



personal architecture

# magic for the markers

THE ART OF IMPERFECTION ANIMATES A NEW HOME.



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SOMETIMES THE PLANETS ALIGN SO PERFECTLY THAT THE LAST PIECE OF THE JIGSAW

puzzle serendipitously shows up under the coffee table or a parking spot suddenly opens up in front of the door. For Chris and Susan Marker of Medina, Washington, finding designer Kay Sorgenfrei was one of those things. Sorgenfrei would not just design their new home but also bring their ideas to life and become a good friend, too.

But it almost didn't happen. Sorgenfrei was so busy that she had to turn down the Marker project. A few months later, when she had an opening, she contacted the couple on the off-chance they hadn't hired anyone. They hadn't.

It's difficult to imagine Chris could be happier with the result: "Once we met Kay, it was clear she knew exactly where we were headed. She was magical. She is absolutely a can-do person—no fuss about anything. Everything was possible."

Everything included making the Markers' spanking-new house look like it wasn't. Susan was adamant that the house look as if it had always been there, and Sorgenfrei was in complete agreement, visualizing an "imperfect" perfection, a home with such patina and character that passersby would wonder why they had never before noticed that lovely old home settled on the shores of Lake Washington.

Sorgenfrei's and the Markers' shared concept manifested itself in a two-story Provençal/Mediterranean-style stucco home with rosemary-green stained shutters, 70-year-old clay roof tiles

**Previous page:** French doors open from the den to the courtyard.

**Opposite:** An arched opening in the living room looks into the den.

**Above:** Exterior stairs lead to guest quarters above the garage.

**Above center:** Chris and Susan Marker. **Right, from top:** A graceful banister leads upstairs. • Kay Sorgenfrei designed the living room's ottoman/coffee table. • A view from the dining room entry.





salvaged from a demolition, and a French-style arched front door that is split vertically off-center. The door was inspired by a visit the Markers made to Provence specifically to gather ideas.

Although no one was crazy about putting the garage in front of the house, a 60-foot-wide lot with 10-foot setbacks limited options. As it turned out, the siting created a private courtyard nestled between the house and the garage, lending a European sensibility and offering a quiet spot for morning coffee.

Inside the home, continental touches are everywhere. The entry's floor is made with French limestone, as are the fireplaces. Old-world influences continue with distressed pecan floors, pre-aged timbers, and faux finishes in soft colors.

On the first floor, a limestone arch leads from the entry to a generous living area that flows into an archetypal French country kitchen and dining space through another signature arch. The whole area is warm and open, fostering a sense of connectedness—one of Chris and Susan's design priorities.

"We wanted a working kitchen and dining room. It was not patterned after anything in particular, but we did stay in a hotel in France that had an open kitchen with a high counter that was designed to hide dirty dishes," Susan says. "And once we had the space allocations, it just seemed to flow out of the plan."

The kitchen works around a custom center island, built of heavily knotted alder planks that were stained, glazed, and distressed by craftsman Tom Neu, who used actual knives and

**Above:** The front door, split into two uneven-size pieces, was inspired by a trip to Provence. **Above right:** The island was distressed to add age. **Right, from left:** The back of the home seems stacked against the hillside. ■ A butcher's block sits below an old cabinet that inspired the finish on the island. ■ Arches are a theme in the Markers' house. ■ A mantel-style hood tops a French-made range.





forks to give the piece a centuries-old, worn feeling. The island features a small copper prep sink and hides such modern amenities as a microwave, refrigerator drawers, and other drawers that house spices and a garbage can.

It also has that handy high counter. The full-sized refrigerator is camouflaged by cabinetry, and a French Lacanche range is tucked under a fireplace-like hood.

In the dining area, big, comfy chairs upholstered in soft chenille take the place of typical bum-numbing, straight-back chairs and are pulled up to an antique Irish wake table. A table-height fireplace warms the space. Nearby sits an antique

butcher's block, bought from an old butcher shop. Susan says the piece has been with them for a long time. "For years, we used it outside in our old house next to the barbecue. It was a mess." But a little elbow grease—scraping and oiling—restored its beautiful, warm glow.

For the living room, Sorgenfrei had in mind a casual, lodge-like feeling. To that end she eschewed the traditional sofa—

Large chairs upholstered in stone-washed chenille surround an antique Irish table once used to hold the deceased during a wake. An eclectic assemblage of found objects, faded floral prints, and glass and silver serving pieces bespeak the room's deliberate informality.

coffee table-and-two-chairs formula for a grouping of five chairs, each slightly different and each upholstered in worn-looking, quietly patterned fabric.

To the left of the entry is a cozy den with another fireplace. To the right, a graceful staircase is defined by a wrought-iron balustrade and a curved landing that displays one of the home's most beautiful touches: a soft, hand-painted mural with an almost translucent look. The only directions given Virginia artist Anne Chaddock Bolton were to paint a riverbed (per the Markers) and to make it subtle (Sorgenfrei). "Anne drew a sketch before she got here; we gave her the measurements. She got off the plane, took off to get paint, then started immediately," Susan says in amazement.

Upstairs, the mural's natural themes continue into the master suite, a space that gives the feeling of being perched

in a tree house, thanks to a vaulted ceiling outlined with beams and a massive fir tree right outside the bedroom's French doors. The doors lead to a small balcony overlooking Lake Washington. Billowing drapes and more muted colors soften the space.

The architecture of the master bath echoes that of the rest of the house with repeated arches and cabinetry painted in almost not-there colors. Tumbled marble tiles reinforce the aged look found throughout the whole house.

"Kay made it look lived-in the day we moved in," Chris marvels. Susan agrees, and sees a little irony in their idea of the perfect home. "Even though it was the first house we ever built, I have to laugh because we built it to look old. We've always loved old things, antiques. Everything seems to have a home here." ■

Interior designer: Kay Sorgenfrei

For more information, see sources on page 170.



Far left: A delicately shaded hand-painted mural of a tranquil riverbed was created by artist Anne Chaddock Bolton.

Left: The master bath features marble, double sinks, built-in cabinetry, and soft colors.

Below: The Markers enjoy the view of Lake Washington from their bedroom. A huge fir tree just outside brings nature close.

