

Creative RETREAT



SPOTLIGHT

project description

Type:	Detached Art Studio Addition
Contractor:	Custom Home Group, Inc. (see ad on back cover)
Trade Partners:	Beiler Bros. Construction LLC (see ad p. 35) General Floor (see ad p. 30) LappTops (see ad p. 33) Outdoor Image Landscaping (see ad p. 39) Weist Electric Inc. (see ad p. 32) Rojas Painting & Wall-Covering LLC (see ad p. 38)
Scope:	<p>This project includes a 750 square-foot art studio addition located centrally in the rear yard of the wooded property. The goal of this project was to provide an independent space for the homeowners that would be conducive to extensive ceramic and art projects. The studio also needed to have the flexibility to entertain guests and host social gatherings.</p> <p>The interior layout features an open art studio area with a cathedral ceiling, large arched windows, exposed wooden beams and bamboo flooring. This area also includes a large prep area with built-in cabinetry, a fire clay farm sink, a quartz countertop and a glass tile backsplash. Adjacent to the art studio is a kiln room that showcases porcelain floor and wall tile and will be used for firing ceramics. Opposite the kiln room is the powder room, which includes a built-in vanity with a glass tile backsplash that complements the main prep area.</p> <p>The exterior was designed to enhance the existing home by featuring cedar shake vinyl siding, exterior molding and stone veneer. The studio entry showcases a covered front porch with large columns, decorative brackets, stone knee-walls and a cobblestone paver patio. For easy access, the existing home and art studio are connected by a paver walkway.</p>

As much as Annette and Ernie loved their house and its location, they were certain that they'd be relocating. It wasn't because they outgrew it or due to job transfer; no, the reason they'd be moving was because they both desperately wanted a property that had an *out building* (adjacent to the home) so that they could convert it into an art studio.

Annette, an art teacher and fine artist (primarily painting and ceramics), dreamed for years of having her own studio. While not an artist, Ernie loved the idea of Annette pursuing her artistic passions at home—rather than commuting to local art centers to work on her projects. Being *home* was important to both of them.

After months of looking at properties throughout the county, Ernie and Annette gave up. Nothing seemed right. Either the location was not right or the property was not what they were looking for. Resigned to the idea that finding the *perfect* existing property wasn't in the cards, the couple decided to explore the idea of building a custom home to include space for a studio.

After months, including some preliminary discussions with a few architects, Ernie did a web search and came upon the design-build company of Custom Home Group, Inc. in Quarryville. Ernie was very impressed with his initial contact with Dan Siegrist, founder and owner of Custom Home



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Group and those feelings were reinforced with each subsequent contact. Confirming what they already felt, they also received an outstanding client testimonial from an acquaintance who had some work done by Dan and his team. Ernie and Annette agreed, if they were going to build, the builder would be Custom Home Group.

Now that the decision to build was made all that needed to be done was find the property to build on. Unfortu-

nately, like the search for an existing home with an out building, the search for a suitable property to build upon was equally disappointing and frustrating. Nothing that they saw was all that appealing or in the locale that they wanted.

Undeterred from their dreams, discussions began with Dan and his staff designer, Jared Erb, about the possibility of constructing a two-story addition onto their existing house. After all,

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they truly did love their home as well as its wooded surroundings. As those discussions continued, it became more and more clear to Ernie and Annette that, given their home's layout, their views, and their beautiful oversized deck that they didn't want to lose, an addition wasn't the answer either.

To finish this story, we decided to hear directly from those involved. Joining us are homeowner's Annette and Ernie, as well as builder Dan Siegrist and designer Jared Erb, both of Custom Home Group. Here's what we learned.

Before talking about the project specifics, tell me more about your decision to go with a design/build company rather than working with an architect for the plans and eventually a builder for the construction.

Annette: It just really made sense. Everyone's under one roof and they work with each other every day. I liked the idea that they work so close together—the designer, the builder, spec'ing out their products, making adjustments as necessary without major holdups.

Ernie: Early on, we talked to an architect in general terms, but after a few discussions with Dan and Jared it was clear to us that the design/build approach was the way to go. Their explanation of the design/build process and their specific approach was very convincing. The ease of our communications, the questions that were asked, and the back and forth exchanges that we had convinced us that Custom Home Group was who we were looking for. Another thing that appealed to me was that Jared, who we would work with in the design phase—which includes developing specs and the selection of finishes—would also serve as our advocate during the building process.

Why would you need an advocate?

Ernie: Well, for one, we had some experience in doing projects over the years and some hadn't gone too smoothly. Having Jared overseeing things and taking the lead in correcting or modifying things relieved us from having to



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assume that role. It was reassuring to know that Jared would be looking out for our best interests.

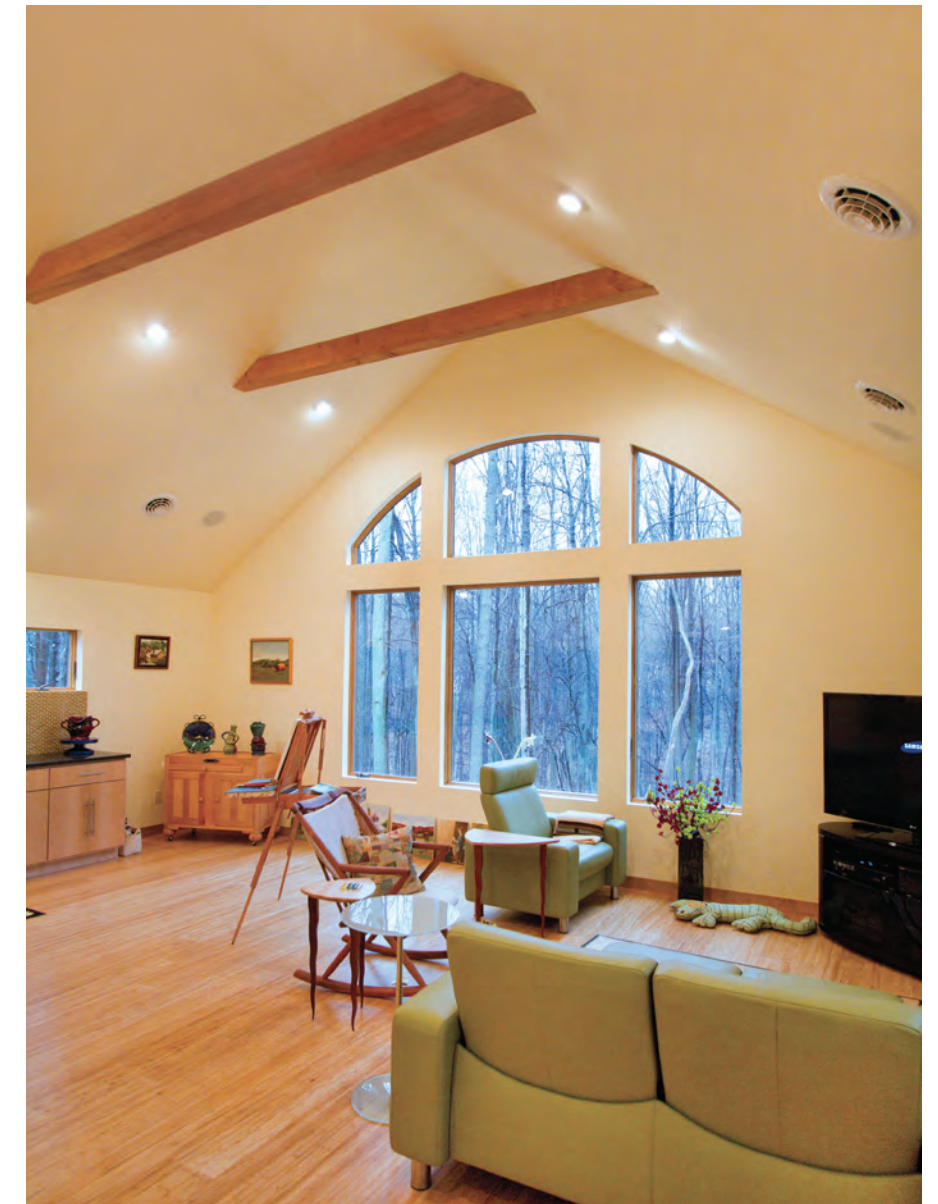
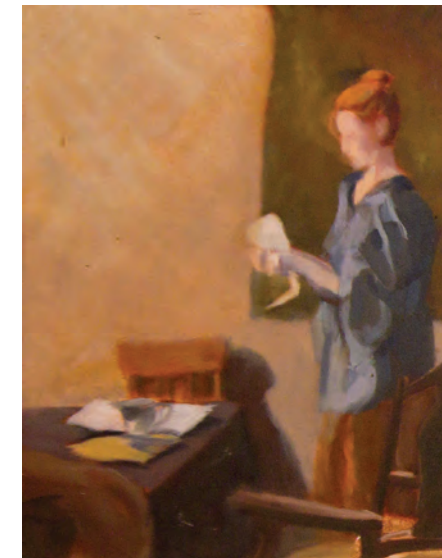
With you nixing the idea of an attached addition, how did you go from there to the concept of a free-standing, detached building?

Ernie: It was strange...one day at work I just had this epiphany! All of a sudden, I was clearly seeing it in our backyard. After calling Annette, I immediately contacted Custom Home Group.

So, it was back to the drawing board—no new home plans, no attached addition. How did the guys at Custom Home Group react to your change in thinking—again?

Annette: Actually, quite well. They were excited about designing a unique space that they normally don't have the opportunity to design and build. We had a great exchange of ideas.

Jared: In this business you have to be flexible and open minded. We've had projects go both ways...sometimes you start with the idea of new construction but there are times when you can meet the needs of the clients by adding on to their current home. In this case, while an attached addition didn't work out, we were able to meet their needs by building on their existing property.



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Annette: Another example of Jared's ability to take an idea and run with it, is the entry way. I had mentioned to Jared about my recent visits to Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* and *Kentuck Knob*. Wright is all about compression and expansion—taking you through a small space before entering a larger one. I talked with Jared about somehow incorporating that concept and...viola! Jared's design included a set of double doors leading into a small welcoming entry area which, a few feet further, opens up into the expansive space of the studio room. It is just awesome! The flow of the room is really great and the large back windows are in perfect proportion.

Ernie: We were looking for a clean look and Jared showed amazing patience while we tried to figure things

out. Originally, we were going to go with a tile floor as most studios do, but decided to be different. Custom Home Group researched options and came up with a bamboo flooring product that, unlike earlier bamboo floors, was very hard and scratch resistant. The hardness was important to us because we didn't want the floor dented by heavy objects. This stuff is just as good as tile and maybe better because it won't crack if you drop something heavy. Jared found our Teragren bamboo flooring that is absolutely beautiful and not all that expensive.

Did the finished product turn out as you had initially envisioned it?

Ernie: As far as the basic structure was concerned, yes. Jared, however, made numerous suggestions that we never would have thought of. The little square windows on both sides of the studio, for instance, were raised at Jared's recommendation. In doing so we now have wall space for shelving and other functions—without compromising the room's aesthetics. The four foot roof overhang at the front of the building is also a great feature—aesthetically as well as functionally.

Annette: And the decorative ceiling beams, those too were Jared's idea. The way he tied everything together—the floor, the tile, the countertops, the backsplash, the wall paint, the beams and the windows—everything just blends together beautifully.

Jared: This project was very unique for us. We've done detached buildings—garages and carriage houses, but we never built an art studio. As an art lover, I thought the whole concept was exciting. The idea of designing a studio that could also function as a family gathering spot for dinners or watching football was challenging—but a fun challenge. I couldn't wait to get started. And because it was detached, we were creating a whole separate area.

Annette: Yeah...I just walk out our back door and I feel like I'm getting away. Walking down the path on a cool, clear, starry night, I feel my senses awoken before stepping into our retreat...our place for respite and rejuvenation.

How did things go during the construction phase?

Ernie: From the get-go, Custom Home Group used online scheduling software that laid out their expectations and a timetable for completing each stage. Nonetheless, despite seeing a schedule, we were surprised early on when we took off a few days to go down to Cape May. While the foundation was in when we left, the whole thing was framed and under roof on our return, just two days later!

Annette: Our neighbor across the street told us all about it. They brought in a crane and up it went.

Ernie: Another thing that helped supplement our communications during construction was email. We used it on a regular basis to address issues and to make sure nothing fell through the cracks.

Were you comfortable with the comings and goings of the various subcontractors?

Annette: Yes, very much so. Most of the work occurred during the summer when I was home—so I got to meet pretty much all of them. Custom Home Group partnered with a great group of subs. While they all worked really hard, they were also very thoughtful and personable. It was actually fun having them around.

Ernie: Yeah, those guys became like family—I had complete trust in them. I liked that.



In hindsight, would you do anything different?

Ernie: Nothing...I think it actually turned out perfect. Really, that's how I feel. The proportion of it—big enough for Annette to do her work and still have a little entertainment area, all the little details—there's really not anything I'd do differently.

So, you've used the studio for entertaining?

Annette: Yes, Thanksgiving was our grand opening. We seated 18 comfortably...it was great! The food was on the counters and we set up three long banquet tables. We also

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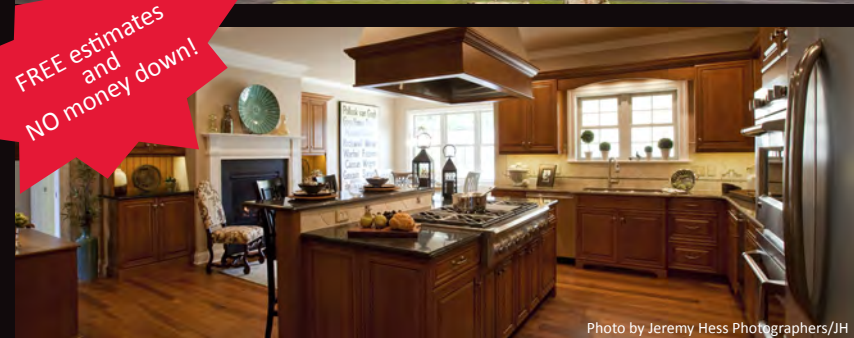
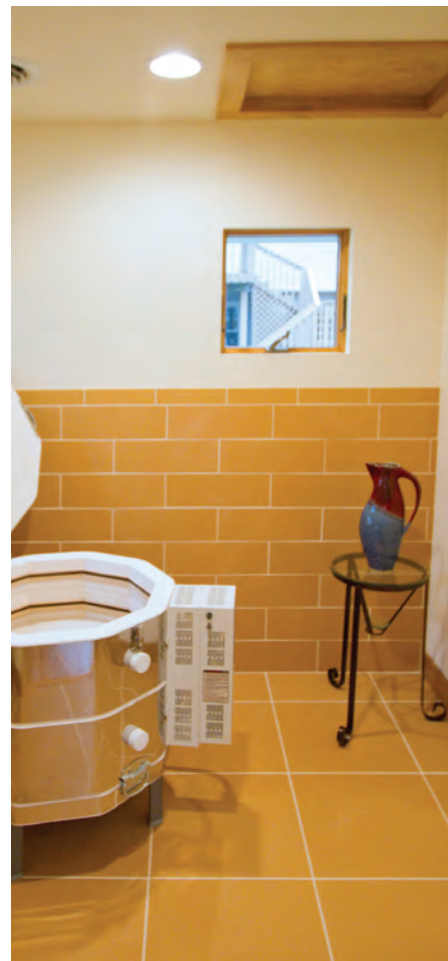


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had a holiday party for about 20 fellow teachers and found out the floor is also great for dancing!

Ernie: And this is where we now watch television. The big screen is awesome and so is the surround sound system.

When we watch a movie, it's like you're in the film. The sound system was another Custom Home Group idea—and they put the speakers in the ceiling. It turned out great!

Have you received any feedback from your neighbors?

Ernie: Yes, and it's been very positive. Our neighbors have been curious and we've given tours. One comment that I particularly liked was "how well the building actually blends in with the house and the property—like it has always been there". Yes! That was one of the things we were trying to accomplish.

Do you have any advice for those who may be contemplating a home improvement project?

Ernie: Well, for one, there's no better time to finance than now. The rates continue to be at record lows. We financed this project through the equity we had in the house and with our new

low rate, our monthly payments are less than what they were previously. Rather than waste time trying to save for the project, we financed it and are enjoying it now—no waiting! The other thing I'd advise homeowners to do is to take the time to find the right builder. That's the key. You've got to find people who have integrity and who do what they say they'll do.

Annette: And who put out a quality product. We did our research on Custom Home Group and they didn't disappoint us. The quality of their work is just excellent.

Any last comments?

Ernie: I'd like to revise my answer to your earlier question about doing things differently. The thing I'd do differently is I'd get in touch with Dan Siegrist at Custom Home Group much sooner than we did. We wasted a lot of time.

R&A

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