

MODERN LUXURY

# Interiors

CHICAGO



## TAKE IT OUTSIDE

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LAKEFRONT LUXURY: JULIA BUCKINGHAM'S LATEST PROJECT

MORGANTE-WILSON ARCHITECTS REDEFINE URBAN CHIC

SUZUKI'S STYLE: INSIDE THE FAMED ARCHITECT'S SOLE U.S. PROJECT

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**BRIGHT WHITE** With a vision of a home that was lighter and brighter, the homeowners let interior designer Julia Buckingham take them out of their comfort zone and steer them into a more modern, chic aesthetic.

# WaterVision

A luxury homebuilding couple construct their own dream home.

By Kerrie Kennedy  
Photography by Eric Hausman

The path from the former Soviet Union, circa the 1970s, to lakefront living in Winnetka in 2014 is an improbable one, yet it's the story that belongs to North Shore residents Milena and Leo Birov, whose house is testament to their impressive triumph.

The couple, now luxury homebuilders on the North Shore, immigrated in 1979, moved to Rogers Park, and each got jobs as engineers. On weekends, they explored the North Shore. "One of our first outings was here in Winnetka, Milena recalls. "When we came to Elder Lane Beach, we







**BIRD'S-EYE VIEW** With the home's spectacular lakefront views, watching the sun come up over a cup of coffee in the breakfast room is the highlight of the homeowners' day.



**LIGHT UP** A custom chandelier, cascading down three flights of stairs, makes a dramatic statement.

said "How lucky are these people to live here in these houses on the lake?" Fueled by the dream of a home by the lake, the couple invested in fast-food franchises and used the resources to build their first home in Winnetka in 1989. They had found their passion. In 1990, they founded Heritage Luxury Builders and have since built more than 150 custom homes along the North Shore.

Working in the high-end home industry by necessity turns one into a connoisseur, so it was no surprise when Milena noticed her taste was gradually beginning to change. "It's like working in the fashion industry," she says. "Just as fashion changes, so, too, does interior design. You start looking at your house, and it doesn't look as good anymore," says Milena. Their desire to build a home that was lighter and brighter grew.

And what could be brighter than a home on the lake? When the couple found the lot, an enviable lakefront parcel in Winnetka, there was a small classic

1920s Tudor sitting on it. While saving the home wasn't possible, salvaging a number of its ornate architectural details was, including about a dozen stone gargoyles that were incorporated into the patio. Elements that couldn't be salvaged were recreated, from the intricate coffered ceilings in many of the public rooms to the grand limestone fireplace mantel in the living room.

The couple enlisted interior designer Julia Buckingham of Buckingham Interiors + Design to help them execute their vision of a bright, modern-but-classic home overlooking the lake. "I had done lakefront projects before but nothing like this," Buckingham says. "The panoramic views of Lake Michigan were absolutely breathtaking."

The home's location influenced nearly every design decision Buckingham made, from the palette of taupe, grays and soft blues, chosen to play up the lake's seafoam green color, to the host of reflective

surfaces installed throughout the home—from marble floors to metallic wallcoverings to crystal chandeliers, including the dramatic custom chandelier that cascades down three flights of stairs. In the master sitting room, Buckingham installed a glass wall facing the hallway so that the lake could immediately be seen when walking up the stairs. “It’s the perfect room to kick back on the chaise after a long day with a glass of chardonnay while you watch the sunset and see its reflection behind you in the glass,” Buckingham notes.

Naturally, the Birovs wanted their home to include many of the features they incorporate into the homes they build. The butler’s pantry was smartly located between the kitchen and dining room to make entertaining a breeze. The kitchen was equipped with a built-in espresso and cappuccino-maker, a drawer-style microwave, a custom mirror-paneled Sub-Zero refrigerator and a cozy sitting area with a fireplace. And the master suite was furnished with the ultimate luxury of all: his-and-hers walk-in closets and baths, both of which clearly favor the lady of the house.

In Milena’s bath, a study in gray and white large-slab marble, a huge soaking tub commands the room like a piece of sculptural art, positioned in front of four floor-to-ceiling windows with sweeping views of the lake. Buckingham upped the wow factor with Venetian mirrors and opulent midcentury Murano chandeliers.

Given its spectacular lakefront location, the home’s outdoor space was a major part of the design plan, with a breathtaking turquoise pool as its centerpiece. “We always wanted a pool; a place for our children and grandchildren to gather,” Milena says. An outdoor pizza oven, also on their wish list, was incorporated into an outdoor kitchen just off the pool area. “Now our grandkids swim, and later, we all make pizza together,” Milena says.

Ironically, the home’s ideal location also proved to be one of its greatest challenges. “We had the lake, of course, but we really didn’t have a lot of sand,” Milena says. “So we had to make a beach as well as a wall to keep it in.” Sand for the beach had to be shipped in by barge, and the entire process took almost as long to complete as the house itself—not that anyone has any regrets.

“What can I tell you?” Milena says. “It’s a privilege to wake up every morning and see the sun coming up on the water. To be able to look out our windows at the lake and open our doors and walk on our beach is something we appreciate every single day.” ■





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PROJECTS BEFORE, BUT  
NOTHING LIKE THIS,"  
SAYS INTERIOR DESIGNER  
JULIA BUCKINGHAM.

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## DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE  
**English manor,  
single-family home**

LOCATION  
**Winnetka**

ARCHITECT  
**SGE & Associates Architects**  
sgearchitects.com

DESIGN  
**Julia Buckingham of  
Buckingham Interiors + Design**  
buckinghamid.com

BUILDER  
**Heritage Luxury Builders**  
heritageluxury.com

RESOURCES  
**Buckingham Interiors +  
Design Showroom**  
Accessories and furnishings throughout  
buckinghamid.com

**Idlewood Electric**  
Lighting  
idlewoodelectric.com

**Louise Gaskill**  
Living and dining room chandeliers  
louisegaskill.com

**DME Elevator & Lifts**  
Elevator  
dmelift.com

**Ruffolo Inc.**  
Landscape design  
ruffolainc.com

**Boilini Company**  
Pool design  
boilini.com

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**POOL PARTY** A breathtaking turquoise pool overlooking Lake Michigan and an outdoor kitchen complete with a pizza oven ensure the grandchildren are happy all summer long.