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Built From Scratch

BY TRISH ANDERSON-BOERGER HOME PHOTOS BY ROB BOREL



This entrepreneur carved his own niche in a high-tech world, but there's nothing like being back home again in Indiana.

ABOVE: High tech entrepreneur Brian Underwood with his wife Carol Blacutt Underwood.

RIGHT: Great lake views can be enjoyed from a variety of vantage points.





Australian pine flooring, an octagonal island and barn red walls enliven the all-white kitchen.

Silicon Valley, south of San Francisco, is a continent away from the Heartland and a different world. The contrast between life in the fast-paced center of technological development and the cornfields and lakes of northeast Indiana couldn't be sharper. You might even say it's like the difference between digital and analog. And because of Brian Underwood, we can see it in high-definition a little clearer.

Like another Indiana boy, Philo T. Farnsworth, who while plowing a farm field got the inspiration to break down images into rows of lines for electronic transmission—and came up with the concept of television—Underwood could be called a visionary. The first of his four start-up companies developed the technologies behind HDMI and DVI. These technologies enable digital video from a source, such as Wii, Playstation or PC, to be digitally transmitted to a flat panel display. And they made him wealthy by age 36.

Underwood modestly attributes his success to a number of factors including his parents, Shirley and the late Hugh Underwood, both teachers, for instilling in him the value of education (he's a Purdue University and University of California engineering grad) and a Hoosier work ethic ("Nobody can outwork me"); an understanding spouse (Carol, his wife of 21 years, who's a corporate attorney herself); solid management; investors willing to

take a risk and provide financing; timing ... and a lot of luck.

"You can have great ideas and the technical background, but timing is critical," Underwood says. Lots of people will have a similar idea, he adds, but, "He who executes, wins."

Though the successful businessman has made his home in northern California for nearly 20 years, his Hoosier roots are deep, exerting an almost primeval force that keeps pulling him back. Memories of happy summers spent with his boyhood friend Matt Roth at the Roth family cottage on Lake Wawasee made it an easy decision for Underwood to build his vacation home there on Morrison Island in 2000.

"I'm a Hoosier to the bone," Underwood admits. "I love Indiana—I get excited to be back on the ride from the airport."

The high tech entrepreneur is not one to make rash decisions. He surrounds himself with competent talent and puts his faith in their abilities. Underwood had definite ideas about what he wanted in the Lake Wawasee house when he started building it 10 years ago, after his mom found the property and the existing tear-down on the lot was removed.

"I wanted it primarily to be a place to come back to, a gathering place to be with family and friends. It had to be comfortable and the engineer in me demands that everything has to be functional as well as pleasing."

Just as he does in business, Underwood made the successful execution of his family's vacation home plans a collaborative effort employing the combined talents of architects Wyatt Drafting & Design and builder Brad Jackson of T.L. Jackson Construction. For the interior design and décor choices, he relied on the artistic sense and good taste of his mother and his sister, Cathy Dauenhauer.

The result is a pleasant, 5,000-square-foot, two-story traditional style, steel frame house with an attached 800-square-foot apartment above the garage for a total of eight bedrooms, six and a half baths, complete with all the amenities necessary for the comfort of frequent guests as well as extended family. In addition to his and Carol's seven-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter, that includes Underwood's mother Shirley, his three siblings, their spouses and nine nieces and nephews.

From the home's entry foyer, a staircase to the left leads to the second floor. Though a row of round white columns that separates the corridor to the kitchen from the main living area is a classical touch, the feel is not in the least formal. Rather, the pale celery walls and the crisp white woodwork impart a relaxing tranquility. Uncarpeted portions of the hardwood floor in the kitchen, dining and hallway are gleaming Australian pine.

The open floor plan reveals a wide living room with a panoramic lake view. At one end is a dining area with a table long enough to seat 10. At the opposite end is a fireplace with a simple river rock hearth, flanked on either side by built-in bookcases. In between are a large L-shaped seating area, a pool table and a game table for after-dinner amusement.

Shirley and Cathy chose pale shades of green, blue and yellow for the walls to give the home's interior a fresh but timeless appeal. The single, bold departure from that scheme is the deep barn red that enlivens the otherwise all-white kitchen, with its white wood cabinets and octagonal center island. A black wrought iron weathervane, salvaged from the original house, adds a rustic accent.

"It was so much fun decorating the house, we were a little sad when it was finally finished," Cathy says.

With a little help from the experts at Ethan Allen, Shirley and Cathy furnished the home mostly in a comfortable mix of contemporary and traditional pieces.

Then they created interest by adding in a few surprises like the pair of gingham upholstered French provincial arm chairs in an alcove



Crisp white wicker paired with blue cushions make this screened room a cozy retreat.


beside the base of the stairs. Another is the pair of wingback chairs upholstered in a navy and dark red nautical print in the second floor lounge by the top of the stairs.

At the opposite end of the main floor from the kitchen is a large bedroom and bath for Shirley. It opens onto a huge screened-in sitting room, filled with white wicker furniture covered with pillows in a fresh blue geometric print.

Upstairs are the guest bedrooms and a cheery bunk room for the smaller children. The splendid master bedroom suite has a fireplace of Italian marble, cathedral ceiling, private balcony and floor-to-ceiling windows “so the first thing my wife sees when she wakes is the lake so she feels she’s right on the water.”

His wife, whom Underwood met through her brother, a Purdue classmate, is a native of Bolivia. “Three months later I chased her to Bolivia. Eight months after that I got up the nerve to ask her to marry me,” he says. Most of Carol’s siblings, who include a world-known orthopedic surgeon and a few successful international executives, have visited the Hoosier state at Lake Wawasee, as well—and loved it.

Hanging over the fireplace in the master bedroom is an original oil painting of a sailboat by Shirley’s mother, Helen Heffelfinger. Another hangs in Shirley’s bedroom. On the shelves by the living room fireplace and in the upstairs lounge wood carvings from Bolivian artisans are displayed along with those done by Taft Heffelfinger, Underwood’s grandfather, who was a farmer and “one of the most inventive people I ever knew,” he says. Creativity and ingenuity, it seems, runs in the family.

And that picture is crystal clear. 



PRODUCT SUPPLIERS FOR THE UNDERWOOD HOME

Appliances	Sears
Architect	Wyatt Drafting & Design
Audio/TV	Millennium Sound
Builder	T.L. Jackson
Cabinetry	Miller Cabinetry
Concrete	Bontrager Concrete Specialties
Electric	Kozon Plumbing & Heating
Fireplace	Warsaw Masonry
Flooring	Nichol’s Flooring
Furniture	Ethan Allen
HVAC	Kozon Plumbing & Heating
Interior Design	Ethan Allen
Lighting	Wabash Electric
Plumbing	Kozon Plumbing & Heating
Security System	Cottage Watchman Security
Woodworking	TL Jackson Construction, Inc
Windows	Warsaw SidingStone

TOP LEFT: The high-ceilinged master suite, done in crisp blue and white, includes a canopy bed and a white marble fireplace.

BOTTOM LEFT: White columns separate the kitchen from the living room and dining area.

TOP RIGHT: Beadboard paneling accents the all-white powder room. Family mementos like fishing lures on a wicker boat and original paintings personalize the home’s décor.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A collection of boats graces the bookcases and rustic river rock hearth.

