed down to two, but couldn't make up our minds," Wendy says. "Then, on our last outing we saw this, and knew immediately this was the one." The granite they chose, Super Bordeaux, features several shades of terra cotta, with dynamic spots and striations in gray and taupe, adding color and warmth to their now bright and modern kitchen.

New appliances, a new dining room rug, new kitchen table and chairs, and fresh paint and window treatments throughout add the finishing touches to their indoor renovations.

At the same time that the interior was being made over, the yard was also getting some attention. The Nelsons cherish their yard, which is often visited by deer, wild turkeys, songbirds and other wildlife, but had some concerns about its condition. The ground below the deck that came off the kitchen and the aggregate patio that neighbored it had been settling, causing cracks in the aggregate and shifting the deck footings.

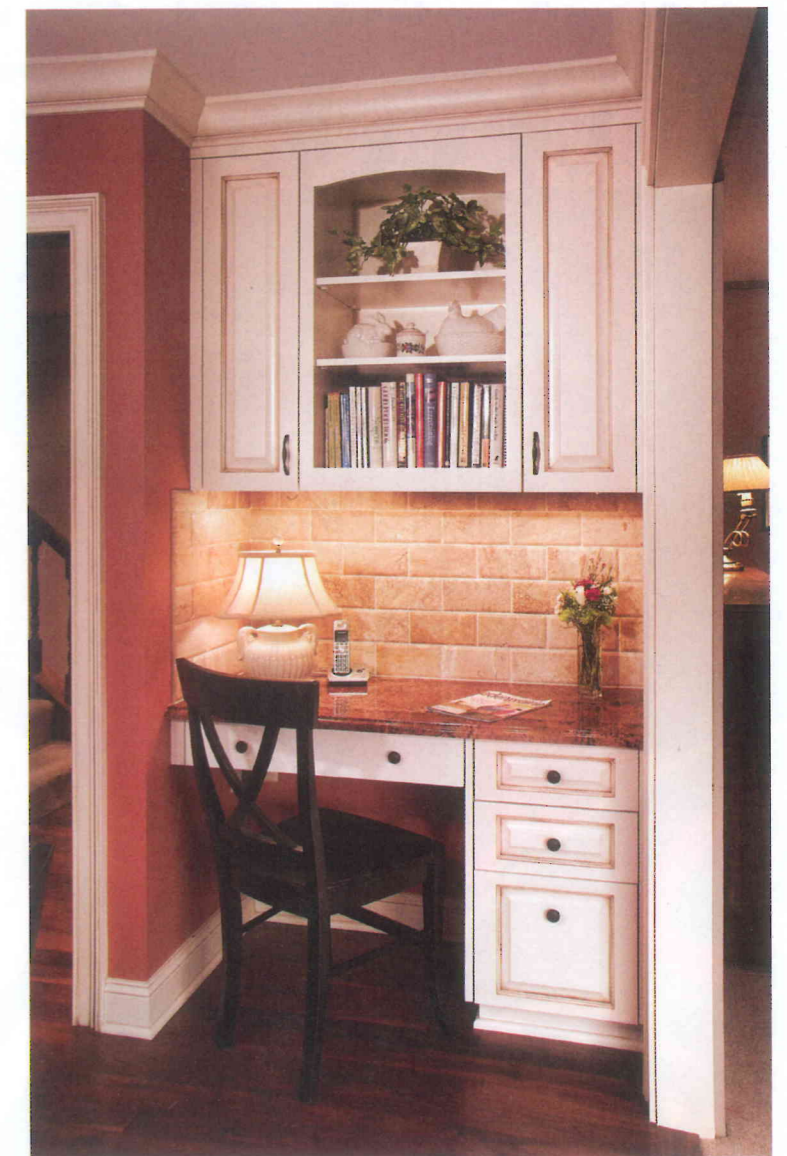
Southview Design ([southviewdesign.com](http://southviewdesign.com)) came in and built a boulder retaining wall to stabilize the earth, laying stone steps to link the deck and patio with the lower yard. The Southview crew rebuilt the deck with an updated railing, hauled away the aggregate slab, replacing it with stone pavers, and removed a few trees to extend the patio further into the yard.

The new patio features a fountain that spills into a natural stone bowl, planters and decoratively laid pavers encircling a firepit for visual interest. Additional changes to the front and side yards renewed the overall landscaping, including a 15-foot pergola for "aesthetic privacy," Wendy says.

Looking around at their remodeled spaces, the Nelsons know they made the right decision in staying in their home. Wendy says their children, viewing the makeover, echoed their enthusiasm saying, "Mom and Dad, why didn't you do this sooner?" With a new granddaughter in their lives, they look forward to many more years making memories and enjoying their re-feathered nest with friends and family. //

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—Wendy Nelson, Eden Prairie homeowner



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