



Remodeling costs led couple to raze house, build dream home

By MIKE HETHERINGTON

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It was a love of boating and diving that made James and Donna Busbey choose North Palm Beach when they moved to Florida two years ago.

James had retired from the U.S. Navy Seal teams, after 20 years as a chief petty officer, and the family wanted to move from San Diego to this side of the country to be near their parents.

The couple loved the climate here, where they could dive year-round, and the water was warm most of the year, eliminating the need for wetsuits.

"There are so many more boating and diving opportunities here," Donna said. "In San Diego, it was either the ocean or the bay."

When the Busbeys bought their 1,500-square-foot home on the North Palm Beach Waterway, the thought of remodeling was already on their minds. Their home in California was 2,500 square feet.

Adding 1,000 square feet seemed reasonable, at a cost of "no more than \$80,000, tops," or so they thought at the time.

Three architects and three sets of plans later, the couple was a lot wiser.

Several contractors made bids on the remodeling, ranging from \$200,000 up. The bids allowed the builders to add more costs for any unforeseen problems, such as bad wiring, faulty plumbing, termite damage, rotten wood and any difficulty in connecting the old structure to the new.

Understandably, the Busbeys were uncomfortable with the uncertainty of "extra costs," for bids that had maxed out their budget.

That was before the

hurricane factor. The homesite was below the projected flood level for storm surge during a hurricane, which restricted home improvement loans to 50 percent of the appraised value of the house. At that time, the house was appraised at \$70,000.

Suddenly, demolishing the old house, raising the elevation of the lot and building a new house seemed very appealing.

Mike Munz Construction Inc. in Wellington built the new home for \$164,000, plus some upgrades. The Busbeys contracted for the demolition, and since they owned a lawn maintenance business, they also elected to do the landscaping.

Built in 1962, the original "footprint" of the home was three bedrooms and two baths with a two-car garage. That floor plan remained the same, with the addition of a den and dining room.

The front of the house was moved forward, leaving room for a circular driveway, while plans for the back of the house stopped short of an existing swimming pool to include a covered patio.

"The old kitchen had brown mica countertops and cabinets," said Donna. Now the countertops are granite and the cabinets are maple.

"The new master bath has a view of the water, whereas there was hardly any view from the old bath," she said. The "million-dollar view" is featured from any spot in the master bedroom, living room, kitchen or dining room.



"The kitchen was this little room with walls separating it from the living room and dining area," said Donna. "Once in the kitchen, you were cut off from any conversation in the other rooms."

During the nine months it took to build the new home, the Busbeys and their two dogs lived in a rented two-bedroom apartment.

"One bedroom was stuffed with clothes and household items. Everything else went into the other bedroom, except for some furniture that was stored at the family business," said Donna.

Are the Busbeys happy with their new home? "We want to live here forever," Donna said.

■ We asked readers to share their remodeling successes with us and show off their beautiful homes. The response was great. We will be featuring other homes throughout the Palm Beaches and the Treasure Coast.

Send your before-and-after pictures, with a daytime telephone number, to: Great Remodeling Ideas, Marketing Services, The Palm Beach Post, P.O. Box 24700, West Palm Beach, FL 33416.

■ Graphic by John Reitman, Marketing Services; photos by Mike Hetherington.



Photos from top left, counterclockwise: New home; original house; master bedroom; view of kitchen; living room; path to dock; pool and patio; and the "million dollar" view from the living room.