

A CINCINNATI CRAFTSMAN FROM SCRATCH

“When we come to make things ourselves and because they are needed, instead of depending upon the department store to furnish them, we shall not only find more pleasure in making them, but we shall also take more pleasure in possessing them.”

—Gustav Stickley

BY MATT HORMANN

IT WAS THIS ADAGE from an Arts & Crafts trailblazer that guided Mike and Stephanie Barber when they built their Prairie-style Craftsman on Cincinnati’s east side.

“We get a lot of compliments on it,” says Barber, a retired doctor and healthcare executive. “We’ve had people drive by and leave notes that they’d like to come in and see the house. It’s different and, you know, it’s a very homey look. It has drawn its own attention.”

Nestled in a wooded former nursery, the house features classic Craftsman elements like overhanging eaves, an off-center porch, and hand-crafted interior woodwork. Soft, muted browns and weathered bricks give it an earthy feel.

Architecturally impressive, the Barbers’ home was as much a product of their relationship as a feat of construction. “We decided after we got married that we wanted to build a house together to be a manifestation of our love for each other,” says Barber. “We co-created this house to celebrate our



THE BARBERS DESIGNED THEIR CINCINNATI HOME TO LOOK LIKE AN EARLY 1900S CRAFTSMAN.

MOTAWI AND ROOKWOOD ART TILES DECORATE MANY ROOMS IN THE HOUSE.



coming together.” The couple wanted a home they—and eventually their kids and grandkids—could enjoy.

Barber and his wife Stephanie, a retired primary school teacher, met “the old fashioned way”—at a singles event in church—and married in 2002.

When a six-acre lot just south of the Little Miami River went up for sale, they pounced. The tract had once been a farm and later a commercial landscaping nursery,

and second-growth ash, maple, oak and walnut trees still dotted the landscape.

It was a promising find upon which the Barbers could build their dream home.

They had a rough feel for what they wanted—something that looked like it was the first home built in the neighborhood. Specifics proved challenging, but a few trips to Los Angeles yielded answers.





DINING ROOM WITH A VIEW OF THE SIDEBOARD AND MIRROR DESIGNED AND BUILT BY BARBER.

“Stephanie’s sister lives in Los Angeles, so we always went and visited her a lot,” explains Barber. “We went through a lot of the Mission-style neighborhoods out there—and, of course, we had to go to the Gamble House. And we read the magazines, including *American Bungalow*.”

The couple also visited other historic homes to gather more ideas about how they wanted the rooms to look and feel. The next question was: who would design it? As it turned out, the right man was right under their noses.

“I saw the name of a builder I know, Perry Bush,” Barber recalls. “He had built a house nearby and I’d known him for years. His daughter and my daughter were both Indian Princesses at the same time. So I called him up and shortly after we bought the lot we began working through a number of iterations. We started in the summer of 2003 and moved in September of 2004.”

Bush was new to Craftsman homes but proved adept and a quick study. “In the year following the purchase of the lot, we gathered books, magazines, and pictures of



LARGE OAK COLUMNS SEPARATE THE DINING ROOM FROM THE ENTRYWAY. THE CEILING FIXTURE (PICTURED BELOW) IN THE LIBRARY WAS PURCHASED FROM ARROYO CRAFTSMAN.



Arts and Crafts homes to show Perry the warm and inviting feeling that we were looking for in the home,” says Barber. “I knew that Perry would be the right person to design and build our home, even though he had never built an Arts and Crafts home before.”

After a year of meetings and multiple drawings, the trio came up with a plan that would give them the kind of house they were looking for.

They settled on a number of features, including multiple fireplaces, Arts and Crafts built-ins, and wood-paneled rooms—as well as large Pella windows that would bring in the nearby woods. Other features included a traditional mahogany Arts and Crafts door, stone window lintels, brick walls, and concrete shingles.

THE DEEP PORCH AND DOORWAY WELCOME GUESTS INTO THE HOME.



The backyard was shaped into a vision of harmony with nature—terraced tracts reinforced with stone bulwarks and decorated with ornamental grasses; a back deck for lounging, reading, and hot tubbing; a large fire ring; and a screened-in porch and barbecue area.

Walls were constructed on a “huge jig in a warehouse-type building where they laid everything out and then screwed all the studs together,” says Barber—then transported and attached to the foundation. “The nice thing is the walls are extremely straight; there are no nail pops,” he adds. “And when I built things like the built-ins and all, the measurements were precise.”

All in all, it was a two-year undertaking: a year of planning and a year of building.

“We really enjoyed the whole process,” Barber says. “I know for a lot of people it’s a lot of stress, but we found it to be a real fun adventure.”



HARDWARE FOR THE HOME WAS CAREFULLY SELECTED. THE DESIGN OF THE DOOR HANDLES MATCHES THAT OF THE WINDOWS. THE RAISED CEILING ABOVE THE DINING ROOM SHOWCASES THE IMPRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE OF THE HOME WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY MAINTAINING A COZY FEEL. THE BACK OF THE HOUSE IS LANDSCAPED WITH STONE AND ORNAMENTAL GRASSES TO INTEGRATE IT INTO THE SURROUNDING WOODS.



While Bush handled the exterior, Barber, an amateur woodworker for more than two decades, set his hand to the inside. He had Bush add notches to the interior of the house so he could craft and add his own wood pieces later. “By the time we were building our Arts and Crafts house, I had enough experience to appreciate how special it felt to live with furniture and rooms I had built myself,” he explains. “For me, using or viewing furniture I had built was calming and comforting and I wanted that feeling to be a part of the new home we were creating. Although it takes time and considerable effort, I find the building and finishing process gratifying and fulfilling.”



THE BARBERS DESIGNED THE THREE-PANE CABINET DOORS IN THE SIDEBORD TO PROVIDE A VIEW OF THE FAMILY HEIRLOOM CRYSTAL. THE MIRROR REFLECTS THE WARM OAK TRIM OF THE DINING ROOM.



THE MANY HISTORIC ARTS AND CRAFTS HOMES THE COUPLE TOURED IN THE TWO-YEAR PLANNING AND BUILDING PROCESS SERVED AS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE HOME'S STUDY WITH ITS QUARTER SAWN OAK PANELING, TILED FIREPLACE AND DISPLAY CABINETS. BARBER SPENT MORE THAN 15 MONTHS BUILDING THE FIREPLACE, BARRISTER BOOKCASES AND CABINETS.

Barber first built a quarter-sawn white oak home entertainment center based on Stickley's #719 bookcase. Next, he tackled a built-in sideboard in for their dining room. "I spent hours looking at Mission furniture design books and magazine pictures to come up with the design and proportions for the cabinet doors and base," he says. "Then came selecting the right quarter-sawn boards and hardware to create the look I was after."

Several years of furniture-building followed before Barber started on his study. "I wanted a wood-paneled room like some of the homes we had visited with built-in display cabinets as well as a fireplace," Barber recalls. "I utilized some design elements I had developed for the sideboard and entertainment unit, including small glass panes and reproduction Stickley hardware. I used tiles from Motawi Tileworks on the corner fireplace we installed to create a warm cozy environment. They have these animal tiles and I decided to put them in each of the corners facing each other, so they make the tiles mirror images."

Barber had built barrister bookcases for his office but found they fit the study better instead. "They're true barrister bookcases in that they're four different units stacked one upon the other," he adds. "You can re-stack and do them in different configurations."



THE MOTAWI MEDIEVAL CAT, STAG, DOG AND RABBIT DECORATE THE CORNERS OF THE STUDY FIREPLACE.

The study took 18 months to complete. "I did it in stages," Barber says. "I built the fireplace first, then paneled the walls and built the bookcases. My wife and I both cherish the time we spend working in the study. Both of us like reading and we both use this office a lot."

Barber then decided to focus on a downstairs library room. "When I started on the room, the fireplace was a bare drywall box and there was a wide niche in the wall that had rough plumbing and wiring for a kitchenette,"



Barber says. "I completed our library room by paneling the fireplace and adjoining wall with quarter-sawn oak, adding a Rookwood fireplace surround."

Barber again replicated the door design he used for his sideboard and study cabinets, and used quarter-sawn oak, Stickley hardware, and glass panels to maintain a consistent look. "The library has become a nice place to curl up and read a book in front of the fireplace," he says.



USING REPRODUCTION STICKLEY DOOR PULLS ON QUARTER SAWN OAK DOORS GIVE THE CABINETS AN AUTHENTIC AGED LOOK.



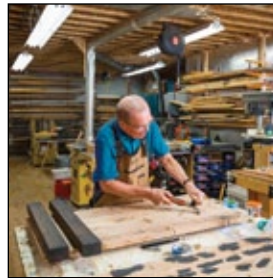


LEFT, BOOKCASES BY CLEAR CREEK AMISH FURNITURE HOUSE THE COUPLE'S BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY. BELOW, BARBER IN HIS WORKSHOP. HE RECOMMENDS THAT NOVICE FURNITURE BUILDERS START OUT WITH SMALL DECORATIVE PROJECTS LIKE THIS MIRROR IN THE HALF BATH PICTURED ABOVE. RECOGNIZING A CINCINNATI ARTS AND CRAFTS HOME SHOULD HAVE A ROOKWOOD FIREPLACE, BARBER PLACED THE TREE OF LIFE IN A FIELD OF BUNGALOW BROWN TILES IN THE LIBRARY FIREPLACE.



Barber finished all his wood built-ins with the same stain. “I picked one stain and all of the trim and all of the furniture pieces are stained the same,” he explains.

Barber supplemented his own creations with pieces from Waynesville, Ohio-based Amish furniture builders Clear Creek, who fashioned several custom-made pieces—including bookcases for the library room, a dining table and chairs, and a Mission-style bed and dresser. “Having custom-built bookcases was actually less costly than putting in cabinets,” he says. “It’s a really neat company—we’ve enjoyed working with them.”



Everything Barber builds originates from a wood shop in the basement, where he taps his creative mojo by listening to jazz and classical music while working. The shop was a trade-off when the house was built: “Stephanie, my wife, got her dream kitchen and I got my dream shop,” he says.

Stephanie was also a stabilizing influence on Barber’s loftier ambitions during construction. “Every time I would say ‘I will build that,’ she would yank me back into reality,” he says.

Their home project was a give-and-take, a balance—the perfect emblem of a marriage. And it embodied all the ideals Gustav Stickley once espoused. As Stickley himself wrote a century ago, “When a man’s home is born out of his heart and developed through his labor and perfected through his sense of beauty, it is the very cornerstone of life.” 