



FLEXIBLE *and* FUNCTIONAL TODAY'S LAKE HOME LIVING

BY JEANNE DELATHOUDER

Over the past year, vacation homes - particularly lake homes - have become much more than just a place to escape for a relaxing weekend. Since the pandemic took hold, more and more homeowners have decided to give up city living and retreat to a lake home full-time or make their existing lakeside vacation property their co-primary residence.

Tranquil, comforting, and connected to nature, these soothing sanctuaries offer a peaceful alternative where families and empty-nesters alike can safely work, learn, entertain, and embrace life to the fullest during these challenging times. In

turn, this new movement has inspired lake home owners to reinvent their spaces to meet the functionality demands of our “new normal.”

What do we need now? Chicago interior designer Michelle Rohrer-Lauer, the founder of Michelle's Interiors (1), is also the owner of a lake home retreat in Wisconsin on Lake Camelot. Michelle shares her wisdom, innate sense of style, and conviction that every home should embrace the spirit of the people who live there. Here are her tips on how you can amp up the functionality of your interior - and exterior - lake spaces.

OPTIMIZE YOUR HOME OFFICE

“Our homes have always been our safe places away from the stresses of the day, but COVID-19 has eroded some of that sanctuary feeling,” says Michelle. “More than ever, our homes are where we work, which brings that stress in through the front door. Yes, we need home offices - and learning spaces for our children - and those must be carefully designed to make long sessions comfortable, organized, and productive,” she notes. Aesthetically, your home office style and its furnishings should always reflect the design incorporated throughout your home. For instance, if your home embodies a rustic farmhouse vibe, consider implementing knotty and imperfect repurposed wood flooring and dramatic ceiling beams. Pair this look with the rich patina of elegantly finished custom cabinetry, desks, and storage units for a visually satisfying contrast.

Next, make sure your office is Zoom-ready with the right equipment and lighting. Since video conferencing is now our primary connection to clients and co-workers, we - as well as



our home offices - need to be dressed for success. Beyond a great camera, microphone, and a comfortable chair, we want our workspace to look appealing, professional, and uncluttered. "Task lighting is important for reading, and your computer monitor should be positioned to avoid glare from a window or overhead light," Michelle recommends. Soundproofing, storage, and concealing all your cords are other factors to consider when planning your home office. For more tips and home office eye candy, visit Michelle's Interiors.

JUMP-START YOUR HOME GYM

With all the time we spend sheltering in place these days, working out at home has become necessary for burning off stress and staying fit. While we love to exercise outdoors, a home gym is often the easiest option when we're super busy, or the weather is bad. What are the must-haves for an aesthetically pleasing and inspiring home gym? "Bright lighting is number one," says Michelle. "Evenly spaced recessed lighting and lots of natural light can make us feel more energetic - which equals a better workout."

Other key essentials include a wall of mirrors to magnify the light and make the space look larger, interlocking rubber floor mats, or another cushioned surface for comfortable floor workouts and noise suppression, plus acoustical tiles and soundproofed walls to create a quieter workout.

A TV monitor creates a great distraction while you burn calories and brings an element of luxury and value to your home gym. You can listen to your favorite music, binge-watch a Netflix series, or live-stream a motivating fitness program. Plenty of smart



Photo courtesy of Orren Pickell Building Group

storage solutions will ensure exercise equipment and towels are conveniently stowed away yet still within easy reach. "An eco-friendly water dispenser is also handy and cuts down on plastic bottles," notes Michelle. "Everyone can fill up their reusable bottles - and you know how important that is to me! I am always thinking of ways to help people live greener lives at home."

*Bright lighting
is number one.*

~ MICHELLE ROHRER-LAUER

CREATE A FUNCTIONAL, FOODIE-FRIENDLY KITCHEN

“As dining out declined last year, people are returning to home cooking, which means our kitchens have to be well organized and functional,” Michelle says. “Look at all the foodies who are cooking at home instead of going out - it’s all over social media,” she adds. As a result, we now want this heart of our home to include open sightlines to the outdoors, sleek, ultramodern appliances, well-planned task and ambient lighting, tons of storage, and an effortless traffic flow.

This kitchen makeover, designed for our homeowners who love to cook and entertain, includes a large satin-finish granite-topped custom island they can use as a buffet for large parties - when they become safe again - as well as a central gathering space for family cooking or just the two of them. The island also features open shelves for

cookbooks, storage cabinets, and a built-in microwave. Pop-up electrical plugs installed on the countertop instead of on the side of the island are a brilliant idea for appliances you want to tuck away after use, and they prevent cords from dangling off the edge. A white farmhouse sink against a lustrous glass mosaic tile wall lends a warm and welcoming feel to this all-white kitchen and enlarging the window above the sink created a view through the living room to the front yard. “Changing the color scheme in this neutral kitchen is easy - just add new accessories,” says Michelle.

For more ideas and the top kitchen trends for 2021, visit hgvtv.com or contact the National Kitchen and Bath Association (2) to find a design professional in your area.





TAKE IT OUTSIDE! DESIGN YOUR ALFRESCO DREAM KITCHEN

We all love to cook and dine outdoors these days - especially while enjoying the beautiful scenery surrounding our lake homes. After spending more time in open-air environments than ever before, we now crave the same luxuries and amenities outside as we do indoors. “An outdoor kitchen extends your food prep and dining space substantially - and it requires careful planning,” says Michelle. Key considerations to discuss before launching a project include lifestyle, location, the traffic pattern between your indoor and outdoor kitchen, layout, and the type

of appliances desired and placement. When designing outdoor spaces for her clients, Michelle approaches it the same way she would for the interiors. How will you use the space, and what is your preferred aesthetic? Do you want to incorporate comfy seating and cozy focal points such as a built-in fireplace or firepit? “Regardless of your style and how you use your backyard, the exterior should be a natural extension of your interior style so that it flows effortlessly in both directions,” she sums. For more stylish outdoor kitchen inspiration, visit houzz.com.

TOP, RIGHT, FAR LEFT: Photos courtesy of Studio West Photography

LEFT: Photo courtesy of Sheldon Landscape



Photo courtesy of Four Brothers Design+Build

PERFECTLY PET-FRIENDLY

Not surprisingly, pet adoption has been on the rise since COVID-19, as many of us are feeling isolated and in need of a comforting companion. Integrating pet-friendly design into your lake house not only benefits our furry friends but also makes care and maintenance easier and less time-consuming - which ultimately makes us happier, right? “Pet design, particularly organizational solutions, makes your home more functional and enjoyable for you and your new best friend - or friends,” says Michelle. “The way you plan a house influences a dog’s behavior and spirit, and good design makes pets feel cared for and content,” she adds.

Some of her go-to solutions? Multi-purpose pet showers are perfect for your laundry area or mudroom. Having your dog wash near an exterior door is the ideal location - no more muddy or



Photo courtesy of Four Brothers Design+Build

snowy paws tracking all over the house! Whether you choose a floor-level or counter-level shower, a flexible gooseneck faucet will help direct the flow of water wherever you need it. Plenty of storage is also vital. Pull-out bins for pet food, treats, and built-in bowls are easy to access - and hide - and you can stash other essentials such as leashes, medications, and brushes inside designated drawers in the same area.

“Pet doors are a great way to give your cat or dog the freedom to go outside for business or pleasure, or to access a litter box in the basement,” shares Michelle. “Some can be monitored remotely via a smartphone, and others work in sync with a sensor attached to your pet’s collar so they only open for your pet - not the neighborhood skunk or raccoon,” she laughs.

SAFELY UPDATING YOUR HOME

If your wish list for home updates is growing fast, you must consider a few safety issues as you embark on a new project. “During these unprecedented times, nothing is more important to me, my team, and our tradespeople than following OSHA COVID-19 workforce guidelines,” says Michelle. “No matter what clients want done, I am committed to providing the safest experience possible for all of us.”

To kick off a project, you can accomplish a great deal via phone, video conferencing, and email to discuss the nature of what isn't working, what you want done, and style and color preferences. Next, a brief in-home visit - mask-wearing and social distancing required - can be scheduled to take measurements and get a feel for your space layout. Then, sanitized samples of finishes and fabrics can be delivered to your front porch - or you can choose to discuss selections together inside or out in the backyard while wearing masks if preferred. As your project gets underway, make sure your design professionals follow these tips to ensure the highest standards of safety:

- All workers have a designated entrance, wear masks, and maintain social distancing
- Zip-wall dividers isolate the room where installers are working



- Porta-potty with hand sanitizer on-site for workers
- Disinfect frequently touched items such as door pulls
- On installation days, all delivery people wear masks and gloves

Michelle also encourages clients not to touch their new furnishings for 24 hours and sanitize glass and metal surfaces. “My goal always is to make the design process easy and enjoyable, particularly during these challenging times,” she assures. “I take care of all the design details and monitor safety so clients can focus on their day-to-day life and enjoy the results.”