

CENTRAL MINNESOTA

# STYLE

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Asian-Inspired  
Redesign

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A photograph of a modern kitchen interior. In the foreground, a large, dark granite countertop island with a thick wooden edge is visible. A stainless steel double-basin sink with a high-arc faucet is set into the island. Behind the island, dark wood cabinetry lines the wall, featuring a built-in stainless steel oven and microwave. Three white, conical pendant lights hang from the ceiling. In the background, a window with a wooden frame looks out onto a bright area. A potted plant sits on the island near the sink.

# A Harmonious Transformation

Area couple redesigns with balance and harmony in mind.

By Kirsten V. Freeman  
Photography by Bella Rose Photography

Over the course of the 25 years AnneMary and Richard Wielkiewicz have lived in their spacious two-story home in the Kenwood neighborhood in West St. Cloud, they've completed multiple mini makeover projects to their home. The changes took shape nicely, but the overall design never blended like they wanted it to.

In early 2013, the couple decided to start completely over with a fresh slate and a new perspective. Inspired to incorporate discreet and meaningful Asian influences throughout their home by their children, Nate and Chloe, who are both adopted from Asian cultures, they sought out a professional home designer who could transform their main living areas from so-so country style to sophisticated modern Zen.

*The Wielkiewicz's kitchen was transformed into an open, organized space centered by a massive new center island.*



They found who they were looking for at the Central Minnesota Builder's Association HomeShow last March where they met Chris Hensel, owner and designer at Dovetail Kitchen Designs. "We liked his approach," AnneMary said. The initial meeting with Chris took four hours. "He really listened to us and seemed to see the whole scope of the project and share our vision for what we wanted it to be," AnneMary said. "He even looked up my Houzz.com account to see the things I liked that I had been bookmarking."

"AnneMary and Richard wanted a more soothing, organized environment with a definite Asian flair," Chris said, "We decided to rearrange some areas and use calm, natural and forgiving design hues, simple furnishings and crisp, clean lines to create a balanced and harmonious space. Each detail was chosen very carefully with their input."

"Chris completely thought out our space in ways we never would have considered," Richard said, "That's why we wanted to find a designer who would look at the project as a whole, not just someone who could build it for us."

The extensive remodel took a solid six months to complete and included relocating the entrance from the garage into the house and changing what was once a tiny closet and living room into an abundant mudroom and harmonious hearth room. The kitchen was completely transformed from a tight u-shaped space into an open, organized and convenient cooking center complete with separate beverage center. There was also time and budget included to modernize the couple's master bath and closet area.

Chris drew up the blueprints and narrowed down all of the selections AnneMary and Richard needed to make from appliances and lighting fixtures to stain and paint colors. Chris managed the project from vision to completion, ultimately saving the couple not only money but headaches as well. The result is beautiful.

One of the most dramatic new design features is underfoot. The new engineered wood floor made from Acacia, also known as Asian Walnut, has a great hand-scraped texture and exotic variegated pattern.

The new mudroom is organized and tidy with tall, deep alder lockers and plenty of storage. "No more shoes all over the hallway floor," AnneMary said. The adjacent hearth room is picture perfect with its sleek stainless floating fireplace and balanced alder bookshelves, Asian-lamp chandelier, alder-beamed ceiling and rice-paper-like window coverings. Even the hardware has a slightly samurai sword shape. Soft, nubby-textured retro-styled indigo lounge chairs invite family and guests to sit by the fire and soak in warmth and conversation.

The renovated powder room now has an oriental panache and pays homage to the natural elements of wood, water and stone. The Japanese archway mirror designed and created by Chris out of cherry seems to be floating above the furniture-style cherry vanity. A gentle stream of water flows from a modern waterfall faucet into the crafted bamboo wood vessel sink that rests atop the sturdy soapstone vanity surface. The backsplash has contrasting reflective glass and hewn stone strips. Even the hardware has a Japanese archway look to it. "The whole package looks like a sculpture," AnneMary said.



*Soothing hues, crisp lines, simple furnishings and Asian accents blend throughout the home, creating a seamless design.*

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Some of the most dramatic changes took place in the kitchen area. Once a honey oak toned, tight, u-shaped space with a refrigerator that stuck out oddly and counters that had gadget-filled corners, now the kitchen's corners have been eliminated and fresh energy flows through the open space. Clean-lined and crisp, the new tawny cocoa alder cabinetry is stylish and plentiful. "The drawers are oversized to hold all of our small appliances so nothing is out on the counters," Richard said. "We thought we'd be giving up storage but we have more than ever before. This kitchen is so easy to use and keep clean—even putting away the dishes is easier. It's all about good planning, function, design and details."

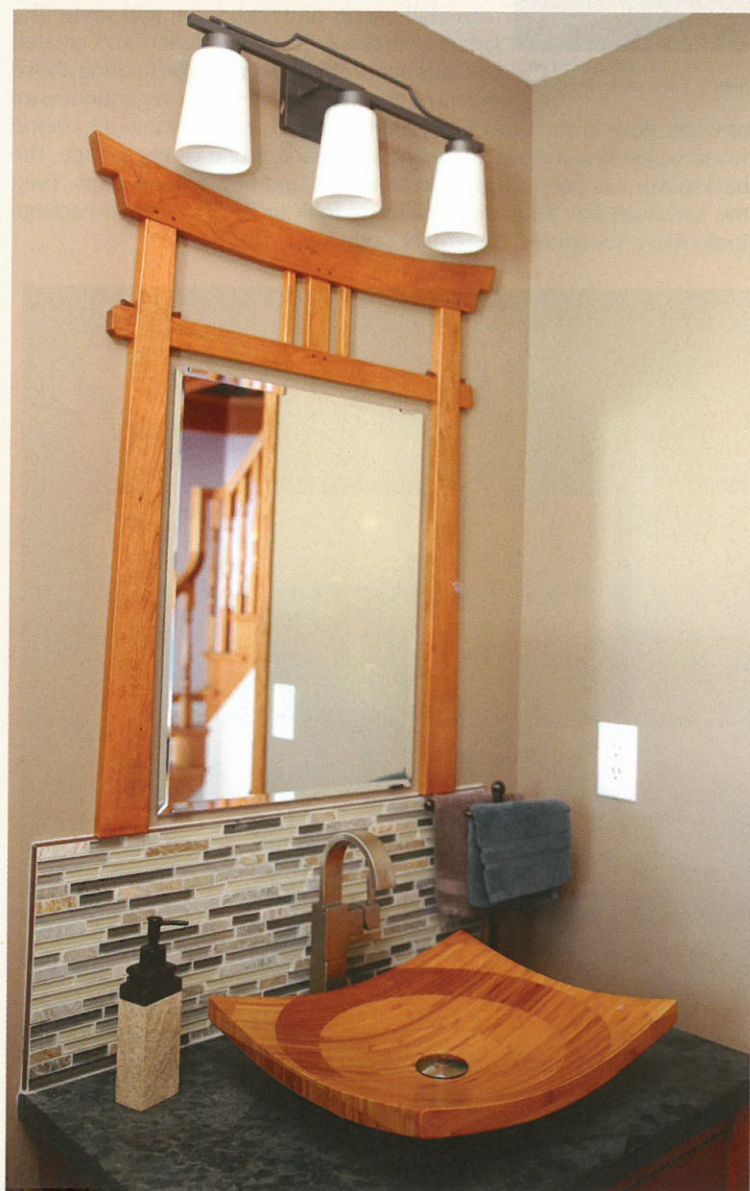
The massive center island is home to a sparkling cloud-like Brazilian granite called Kayrus. The earthy-toned swirls of olive green, cream, mocha and black along with flecks of silver mica make a striking and sophisticated combination. "If you look at it long enough, it appears to be moving," AnneMary said. "It's gorgeous, I love it." Vivid, energy-conserving LED lights illuminate the sparkles of the granite surfaces and the shimmer

of the new Kitchenaid stainless steel appliances and tulip-shaped pull-out stainless faucet and dual sink. The subtle-toned glass subway tile backsplash matches AnneMary's collectable Korean pottery to a "t".

Next to the kitchen is the new beverage center that is a slightly more stylized version of the kitchen area with very similar cabinetry and the same olive and cream glass backsplash but with ribbed glass upper cabinets to hold cocktail fixings and stemware and a fancy wine fridge in the lower half along with wine and spirit storage.

Upstairs in their master bathroom, Chris's team removed the couple's wasteful water heater-draining whirlpool tub and replaced it with a beautiful and energy-efficient tile shower. Again, shimmering glass tiles were used as accents and a crisp, sparkling Silestone quartz vanity top added a layer of glamour to the room. "There is a plug in inside the cabinet so our stuff can be plugged in but put away and not out on the countertop," Richard said. "We wanted a spa bath," AnneMary said, "It's calm and soothing now."

“ AnneMary and Richard wanted a more soothing, organized environment with a definite Asian flair ”



The Japanese archway mirror in the powder room was designed and created by Chris Hensel, owner of Dovetail Kitchen Designs.



Top: Richard and AnneMary are thrilled with their home's transformation. Bottom: The waterfall faucet and bamboo sink, accented by glass and stone tile, give the powder room a subtle Asian feel.





Through careful space reconfiguration and the use of creative cabinetry and organizational tools, Chris added a ton of smart storage space to the couple's master closet. There's even a multi-tiered, velvet-lined jewelry cabinet. "Much of this is my mother's jewelry," AnneMary said, "It makes me happy just to open it and look at it all displayed nicely."

All of these first-rate facelift enhancements came with a price but the couple had planned accordingly and realistically. "We had a budget before we began," Richard said, "and we actually came in within a hair of the budget so that was great." All in all the couple remodeled about 1000 square feet of their home at an investment of about \$100 per square foot including demolition, cleaning, design, all the new fancy features plus installation.

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They saved a bit by having Richard do a great deal of the demolition himself. "Don't let those HGTV shows fool you," he said, "It takes a lot more work than it looks like on TV!" He did everything from remove cabinetry and ceiling sheetrock to tearing out walls and scraping the popcorn acoustical surface off the ceiling of the living room, the only non-renovated room on the first floor.

The couple also had their carpets and ducts professionally cleaned after the work was done. "We did not initially take that into consideration as a budget line item but it was a very necessary thing to do," Richard said. They also ended up replacing a sliding glass door that wasn't in the original plan. Even with the unforeseen expenses, they still came in close to budget. "If I were to give advice, I would say don't penny pinch. We waited a long time to do this project and we wanted it done right."

"We're very happy with the outcome," AnneMary said. "Our home is now more relaxing and functional and we absolutely love it!"

*Opposite page*

*Left: The beverage center is a slightly more stylized version of the kitchen, with the same tile accents to complete the look.*

*Right: Glass tiles accent the Silestone quartz vanity in the master bathroom.*

*Below:*

*A sleek new floating fireplace and built in bookshelves is the focal point of the remodeled hearth room.*



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