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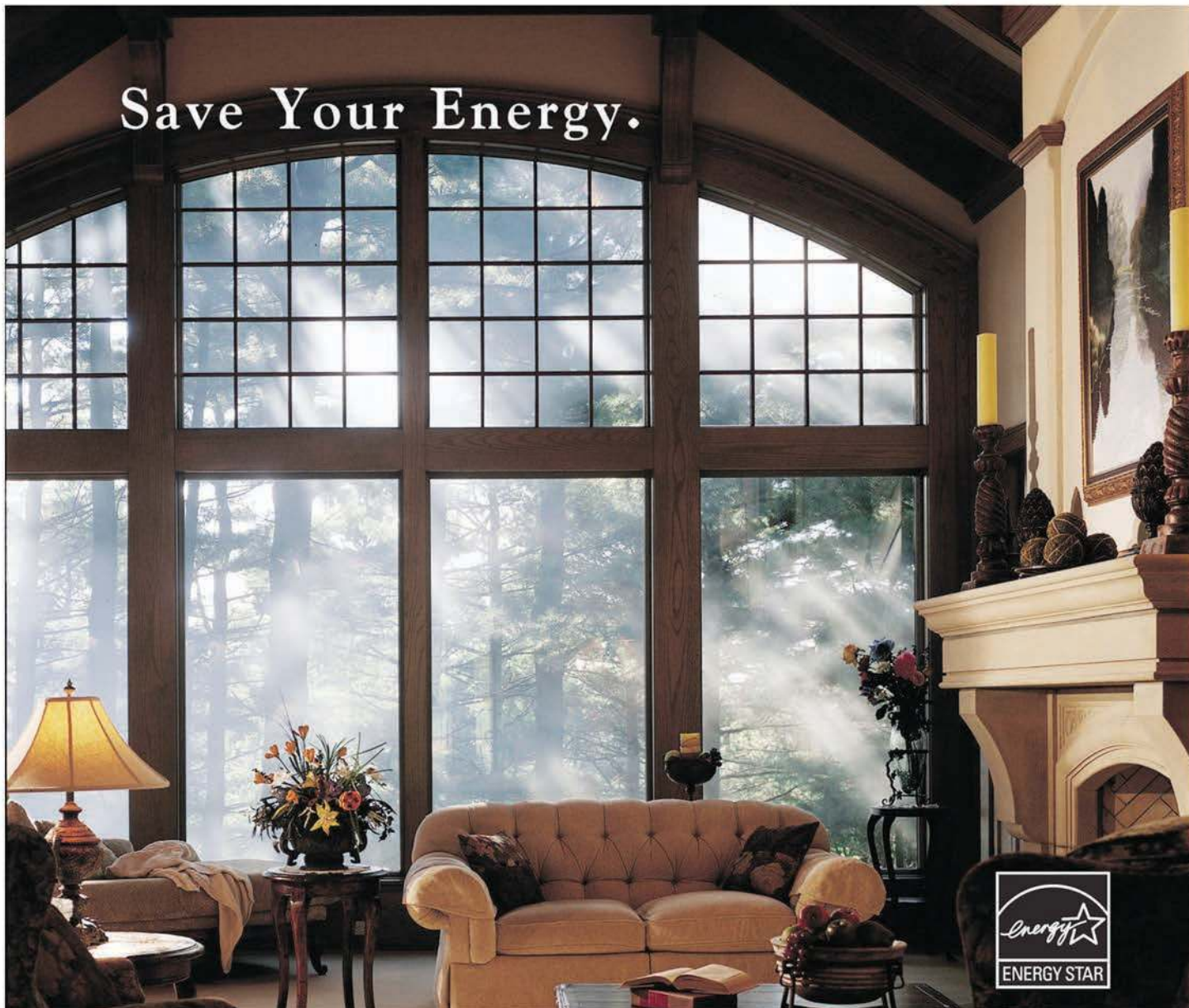
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French Apple Custard Tart

Photography by Linda Hoard

This Apple Custard Tart is inspired by classic European baking, where custard-based desserts are more common than in American cuisine. The tart begins with a buttery, shortbread-like pastry crust that adds a crisp, cookie-like texture to the base. Thinly sliced apples are then layered on top, and what makes this tart truly special is the sweetened cream poured over the apples before baking. As it bakes, the cream transforms into a delicate custard beneath the caramelized fruit. This combination of rich, velvety custard and crisp apples, paired with the cookie-like crust, captures the elegant simplicity of European desserts. Perfect for fall, this tart brings a touch of European tradition to your kitchen, celebrating the natural sweetness of apples in every bite.

Tart Crust Ingredients:

3/4 cup unsweetened butter
3/8 cup sugar (6 tablespoons)
2 large eggs
2 1/4 cups flour
1/4 teaspoon salt

Filling Ingredients:

4 medium apples, about 1 1/2 pounds
2 large eggs
1/2 cup granulated sugar, plus 2 tablespoons
sugar for sprinkling over the tart before baking
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
pinch of salt
1 cup heavy cream
2 1/2 tablespoons apple cider or calvados

Preheat your oven to 350°F

To prepare the tart dough, cream the butter and sugar together in a stand mixer on medium speed until well combined, about 1 minute. Add the eggs and mix on low until incorporated. Gradually add the flour and salt, mixing just until the dough comes together. If the dough is too dry, add a small amount of water, but avoid over mixing.

Press the dough evenly into a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom, using your hands to spread it as evenly as possible. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Peel, core, and slice the apples into thin slices. Arrange the slices in overlapping concentric circles inside the unbaked tart shell.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the eggs, 1/2 cup sugar, vanilla extract, and a pinch of salt. Slowly add the heavy cream and apple cider, whisking until the mixture is smooth.

Pour the custard filling over the apples and sprinkle the top with 2 tablespoons of sugar. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until the tart is golden brown on top and set in the center.

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By Zinta Alstars

D “Don’t force trendy,” advises Jessica McGuire, interior designer and owner of Flair Interiors. “Trendy comes and goes. You have to feel happy in your home for years to come, over a long time. Decorate your home the way you like it—and I can help with that.”

DOING IT WITH FLAIR

Flair Interiors, originally founded in 1985 as Draperies on Wheels, has expanded over the years from window treatments to include teams of designers and installers for complete home décor, ready to transform the home that yawns into the home that dances.

Your interior designer can do the work for you. First step—check with your friends, put your ear to the ground, to hear who others are recommending for interior decorating services. Next, make an appointment with the designer. It can be as easy as a few clicks online on a website or making a phone call.

“Once you make an appointment, we send a designer to your home to have a look around, take measurements, ask questions, and we will take photos of the spaces you want decorated,” McGuire says. “We will bring samples for you to consider and may even give you quotes up front.”

Your next appointment will be to come to the showroom. Browse for ideas, look around and see what inspires. The designer at Flair Interiors will have three layouts ready for your inspection, geared to your home and style.

“We are almost all custom orders,” McGuire says. “Clients can tour the showroom, but we can order most anything in colors and fabrics of your choice.”

Once ordered, the Flair Interiors team delivers and installs the new furnishings and window treatments—whatever has been ordered. They hang artwork, put in lamps, down to the detail—something customers appreciate.

“And we don’t subcontract our help,” McGuire says. “Our main installer has been with us for 20 years.”

Allowing the experts to arrange the new space eliminates family arguments about what goes where, McGuire smiles. The team can update one room or the entire home. Clients usually choose to do one or two rooms at a time, reserving a whole house redecorating project for a new build.

“Or we can do just one window treatment,” she says. “It’s all up to you. As for payment, we ask for half up front and half at install.”

More and warmer colors are being introduced into today’s rooms, she notes. Earthy tones but stepped up a shade or two. Wallpaper has also become more popular once again. A variety of textures adds interest.

“We are happy to work around pieces you wish to keep—not everything needs to be replaced,” McGuire adds. “Most people have favorite pieces already. And should something need repair or service—such as blinds that get damaged or a coffee table that gets scratched—we also provide repair service.”

BRINGING IN THE EXPERT EYE

Dian Latora, owner and founder of Cork Lane Decorating Center has been in business since 1979. She agrees that the recent home décor trend has changed from gray tones to warmer, natural earthy tones—often with darker accent colors.

“Give us a call and we will come to your home for a consult, free of cost,” Latora says. “We can listen to you and come up together with ideas, but one of our first questions will be about your budget, because we need to work inside of that. Usually clients know their budget, although we find people are often willing to expand on that when they get excited about new ideas.”

Cork Lane Decorating offers everything needed, from floor to ceiling—furniture, bedding, flooring, window treatments, fabrics and paint, with a final touch of accessories.

“We will even knock a wall down to enhance a room, although if you need more contracting work, we can



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arrange that contractor for you," Latora says. "A client may want to redecorate room by room, but it can be easy to make mistakes that way. We can give you a plan for the whole house but then work in phases, as your budget allows, so that it all flows and works together."

Although there were design industry rumors that the open concept was out as the year began—that people may want walled-off rooms again after so much togetherness during the pandemic years—both designers agree that the open concept has retained its popularity. Good design can define spaces without adding walls.

"There have been some changes in bathrooms," Latora says. "No more of those large, built-in tubs. Tubs in general have come out or else are replaced with soaker tubs. Showers have gotten bigger, and they are walk-ins. Vanities have gotten taller. If the client doesn't want to replace the entire vanity, we can add a vessel sink to give it a taller feel."

In bedrooms, Latora recommends that the bed should be the focal point.

"Not everything needs to be changed," she says. "A new headboard and linens can really update the bedroom. Tufted, padded headboards are now popular if you have a higher ceiling to allow for it. You don't have to change out all the furniture if you don't wish to—maybe paint, maybe new lamps. Many bedrooms now have TVs in them, but those should be inconspicuous. Don't make the TV the main thing."

While the recently popular white cabinetry in kitchens has been popular, colors now are more muted. White has now become a warmer white, not so sterile. While uppers may be a lighter color, bottom cabinetry may take a bolder, darker color, or the island can be the darker piece in the room.

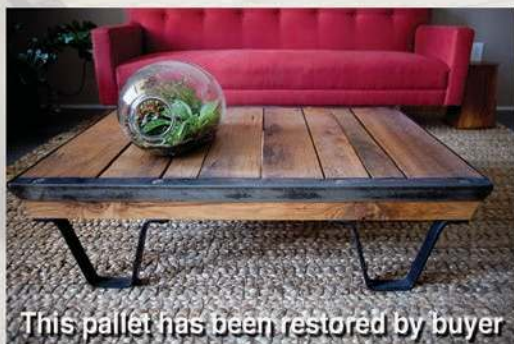
"It all depends on the light in the room," Latora says. "If you have a lot of light and you have high ceilings, you can go darker to anchor the room. Cabinetry can go darker, not stained, but painted in darker colors."

All of that, however, begins in the living room. This is where home design starts, Latora says, giving a strong first impression that then flows throughout the home.

"The living room sets up the house," says Latora. "So that is where we begin."



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Building Homes, Strengthening Communities.



By Barbara Fisher

Photos Courtesy of The Kalamazoo Book Arts Center



KALAMAZOO BOOK ARTS CENTER

The Kalamazoo Book Arts Center is a marvelously creative and public space located in the Park Trades Center in downtown Kalamazoo, joining scores of other artists and artisans in celebrating the arts. With nearly 100 artists and artisans plus other entrepreneurs and small businesses, a visit to the Park Trades Center can be directed solely to the Kalamazoo Book Arts Center or include the broader artistic community. KBAC is open from 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM weekdays as well as into the evening hours on the first Friday of each month.

Founded in 2005, the Kalamazoo Book Arts Center (KBAC), embodies the art of the book. It preserves the traditional arts of papermaking, printmaking, letterpress and bookbinding while infusing more contemporary ideas and techniques. Think this isn't for you? Do read on!

An eclectic space, KBAC offers both wall space and movable panels for its gallery. Seating is also available for the Poets in Print readings and other events. "Over the years the KBAC has hosted many nationally and internationally acclaimed artists and writers, often in collaboration with Western Michigan University's Waldo Library Special Collections, and Visiting Scholars and Artists Program. These creative individuals present their work in the gallery, participate in our Poets in Print reading series, and teach workshops in our studio," summarizes the KBAC website.

Just what is the Poets in Print series, readers may wonder. The poetry reading series may be offered onsite or online. Katie Platte, Studio Manager, shares that a spring 2025 reading in the series will feature poet and novelist Kaveh Akbar, a National Book Award finalist. A poster (broadside) of each poet consisting of an image and a poem is completed for each series.

Guest artists also grace the KBAC. Aimee Lee is featured from November 1 – January 17, 2025. A papermaker, Ms. Lee uses the fibers in ways many might find surprising, such as clothing. A reception for Ms. Lee will be held on the evening of December 6.

Classes and workshops are also offered (online and in person). Are you seeking ways to unleash your inner creativity, master a new skill, find an outing for you and a few friends? Do check out the KBAC website for offerings that can help you do all of that. Just in time for the holidays, the Center has the following (and more) on their calendar:

Holiday Pop-Up Cards (online): Thursday, November 21 (7:00 to 8:30 PM)

Diamond-Fold Accordion Book/Star Ornament for Kids (onsite): Saturday, December 7 (1:00 to 2:00 PM)

Two Needle Coptic Bound Book (onsite): Sunday, December 8 (Noon to 5:00 PM)

Gift Wrapping Party! (onsite): Wednesday, December 11 (6:00 to 8:00 PM)



Butterfly Zhen Xian Bao Accordion Book with Box (online): Saturday, December 14 (Noon to 3:00 PM)

The KBAC Book Arts Store produces and sells handmade journals, posters, and cards, limited edition books, unique gifts and more. Guests may also make purchases online (kalbookarts.org). At the store, guests will also find a variety of handmade and decorative papers, commissioned works, KBAC t-shirts, book arts supplies and one-of-a-kind gifts.

Have some spare time and want a different sort of volunteer experience? The Kalamazoo Book Arts Center welcomes volunteers as well as welcomes book arts related equipment or supplies that might need rehoming.

KBAC accepts experienced and inexperienced unpaid interns to share in printing and papermaking projects, assist instructors during classes, help host public events, and work with staff to maintain the

KBAC studio and equipment. Active interns are issued keys and may use the space after hours to work on personal projects. Some interns may be able to earn college credit or be paid through a Western Michigan University program. Ms. Platte notes that the Kalamazoo Book Arts Center works with local schools in providing classes pairing printmaking, papermaking and bookbinding with literacy. "Kids make a physical book, experiencing art and the importance and love of reading."

On a fun note, Ms. Platte, highlighted the Edible Books Festival. Returning in 2025 on March 29, this fun (and international) event pairs food and books! Adults and child divisions are offered. Let the baking begin! The books are put on display and then voted on. Once the winners are announced, the books get eaten!

Do put a visit to the Kalamazoo Book Arts Center on your 'to do' list. To contact, visit their website: kalbooksarts.org or call 269.373.4938.



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It's All About the Team

By Zinta Aistars

Feature Photography by Next Door Photos Kalamazoo

“What a great team,” the homeowners said.

“We worked as a team,” said the builder, Josh VanDyke, general manager of R. VanDyke Building & Remodeling, LLC, in Kalamazoo.

“It was a team effort,” said Valentina Velkova, president and custom home designer at ADIDA—Architectural Design/Interior Design/Art—in Portage.

The theme of teamwork rose again and again from all parties working together on the project of building the transitional lakefront home. It was located near Indian Lake in the Scotts area. It took a team effort with shared ideas and lots of brainstorming for the homeowners to see their dream realized.

Other team members included Katie Grimwood of Grimwood Design, coming in later in the project to add cohesiveness of color and texture, and Tom Palarz, structural engineer, ensuring that the heavy load of so many windows of the home were soundly supported with a steel beam. Murray Landscaping would add the final touches for curbside appeal.

“We wanted a waterfront home with more land around it, we wanted it to be close to family, and we just couldn’t find what we wanted,” the homeowners said. “But we did find the land. We knew Josh by reputation from friends, so we went with him—and Josh pulled in Valentina. We sat down together to talk about the project, and we were all soon on the same page.”

Velkova at ADIDA drew up the pages—the blueprints—first by hand, allowing for options and easy changes, and only then, when all parties were in enthused agreement, went to the computer.

“I’m old school that way,” she said. “We make any changes, and then I turn to the AutoCAD program for the final blueprints. Those have the greatest precision.”

“She was so easy to work with,” the homeowners nodded. “Val came up with options we hadn’t even thought of—she really understands lake living. Her designs were always focused on the view and lots of natural lighting. That was huge.”

The WOW factor is immediate upon entering the home. That first crucial impression is a view of the water through two stories of windows. Every room in the house has windows overlooking the lake. The street side consists of what are known as “service rooms,” storage areas, pantry, closets. All bedrooms greet the resident with the magic of waterfront.

The homeowners had found their half-acre of land on the water, unique for lake properties that can be so often side-by-side homes to conserve space. Over time, the homeowners were able to buy the adjoining lot, also a half-acre so as to complete their full acre on water, as well as eight wooded acres directly across the street—a possible area for a future guest house or barn.

“By the time the build was finished, it came up to 6,700 square feet,” the homeowners said. “Two stories with five bedrooms, four bathrooms, kitchen with a walk-in pantry, four seasons great room, laundry, game room, and sunroom, and a walk-out basement (with a gym—we may actually use that at some point—and a kitchenette area) for easy access to the lake.













Two of the bedrooms are down there. Since it is a basement, we have a heated floor there. And there is also a two-car garage."

The homeowners bought the parcel in March 2021, started the design, broke ground in 2022, featured the home in Parade of Homes 2023, and moved in soon after that.

They liked a traditional style, but not overly modern, and so the home became "transitional," Velkova explained. She designed the home with modern touches but traditional features.

"I presented them with two different floor plans—I always do that—so that they could consider their options and choose," Velkova said.

Along with the two-story windows in the great room with its white oak beams, another focal point is an immense stone gas fireplace—the stone brought down from Mackinac Island. On the opposite side is an open view of the kitchen with white cabinetry and a backsplash of ceramic tile in a herringbone pattern. A 10-foot island with granite countertop has room enough for family gatherings, but between that and the great room is a custom-made dining table made for the homeowners in Shipshewana, Indiana.

"Leading to the game room is a secret door," the homeowner said. "That was a fun dream for about a decade—always wanted one of those. It looks like a bookcase."

Another fun element is a hot tub on the east side of the home. A large deck extends living space into the outdoors. It is a wonderful place to linger on evenings, the homeowners said, to enjoy the cool lake breezes and watch the moon reflect over the lake.

The exterior of the home has Hardie board siding with several bump-outs over accent windows to add architectural interest, each with a metal roof. Sliding doors open to master, great room, and the gym below.

"The only challenge for this project was when we began," VanDyke added. "There was an electrical pole right in the middle of the property. We had to move that, and that changed the easement. Other than that, it was smooth sailing."

"Yes, we all worked well together," the homeowners agreed. "All of us. We found ways to save a buck along the way without compromising quality. We probably sat together as a team eight, maybe ten times. Val and Josh were always available to us to build our forever home."

"This project really encompassed all that we provide when we build a home for a client," VanDyke said. "We particularly like showing our design creativity which creates the opportunity for our craftsmanship to stand out. It is a top priority of ours at VanDyke Building to include the highest-rated designers and trade partners to join us throughout the process. We pride ourselves on complete involvement from the very beginning to the end."



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When You Need More Than an Interior Decorator

By Zintya Aistars

Photo Courtesy of ADIDA, LLC

I“I do it all,” says Valentina Velkova. “From A to Z.” Velkova is the founder of ADIDA—Architectural Design/Interior Design/Art—in Portage. She does it all: she meets with clients and leans in to listen. Their dreams, their wishes, their needs, Velkova takes note and transfers them all into a schematic design, offering options.

“Listening is important,” she says. “I ask what the homeowners wish to have in their home—how many bedrooms, bathrooms, square footage. What is their favorite style, what is their lifestyle? I ask questions and take note.”

Velkova then takes pencil to paper. Not the AutoCAD program on her computer as yet, she says, because she is “old school” and likes the ability to be creative with drawings. Once changes are made and a final design is approved, only then does she sit down to the computer.

Should the client wish to view the plans in 3-D to help in visualization, Velkova may also create images that can be “walked through” on a screen.

As drawings are loaded into the computer CAD program, Velkova makes any final tweaks to the project so that all those involved have a clear blueprint on how to proceed. The blueprints then go to contractors, structural engineers, electricians, anyone involved in the building process.

Velkova then switches hats to become both designer and interior decorator for clients who wish to include these services.

“It is how I was trained,” she says. “Not just to be an architect, but how to design the interior as well. As an interior designer, I connect the architecture to the interior

spaces. While I am working on the blueprints, I am constantly visualizing the interior look as well. As a decorator, I am available to clients to help choose finishing touches—fabrics, window treatments, pillows and throws on the furniture, to the final detail.”

Velkova was born and grew up in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, the country’s second largest city and known as a cultural center in Europe. She took art classes from age 10 on up. In high school, she focused on math, and by the time she was ready to enroll in university, Velkova had a clear goal in mind—she would be an architect.

“I grew up in a city filled with architectural treasures, buildings that were a hundred, two hundred years or older,” she says. “That inspired me. When I finished high school, I had to take exams and present my diploma thesis to a jury. One of the professors encouraged me to continue my studies because he felt my approach was so unique.”

After earning her architectural degree, Velkova began working at an architectural firm, and when she was sent overseas to Chicago for a conference, she was thrilled to go.

“Bulgaria was a communist country at that time, so many of us who traveled to the United States were hoping to stay,” she says. “I met a man from Kalamazoo at the conference, showed him my portfolio, and he was impressed enough that he had me come to Kalamazoo. He helped me get a green card and gave me a job. I have been living here since 1993, and I am now a naturalized citizen. Yes, Kalamazoo is now my true home.”

One of the differences Velkova brought with her from her education in Bulgaria was that architects

there are also educated in interior design, not only drawing up blueprints but carrying through the entire process of building and designing and decorating a home.

"That's my training and my preference," Velkova says. "I established ADIDA in 2005 while still working as a contractor for other firms, but I was able to work for my own company full-time by 2013."

From 2017 on, ADIDA has earned Best of Houzz awards for Velkova's work every single year through 2024 and a 5-star rating from her clients. She specializes in residential properties, mostly high-end lakefront homes. Many are featured in Parade of Homes throughout greater Kalamazoo.

"My philosophy is that everything must work together," Velkova says. "I create a space that is functional but also esthetically attractive. In that sense, Frank Lloyd Wright in my ideal architect, because he not only designed the house but everything in it, including the furniture. He was architect, designer, and decorator. When I draw up plans for a house, the style of the house dictates the style of the interior. For instance, if I have stones on the outside, I may bring some of them inside, perhaps to the fireplace. I often ask clients about the furniture they are bringing in and work around their pieces."

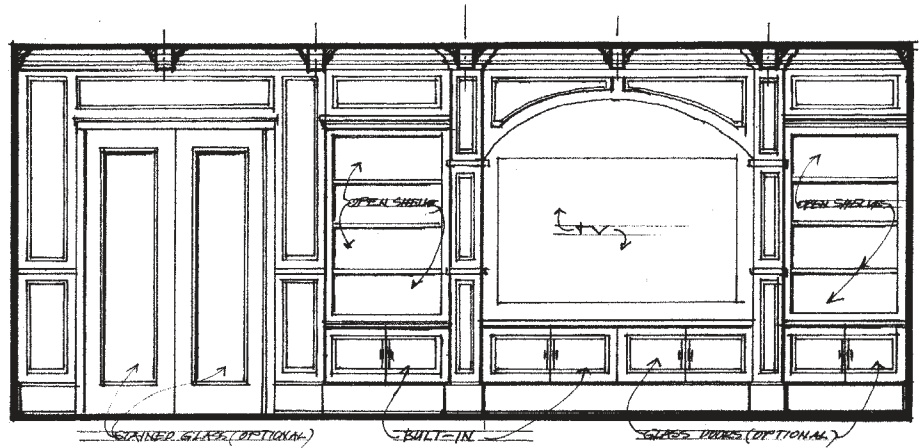
Currently at work at just such a project, renovating an interior, Velkova is transforming a home by removing walls, adding built-ins, bringing in a consistent flow from room to room to room.

"I'm using the same wood for built-ins, for example, as I am for kitchen cabinetry, so it all flows together," she says. "Most of my homes are new construction, but when I work on older homes, I adjust the interior to the exterior. The style of the house dictates the design. Every house is unique as every client is unique. That is why I take the time to get to know the client."

To learn more about ADIDA and read reviews, search ADIDA on Houzz.com or visit the website adida.design.



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The Hot Soak that Refreshes and Heals

By Zinta Aistars

Photos Courtesy of Nordic Hot Tubs

The day has been long and difficult. Contentious office meetings, a grumpy boss, a toddler throwing a tantrum in the middle of a grocery aisle ... enough. Home at last, you turn on the jets in your new hot tub and let the bubbles flow. Pour a glass of your favorite beverage, drop the weight of your day from your shoulders, and sink into the steaming warmth. What could be better.

"A hot tub can be a year-round luxury, a great way to relax and unwind at the end of the day," says Glenn Lussier, store manager at Watson's, 6695 South Westnedge in Portage. The business sells various recreation and relaxation products, including a large selection of hot tubs and spas.

"There are many health benefits to hot tubs," he says. "We have had customers say they have been helped with sleep apnea, arthritis, high blood pressure, fatigue, and muscle tension. And it can be a great way to relax with family and friends."

Watson's offers bench-style spas that provide seating along the edges, lounge style spas with larger seating areas, and "plug-n-play" spas that operate by being plugged into a standard outlet, quickly ready to enjoy. All come in various sizes, under various brand names. What makes Watson's unique, Lussier says, is that the store is part of a larger conglomerate so that they can buy in bulk and offer customers more competitive prices.

"One of the first things we ask when a customer comes in looking for a hot tub is how much space they have for it," Lussier says. "We ask how many people are expected to use it, so we know about seating. What will be its main use—entertainment? Hydrotherapy? And we talk about budget."

While smaller hot tubs can begin at prices around \$4,000, Lussier says cost can go up into the \$20,000s, but

as much as twice that if the customer is looking for what can be termed a swim spa, a large tank big enough to take a swim in it.

"Athletes like those," he says. "They can use them like a treadmill in water. Hot tubs can be as much as 38" deep, but the swim spa may have sides that are as tall as 58"."

Hot tubs that run on gas, Lussier says, are a thing of the past. Today's tubs run on electricity and are much more energy efficient.

Nicole Locey, owner of Locey Swim & Spa, 6655 Lovers Lane in Portage, agrees that hot tubs run on gas are out.

"You will have to hire an electrician to install a hot tub properly," she says. "On average, they require 240 volts, 50 or 60 AMPs. We can help with recommendations for electricians to install them safely."

Locey says some of the most frequently asked questions she hears from customers are if a building permit is required for a hot tub installation. She recommends checking with your county or city for its requirements as they can vary.

Asked about indoor or outdoor placement, Locey indicates most are placed outdoors, but if a customer chooses to place the tub indoors, proper ventilation is required for the steam and moisture in the surrounding air as well as a solid foundation.

Considerations for the outdoor hot tub might include the view, distance from the home when using in cold weather for quick in-and-out along with access to a changing room, privacy, considerations for weather such as snow accumulation, need for fencing, and any trees overhead that might drop debris into the water, making more frequent cleaning necessary. If using the tub throughout four seasons, consult a professional for



winterizing to avoid freezing or at least obtain instructions from your salesperson on how to follow steps to avoid any damage from cold.

"Otherwise, many of our customers do enjoy using their hot tubs all year long," Locey says. Locey's even offers what they call a "pool school" for maintenance instructions, although hot tubs are usually easier to care for than regular swimming pools. "We are big on education," she adds.

Maintenance involves removing any film or residue that adheres on the walls of the hot tub that can contaminate your water, causing it to become smelly and foam too much. Chemicals such as sanitizer, pH, alkalinity and calcium are used to keep your hot tub water clean and clear while preventing rust and scaly mineral build-up. Filters need to be cleaned every 4 to 6 weeks, and an annual drain to cleanse the spa plumbing is recommended.

Cover your hot tub when not in use. This will help to keep heat in while protecting it from any debris. Make sure the hot tub is not easily accessible to children or pets when adults are not supervising.

Locey's Swim & Spa sells only the Nordic brand, Locey says. "We feel Nordic has superior quality while being affordable. Most range from \$5,200 to \$9,000. Prices vary, of course, if you are looking for a hot tub for only two people or for eight. Those are the typical sizes customers choose."

Locey says she inherited the store from her father, Paul Locey, who opened its doors in 1979 as a passion project. He had worked as a pool builder and had great pride in the business.

"He was very proud of it, as am I," Locey says. "And another aspect of our business is that we service what we sell."

As for health benefits, Locey acknowledges the well-known good a soak in the hot tub can bring, but she adds: "Yes, it's great for de-stressing. That's how I use mine. But I think one of the greatest benefits is how a hot tub can bring a family together. You can get all generations in there, get away from the TV and cell phone, and just enjoy quality time together."





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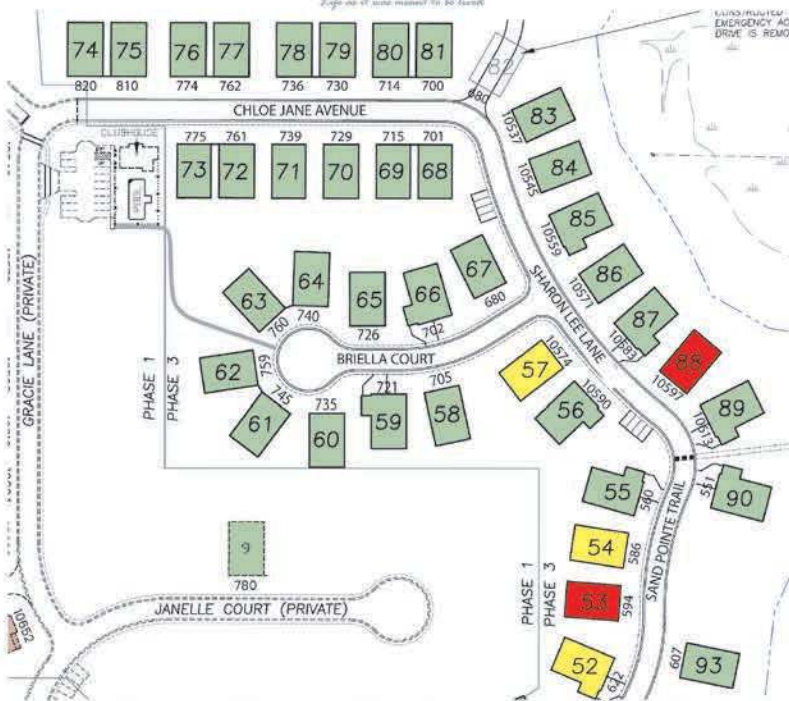
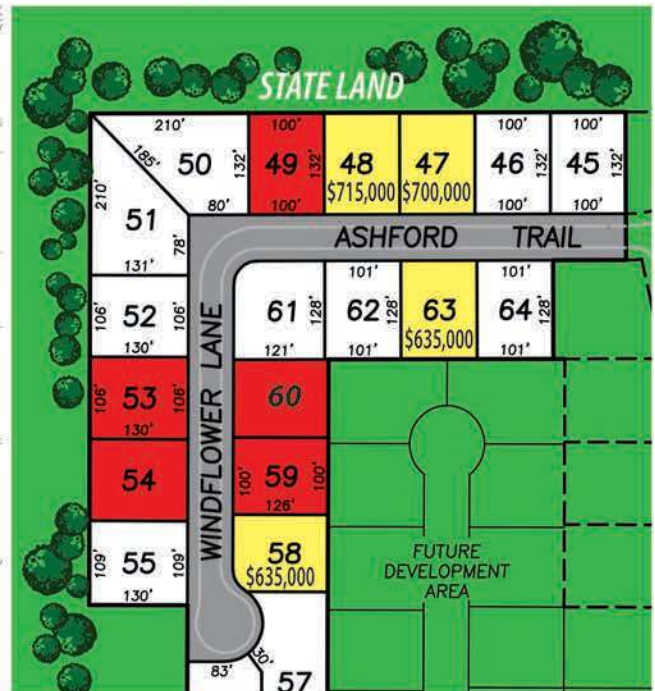


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