



Feature

At home

COMFORT BY DESIGN



by Sandra M. Buckley

At home, we are in our safe space. We are surrounded with the people, pets, and things that mean the most to us. It is where we can unwind, play host, solve problems, and simply “be.” The feeling we all hope to have at home, essentially, is a sense of comfort.

For Jan and Willie Macko of Hattiesburg, who have been married for 48 years, creating a comfortable space – especially as the couple has lived in 22 houses (and built 10 of those) during their nearly five decades together.

And with each house, a new chapter in the couple’s love story unfolded along the way.

For Jan, a retired middle school teacher, each move had a mission: embracing the experience and challenge of finding the right home or lot of land where she could customize a comfortable space for her family. While each transition may have been a labor of love, the custom homes Jan and Willie have built over the years have especially been source of joy for Jan.

Recently, Jan’s passion was tapped into again as she planned and designed her and her husband’s tenth build. They began clearing the lot in January 2022 and moved in in January 2023. The home, located in the 40th Place subdivision in Hattiesburg, is a classic design that boasts around 3,000 square feet, with four bedrooms and two-and-a-half bathrooms.



Homeowners Jan and Willie Macko



Matt Haskins, Interior Design



"I love the entire process of home building," Jan said. "I love tapping into my creative side. I find it fun, seeing an idea that started in my head ... then on paper ... then coming to fruition."

Drafting an initial floor plan is part of the fun for Jan. "I prefer to do my designing 'old school,' she said. "I use ¼' graph paper, a ruler, and a pencil and then start drawing. I have developed a relationship with the people



at House Plan Zone over the years. Since I only care to know how to draw the floor plan, Jonathan Boone and his people put my design into a working set of blue prints."

Experience has taught her that the first design rule is to ensure the home's layout is functional. "Each of the homes I have designed and built met our personal needs and design taste for that stage of our life," she said. "For example, when our daughter Andrea was young, we wanted her bedroom on the same level as ours. As she got older, that changed.

Selecting the right builder is also key to a successful experience. "It is so important to choose a builder that you can trust and feel comfortable with," she shared. "For me, it was also important for a builder to allow me to be hands-on. We chose Sebron Broome to build this house. He met me every morning at the job site to discuss what was going to happen that day."

The design stage is equally important. "One's home should reflect their personality," Jan said, adding that working with an interior designer has been instrumental in almost every aspect of each home they have decorated, designed, or built. She hired Matt Haskins, of Matt Haskins Interior Design, to collaborate on this latest project, involving him in just about every aspect – from the layout and building process to the design, fixtures, and decorating.

"Matt stays on top of all the new trends and new products in design," she added. "For me, shopping for paint colors, flooring, countertops, lighting, and so on can become overwhelming. What would take me alone days or weeks, he can help me accomplish in a matter of hours. Using a professional, like Matt, helps save time, money, and sanity."

"I have worked with Jan and Willie on five homes – making each one different in style while incorporating all of their needs," said Matt. "We have had a wonderful design and friendship relationship."

When it came to selecting the home's interior color scheme, Jan and Matt chose a clean, fresh neutral. "In the past, I always used color on the walls," she noted. "For this house, we chose to paint the inside walls, trim, and ceilings with White Dove. It is a warm white, so it is not cold or sterile. The White Dove makes all my furniture and decorative items really stand out."

"The neutral white walls allow all of her artwork to come to life," Matt added. "Using color in textiles and rugs along with artwork warms up the space. The white walls are calming and inviting with the natural light flowing through."



Additionally, each room incorporates various shades of blue. “When I was around five years old, my grandmother gave my two sisters and me each a Blue Willow tea set,” she shared. “That started my love for anything blue. I have been collecting Blue Willow ever since. This Blue Willow tea set now sits proudly in the built-in glass cabinets in our kitchen eating area. I joke that I have a ‘3B’ design theme – blue, birds, and bunnies! Every room has a few of each.”

In one particular space, Matt encouraged Jan to step out of her comfort zone. “I was reluctant to use wallpaper again,” she said. “But I did in the half-bath, and I am so glad I did! We picked out a paper with a simple off-white and gold tree design. I think it makes a quiet, but bold statement.”

The home’s flooring features a wide plank white oak. “It seems to be very forgiving,” she added. “And, it doesn’t seem to show dirt – which I am loving! Then, in the kitchen, front porch, and back porch, we decided to have a tongue and groove-stained wooden ceiling. We chose a custom stain that blends well with the wood floors.”





Countertops throughout the home are Quartz. “We went bold for the kitchen because I wanted the countertops to really make a statement since there was no place for artwork,” she said.

“The furniture in our home is a collection of pieces that we have purchased or inherited over our 48 years together,” Jan shared. “Willie and I both enjoy antique and thrift shopping. These items are proudly used in our home.”

“Jan has kept several antique family heirlooms in mind while designing the house,” Haskins explained. “It works well mixing the antique pieces with the newer pieces to make the home feel evolved and not store bought.”

One antique piece close to Jan’s heart is a stately grandfather clock her father built her more than 40 years ago. “The cherry wood that it is made with came out of the old Thames Woodworking Shop that was near Downtown Hattiesburg,” she said. “The wood was in the shop when my dad purchased the woodworking shop in the late 1940s.”

“I love to blend old and new, so I wanted to use some antique doors in our home,” she added. “The Bank Architectural Salvage in New Orleans is where we purchased antique doors for our half bath, pantry, and entry into our bathroom. I love them!”

“These doors create personality,” Matt added.

When designing their bedroom, the couple agreed they wanted “a quiet oasis” that would also allow their electric fireplace to be the focal point of the room. “Our bedroom’s main steel blue color comes from the antique rug that we acquired years ago,” Jan said. “Several houses ago, Matt selected the fabrics that are used in our room to complement the rug. Matt brought over the chairs that sit at the foot of our bed about 10 years ago, and to me they seem timeless and new.”

“Something extremely special to us in our new home is a custom leaded window,” she said. “Fred Smallwood, of Distinctive Doors and Glass, has made custom windows and doors for each of our homes that we have built. Even though he is 88 years young, he still goes to work every day. I adore working with Mr. Smallwood. He allows me to design the windows and watch him as he builds. So much fun.”

Outdoor spaces were also important to the design of the home. “We are outside people,” she shared. “Willie has a reputation of having a wonderful yard, and he insisted on a water feature for the front yard and a fireplace in the backyard. We also knew that the house had to have a welcoming front porch plus a large back porch and patio for entertaining.”



While building their latest home has been yet another memorable chapter in their lives together, the journey was again worth the wait.

“I would love to say that every day was fun; however, that’s not reality or realistic,” she noted. “There were ups and downs, delays, etc., but we are so pleased with the final product and look forward to enjoying our new home and sharing it with our family and friends.”

No matter how many houses the Macko family has called home over their 48 years together, Jan shared that there is always one constant: “Hattiesburg is HOME.” ✦