

Sunday, August 3, 2003 8:52 AM CDT

Home sweet home

By MELODY PARKER, Courier Arts/Special Sections Editor

CEDAR FALLS --- When guests walk into Denny and Kathy Lenth's home, the first thing they notice isn't the great room's large fireplace.

It's the perfectly framed view of the lake outside floor-to-ceiling windows.

"The view is very calming. It's one of things we enjoy about this home," says Kathy. "Our master bedroom has a view of the lake, too, and a deck where we can spend time."

Denny, a home builder, constructed the waterfront home in a surprisingly secluded area in the North Cedar area. They moved in last October.

"We've built this basic footprint before, starting in 1990, but I like tweaking it. I designed the plan, and I like seeing how it can be altered to fit different sites and lifestyles," he explains.

In this incarnation, a home theater, guest rooms, office and a walk-out patio are on the lower level. The master bedroom is on the main or upper level, taking full advantage of the scenery.

Another version of Lenth's design will be open during 2003 Parade of Homes, Aug 14-16. Sponsored by the Home Builders Association of Northeast Iowa and the Courier, about 20 homes will be featured in what is considered one of the largest real estate events in the Cedar Valley.

The Lenth 3,400-square-foot show home is located at 3019 Cobblestone Court in Lexington Heights.

In their own home, the Lenth's enjoy "a feeling of openness, of not being confined with lots of walls and closed-in spaces," says Denny.

Beyond the view, the great room's main focal point is the fireplace and surrounding cherry cabinetry. Contrasting stained and painted crown molding and woodwork add interest. The dining area opens onto a deck, and the kitchen is functional and efficiently designed. Traffic flows easily around a central island and a built-in hutch provides display space for fine china and collectibles.

A formal dining room sits off the foyer, opposite the entrance to the master bedroom. The master bath features a spa tub and other amenities, as well as a view of the front garden.

"I like to emphasize the landscape. It's like baking a cake. The cake can be good but until you frost it, and frost it right, it's a waste of time. Good landscaping finishes off a home and makes it complete," says Denny.

Long before moving into their new home last year, Jan Newendorp knew exactly where her piano would be placed in the living room. She and her husband, Bruce, made life-size cut-outs of the piano and other furniture pieces, as well as a kitchen island, to make sure everything would fit.

From start to finish, the Newendorps did their homework. They knew exactly what they wanted in their dream home.

"We wanted to create a warm and inviting home that wasn't too formal. We wanted everything on the main floor, with the kids' bedrooms, bath and family room on the lower level. We wanted sunrise in the breakfast room and sunset in the master bedroom," says Jan.

"We wanted an active role in the whole process and wanted to find someone to work with us."

Enter home builder Wes Owen. "I have customers who don't want to be that involved in the day-to-day decisions, but Jan and Bruce were involved in all aspects. Communication is extremely important. I give my customers all kinds of information, maybe too much, but until they tell me they don't want all that information, I'll keep giving it," Owen says.

Close collaboration kept the project on track and moving rapidly ahead. The Newendorps' home was finished in five months, thanks to three months' advance planning.

"One reason building projects go south is assumptions are made and that leads to mistakes. A relationship is formed between the homeowner and builder, and if that relationship is adversarial, it will be a stumbling block," he explains.

The Newendorps love their new home.

"We feel great about all of it. After living 19 years in the same home, I wondered if the new place would feel like home. But we spent so much time over here, that when we moved in, it felt like home right away," Jan says.

In the foyer, a granite floor with marble accents creates impact. The formal dining room features an unusual ceiling treatment and dramatic ironwork chandelier. A fireplace and oak woodwork milled on site, add warmth to the airy living room. The kitchen features granite countertops, an island and oak cabinetry.

The couple themselves built the screened porch and deck. Bruce, an engineer, had built houses in college and put his expertise to work. "There is a pride in ownership, and it was a fun thing to do together. Wes had to be reassured that the finished product would look professional," Jan explains.



Photos by KIM MENKE / Courier Staff Photographer
Landscaping around their new lakeside home is like 'frosting on a cake' for home builder Denny Lenth and his wife, Kathy.

One of her favorite spaces is the main-floor laundry room -- "the drop zone. It's right off the garage. We have cabinets and cubbyholes so that when the kids come in from school, they can put away their backpacks and other belongings and not drag them into the kitchen."

Although the Newendorp home won't be featured on the Parade of Homes, the couple plan to man the door at another Owen-built home.