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Family Favorites

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The lake — and cliff — view from the Semmelmann weekend home is what drew them back to the site that was devastated by fire in 2011. Not one but two Green Egg grills, below, in an outdoor kitchen make it easy for Marc and Susan to feed a crowd on their patio.

THE GIVING HOUSE



There's a reason the Semmelmann family embraces every day with thanksgiving — and throws open their Possum Kingdom Lake house at the slightest excuse for celebration.

By Babo Rodriguez Photos by Ralph Launer

If ever a house were built on a foundation of gratitude, it is the Possum Kingdom Lake home of Marc and Susan Semmelmann.

Susan likes to quote California author Sarah Ban Breathnach: "Every time we remember to say 'thank you,' we experience nothing less than heaven on earth." It's a sentiment that could explain the couple's connection to the getaway they designed and built in one long exhalation of thankfulness.

The lakeshore location long has been special to the family, whose primary home is in Decatur. The rustic cabin that first stood there — among the first built on the lake — had been their escape from workaday cares since they bought it in 2005. When Palo Pinto County wildfires leveled more than 200 houses near or on the lake



Susan and Marc Semmelmann take any opportunity to share a day in the sun with friends and family — and their dog Buster.

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The sweet potato casserole recipe is passed down from Marc's great-aunts.

in 2011, the Semmelmann cabin also was consumed. It was heartbreaking for many and would have been for Susan, too, if another tragedy hadn't been rocking her world.

"I got the call that the house had burned, and my response was, 'Oh, well. I will deal with that later,'" she says. The loss meant little at a time when Marc Semmelmann was fighting for his life. Diagnosed in 2010 with dedifferentiated chondrosarcoma, a rare and lethal bone cancer, Marc had already had his pelvis replaced and spent nine months in a medically induced "chemo-coma" at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. The loss of the house was bearable. Losing Marc was unimaginable.

Susan is co-owner and founder of Grandeur Design, a home-design company based in Decatur. When Marc fell ill, she and partner Brenda Blaylock were managing their manufacturing



Wasabi quartz covers the kitchen island and countertops. The backsplash features 3- by 9-inch glass tiles set in a brick pattern that abuts the recessed and framed Velmour Moroccan Mosaic Inset.



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Marie Rieger, who works at Grandeur Design, joins David Blaylock, Susan Semmelmann, Marc Semmelmann and Brenda Blaylock, a partner in the design firm, to salute a day at the lake. The patio seating just outside the house's back door is steps away from the outdoor kitchen.

plant, handling day-to-day business and making plans for a Fort Worth design center and showroom. When Marc's medical financial services company took off while he was under treatment, Susan began running it, too. She and Brenda agreed to shutter Grandeur Design.

There's a more-than-happy ending to this story. Marc was pronounced cancer free last July. His oncologist says he knows of no other survivor of this cancer in the world. Marc's recovery feels like nothing short of a miracle to the couple and their three children, now ages 14 to 18. The lake house is a monument to that miracle. Before his recovery, Marc had told Susan, "If anything happens to me, keep the lake house as a place of memories and a place to make memories."

A lawn between the house and the dock offers plenty of room for a friendly game of football. Emily-Anne, 17, and Marcus Semmelmann, 14, join family friends. The Semmelmanns' oldest daughter, Madeleine, 18, catches the ball.





Marc designed the rooftop replica of the University of Texas at Austin Tower. He had the stucco crew mold windows that were then inset with glass tiles. The working clocks are designed to withstand the elements. Marc worked with an electrician to ensure the LED lighting produced a burnt orange recognizable to any Longhorn fan along with other colors.

Despite the one-two punch of the fire and Marc's illness, the couple determined to find a path back to family time at PK as quickly as possible. At the end of 2011 they started building a two-story guesthouse. Marc was still under treatment, but he did not want another summer to roll around that he couldn't be at the lake with his children. Finished less than a year later, the guesthouse features an open kitchen/living area and a master bedroom suite downstairs; upstairs are boy and girl "bunkhouses" — the two large rooms feature eight trundle beds each — and another bedroom suite. The guesthouse was much used during the three years the family spent building the adjacent lakeside house.

Susan and Marc built spec and custom homes together for a dozen years, so they felt comfortable creating an initial plan for the main house. They hired William Brown as a draftsman. Builder Mark Anderson, also an architect, worked closely with Susan. She designed all the artisan details inside and out, as well as the home's light fixtures and furnishings.

The 5,500-square-foot house has the lines, tile roof and stucco facade of an Italian villa but, unlike most Old World-style houses, it overflows with light. Two walls of windows throw open the kitchen/living areas to lake views. There's a lot of luxury in the details, but like the guesthouse, the house was built for family, friends and fun — in spades. The compound has a total of six bedrooms but, thanks to those trundles, sleeps up to 28.



Throughout the building process, “hospitality” was at the top of the couple’s wish list. Since completion, both houses have been offered to anyone who needs a getaway. Attention to lush finishes and fabrics abounds, because Susan believes beauty inspires a comfort that’s equal to a good bed and a soaking tub. The design of the houses is about the ease of entertaining, too. There are two ovens in the main house, another in the guesthouse and a total of three refrigerators and five icemakers in the houses and outdoor kitchen.

Spread out beneath 24-foot ceilings, the public area of the main house is essentially one

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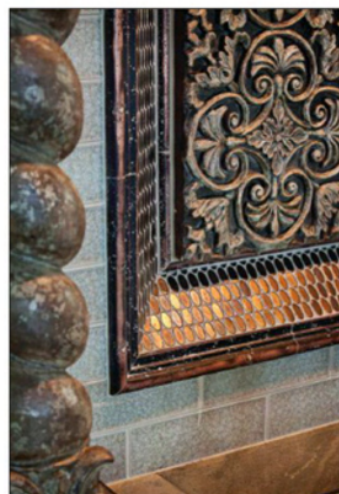
big room. Easy circulation, from seating at the kitchen’s massive marble island and glam picnic-style dining table to the intimate sitting and fireside lounging areas, keeps guests moving from one comfortable vignette to the next. There’s plenty of outdoor seating on the patio, terrace and dock, too.

Susan’s experience with Grandeur Design, now open on Foch Street in Fort Worth — manufacturing resumed and business boomed in step with Marc’s recovery — allowed her to tap into ideas she’d never before explored. “I stepped out of the box,” she says. “I felt free to try all sorts of new things.”

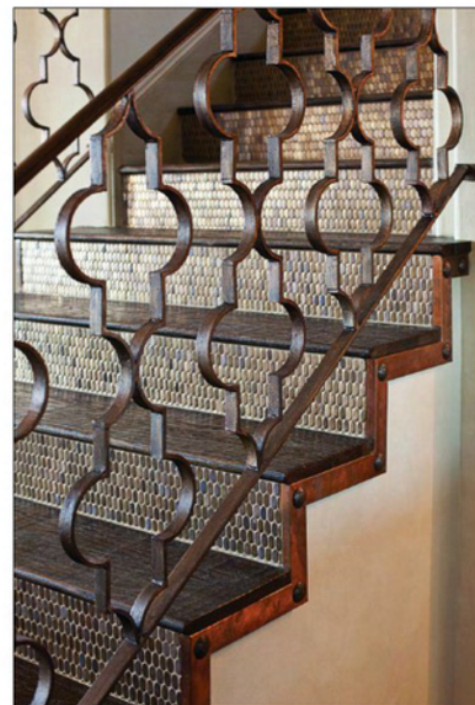
Peruvian wooden columns in the kitchen, under-lit onyx counters on a bar made from a deconstructed antique cabinet, a bathtub in the shower, a wall of vintage mirror glass broken into pieces and seamed together



A grouping of swivel chairs from Grandeur Design has the best view in the house. The draperies were manufactured in the company’s workroom in Decatur. The pillows coordinate with the copper penny tiles on the kitchen backsplash and stair risers. Daughter Madeleine Semmelmann painted and distressed the coffee table. The tile flooring was inspired by a small Arabesque concrete tile that Susan had manufactured on a large scale. The shift in color from khaki to bone gives it a movement similar to that in the wall finish.



A bar was born of an antique china cabinet that was deconstructed and redesigned by Susan. The countertop is lighted Wonder onyx. Rather than traditional rope lighting, LED flexible film lighting gives the stone a consistent glow. Copper penny tiles frame the artwork over the stove, above, and fill stair risers featuring copper work by Rick Davis.



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with copper for a fireplace surround, one-of-a-kind tile floors, a tiled dog-feeding station, the disco ball in the girls' bunkhouse: Why not? Marc had a few special requests, too: Not one, but two Green Egg cookers in the outdoor kitchen; an industrial-size pull-out trash can in the house so parties aren't interrupted with having to take out the trash; and a replica of the University of Texas Tower, complete with orange lighting, on the roof. (In deference to family and neighbors, the structure also turns purple for TCU and green for Baylor).

The couple is crazy for football: Her family boasts dozens of TCU grads; he was a four-year letterman at the University of Texas in the '80s. Because Thanksgiving Day is all about one ballgame or another, they choose another day for their feast each year. But

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now, every day is about gratitude, and gatherings large and small fill their schedules. Finished in September, the lake house stands as a *carpe diem* salute to answered prayers.

"When Marc was so sick, we asked ourselves what life and living really mean to us. It means friends and family and happiness. Every day since his recovery, anything that might have felt catastrophic before feels minimal, manageable. There's only one way to look at things: positively. We built this house to share the joy. And we did it right." **380**



Custom-made pillows in the girls' bunkroom coordinate with the room's bright paint and bedding.

THE DETAILS

Interior design, furnishings, architectural and construction details of exterior and interiors Susan Semmelmann, Grandeur Design; 940-577-1000 or grandeurdesign.com

Architectural plans William C. Brown, Design Services; 940-565-0520

Builder Mark G. Anderson with Anderson Fine Homes and ADC group; 806-789-6275

Copper work Rick Davis, RLD Designs; 817-929-5277

Faux finishes Angela Camp, Austin Faux Real Designs; 512-423-1813 or austinfauxreal.com

Cabinetry finishes Tommy Dyke, Austin's Finest Finishes; 512-944-3468 or austinfinestfinishes.com



A strobe-light disco ball lights the glam girls' bunkroom, just for fun. On the practical side, the eight trundle beds glide on industrial rollers. Cabinet insets are styled with a beaded wallpaper to complement the rhinestone buttons on the cornice window treatment. In a house built for playing hard and sleeping well, all the bedrooms feature blackout draperies.