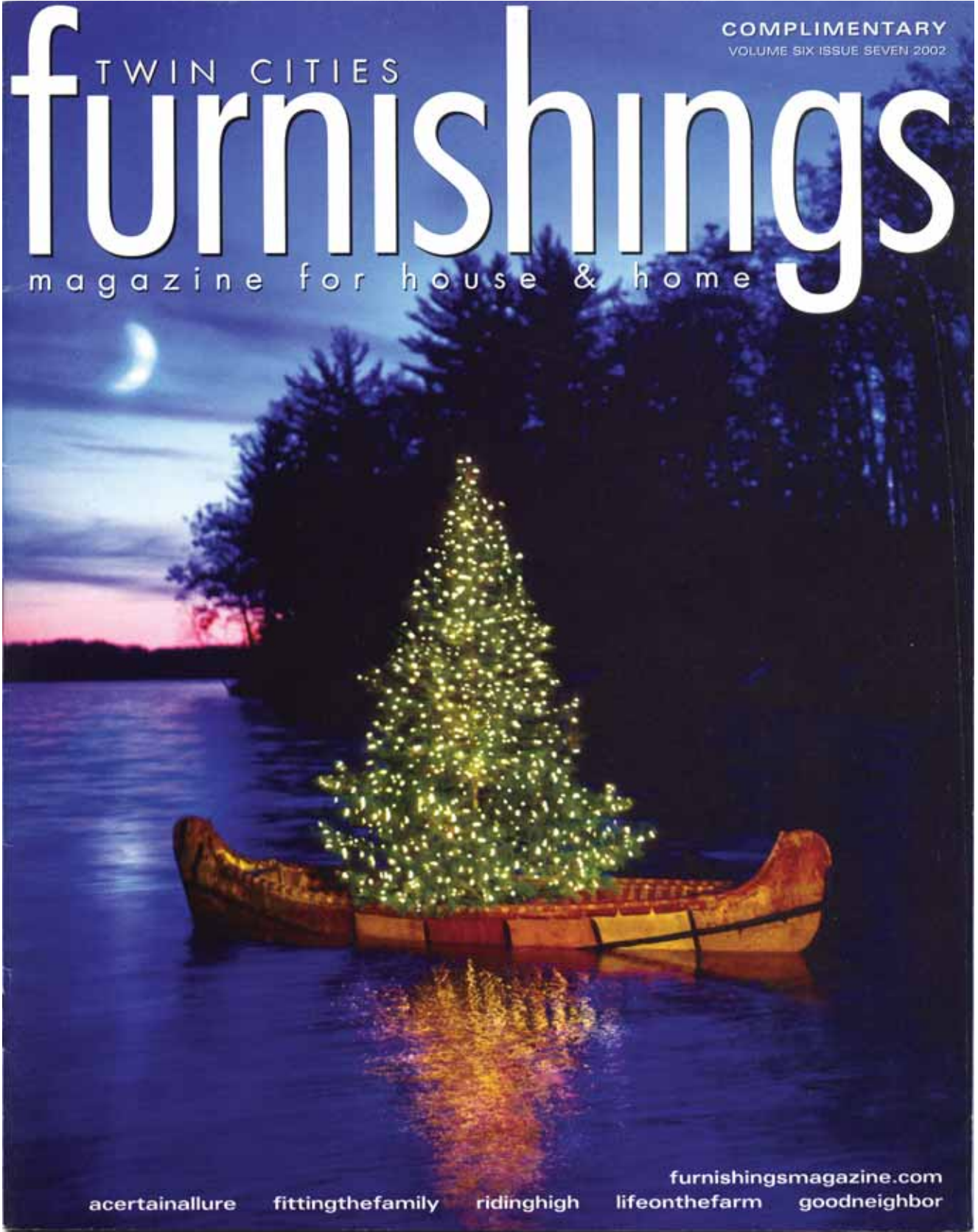


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THE FAMILY

"Our house just wasn't working for a family of five. It was either move or remodel. We really love our neighborhood so we decided to remodel," says Gretchen Gilbertson. It was a natural choice for her to choose Imagination Renovation, part of Pillar Homes, to rework her family's "1970's modified ranch house." She works with the firm as a designer.

TEXT BY CAROLYN CROOKE PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN WIESE

As K.C. Chermak, owner of Pillar Homes and Imagination Renovation, puts it, "The family spent 90% of their time in 40% of the main floor. The whole front of the house was formal space, and very long, too—you could practically bowl in there. A long room like that isn't functional because you have lots of space doing nothing. We made it more family-friendly by taking significantly more space for the family living areas."

Imagination Renovation is a concept remodeler that concentrates on whole-house renovations rather than jobs like room additions. "We change the concept of a home instead of adding to the existing dynamics," Chermak notes. "We literally take the house down to the bones."

For the Gilbertsons, the team doubled the kitchen space, enlarged the family great room, eliminated the narrow, non-functioning living room and made a front study. They turned the old formal dining room into a laundry area, powder room, and a portion of the kitchen, and created a dinette and two counter spaces for the kitchen.

The very striking wide plank floor (by Manomin Resawn Timbers) was another important aspect of this remodel, creating

tremendous character and a feel of heritage rather than new construction.

Manomin reclaims and remills lumber from the numerous century-old warehouses and bridges that are currently being torn down. "Reclaimed historic lumber comes from old growth forests, so it's exceptionally strong and stable," explains Manomin owner Jim Rice.

The Manomin team usually sits down with a homeowner to get a feel for what they want. Gilbertson wanted an eclectic style and a kid-friendly environment, so they chose random width planks of Douglas fir (some as wide as 14 inches). "We choose different kinds of wood for different homeowners," Rice notes. "Some homeowners want a certain color tone, all vertical grain, or a more sanded and formal look. Many, like the Gilbertsons, like a lot of character. Old nails, bolt holes and other marks from the wood's previous service add beauty and interest without compromising the wood's strength. There are several types of wood species and surface textures available. Homeowners choose the amount of distressing they want on their floors."



The Gilbertsons' new wide-plank floor is very striking, very rich in character. It was fashioned by Manomin Resawn Timbers out of reclaimed historic lumber from the numerous century-old warehouses and bridges that are currently being torn down.



Part of the long, narrow living room was converted into this study. "It was a space that was never used before," Gretchen Gilbertson notes. "Now it's used all the time!"

Gilbertson's children use this kitchen desk area for projects; the pass-through window opens onto her husband's study, allowing interaction between his office space and family spaces. It also increases the flow of light and air through the home. The shutters can be closed for privacy.

Gretchen's own desk is just off the kitchen. She can work and make phone calls there while watching the kids play outside.

Imagination Renovation doubled the size of the kitchen. Most of the lighting pictured comes from Cartier. "Lots of people are doing small pendants in their kitchens, but I wanted to make a statement, so I chose these wonderful chandeliers for over the island. I think they make the room feel cozy."





Gretchen drew her color palette from the family's beloved "cozy, comfortable corduroy sofa." Behind it is a bump-out window, which mirrors another bump-out across the room. The Imagination Renovation team created these windows without altering the foundation.

Another idea behind this particular renovation was that the rooms would be able to "experience each other,"

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Manomin brings a surprising level of artistry to the process of selecting and laying a wide plank floor. "Aesthetics are important when you're creating floors like these," Rice says. "We look at each board and think about the homeowner's vision and decide which face is more interesting, and where on the floor it would work best. For example, we often place boards with a great deal of character in a high visibility area, but away from traffic spots. We also consider how the boards will work in with layout and furniture, and we put a lot of thought into the placement of splices. Everything's about the look—it's vital to get that just right." Gilbertson's floor has some planks that are 14 inches wide and a full 20 feet long—something you don't often see anymore.

Another idea behind this particular renovation was that the rooms would be able to "experience each other," according to Chermak. The kitchen opens onto the great room, and the team took out a 1970's indoor barbecue, replacing it with kitchen counter space and a pass-through window with rustic barndoor shutters (crafted from antique barnboards supplied by Manomin). The window look from the kitchen area onto Mr. Gilbertson's study. "He can close the shutters for privacy," Gretchen notes. "But when they're open, you can see clear to the front door from the kitchen. The kids can sit at the counter and do projects and talk to Dad. His office used to be in the basement. It was

nice, with lots of built-ins, but still, he often felt like he was in a dungeon down there."

Gretchen notes that she wanted to "mix it up a bit in the kitchen." She selected maple cabinetry—stained dark to look like cherry—and enameled beadboard for the island and the backsplash. "My new kitchen island has a matte soapstone top, and the counters are stainless steel—very functional and industrial. Stainless steel cleans up well, and the more you use it, the better it looks. I chose beadboard panels for the refrigerator and found these great wrought-iron refrigerator pulls, so that the refrigerator, the island, the cabinetry, everything here looks like its own piece of furniture. It's a very comfortable family space."

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The fireplace in the great room had been whitewashed Chicago brick. Gilbertson plastered it over and gave it a tinted glaze to make it look antique. "The floors have such a wonderful, Old World character, I didn't want everything else to look brand new. I wanted things to look like they've been there." Many of the furniture pieces and accessories she used throughout the home come from flea markets (such as the buffet as well as the vintage martini shaker collection and concrete candleholders on top of it).

The fireplace mantel was crafted by Rice at Manomin. "I wanted something that would match the tones of the floor," Gilbertson says. "Jim [Rice] is a real artisan. The mantle just looks fantastic."

One of Gilbertson's favorite aspects of the remodel is the mud room transformation. "This is part of the functionality of the house," she says. "The Imagination Renovation team created a big bench with cubbies and hooks. Now each child has a place for boots, shoes and backpacks...and the new slate floor really hides dirt. The laundry room was moved out and put next to the kitchen. It's such a relief not to have baskets of laundry in that area!" Her new laundry room has a washer, dryer, a U-shaped counter top, and even a blackboard wall. "It's a great place for the kids to play. I also love the glass door—it's etched, so it lets light through to the kitchen, but also creates privacy. The door has the word 'laundry' stenciled on it, above a fleur de lys. It's a wonderful touch."

Pillar Home/Imagination Renovation is located in Wayzata; phone: 952-473-2351. Manomin Resawn Timbers is located in Forest Lake; phone: 651-408-2303. ♣

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Gretchen Gilbertson refinished the fireplace brick to give it an antique feel; she had the Manomin team custom-mill a mantel out of old timber to match the floor.