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Home Away from Home

Building a beach getaway

By CHRISTINE HENNESSEY » Photos by G. FRANK HART

As natives of Greensboro, North Carolina for the last two decades, Hope and Phil Collins spent many years visiting Wrightsville Beach with their two children, Morgan and Parker, and their Goldendoodle, Teddy. While they loved staying at Summer Sands, their favorite dog-friendly hotel, Hope, a domestic engineer, and Phil, a business owner, had dreams of buying their own home in the Wrightsville area and making their frequent getaways easier and more comfortable. “We drove around a lot through the years looking,” says Hope, “waiting to find the right time and location that was best for our family.”

Then, in May 2018, Hope and her daughter attended the Parade of Homes to kill time while Phil was in a meeting. In the Autumn Hall neighborhood, just down the road from Wrightsville Beach, they wandered into a house built by Vahue Building and had one thought—WOW. As soon as Phil’s meeting was over, he drove straight to Autumn Hall to see the house for himself and had the same reaction.

“It wasn’t so much as the neighborhood as it was the house,” Hope says. “Everything about it was fabulous.” After walking around the house several times, they spoke to Marty Vahue and his son, Michael, asking questions about the house, the neighborhood, and whether there were any available lots. “We didn’t have any intentions of buying a lot or building a house on that particular day, but it seemed to be heading in that direction. Marty walked Phil and I down the street to see the remaining lots that he either knew were available through Autumn Hall or for sale by owner. He also took us into another one of his homes that was part of the Parade of Homes, that at one time was going to be his own personal house.”

Between the wow factor that swept them away and the Vahue family’s friendly and knowledgeable personalities, Hope and Phil were hooked. They bought a lot and hired Vahue Building to recreate the exact home they’d just walked through—this time, for them.



Morgan loves the middle room which provides a peaceful space for her and her friends to watch tv and hangout.

It's All About the Details

Marty Vahue began his career in the home building industry in 1977. A second-generation homebuilder, he began his career building homes in Western New York before relocating to Raleigh in the mid-90s. Over the years he “came up through the trades,” mastering every skill from framing to trimming out interiors. In 2014, he brought Vahue Building Corp. to Wilmington, where he shifted his focus to new home construction.

Other clients agree. One homeowner describes Marty’s unique way of “understanding the customer’s desires, coming up with creative ways of meeting them if needed, and making and keeping commitments both during the build and after the final sign-off.”

When it comes to building a new home, Marty doesn’t push a certain style or look. Instead, he listens closely to the client. “We do custom designs that meet people’s actual wants and needs, while still fitting into the neighborhood,” he says. Some of those neighborhoods include Autumn Hall, River Bluffs, Salters Haven, and St. James Planation. “We will also build on any private home site a client may have,” Marty says.

As for the Collins’ family, their dreams were fairly straightforward. The first was to build a quality family home in a timely manner within budget, and to have a pleasant and exciting building experience. While they originally requested a duplicate of the house they’d seen in the Parade of Homes, they ended up making a few adjustments based on their family’s needs and things Marty had learned during the first build.

One of these adjustments included a storage area off the master entrance. In the original design, Vahue Building installed a

Custom bar area



Essential storage space
for a family of four.



Vivid Interiors, a Greensboro design firm, made the home look amazing while keeping it comfortable and functional.



full wall, which caused some issues when moving furniture up the steps. For the Collins home, they revised the plan slightly. “Although we may have lost a few storage inches, we appreciated the benefit of moving in easily!” Hope says.

A Mostly Pleasant Process

Hope and Phil had never built a home from scratch before, and found the process both exciting and nerve-racking. They soon learned that each phase of the process has its own timeline. For example, things like the framing and cabinetry go quickly, while the interior walls and wiring take substantially more time. Throughout the experience, however, they did their best to enjoy the process and trust their gut as well as their builder. “Vahue Building was very helpful in the areas of design and coordinating vendors and schedules with us to stay ahead of deadlines,” Hope says.

This is a common refrain from Vahue Building’s clients, as well as anyone who has built a custom home. As another Vahue client says, “Most people would expect to make decisions on room size, cabinetry, hardware, etc. But there are so many other little



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The home is a coastal modern farmhouse style, a popular yet classic look that suits the Autumn Hall neighborhood.



The design lends to a lot of outdoor living space.



decisions, such as the color of the piece of metal in the floor between the carpet and the tile!”

With Marty’s help, the Collins were able to stay on track. Less than two years after they met Vahue, their own home was ready to go.

From House to Home

The Collins moved into their new home on December 19th, 2019. “Even though we have not been there long, we are settling in nicely,” Hope says.

The wow factor that originally drew her to the home is still there, but now that she lives in her own version, she appreciates other aspects of the design, such as the screened-in porch. “I like having an outside room that feels like its inside,” she says. Meanwhile, her daughter Morgan loves the middle room, which serves as a natural extension of her bedroom and provides a peaceful place for her and her friends to watch television and hang out. Parker’s favorite will be the bonus room, once the furniture is in place—apparently, he already has big plans for the space.

Marty is pleased with the home as well, and glad he could make the Collins long-held dream a reality. “The home is a coastal modern farmhouse style,” he says, a popular yet classic look that suits the Autumn Hall neighborhood. “It’s a very open, inviting floor plan, and offers a lot of outdoor living space.”

Another reason that the Collins had





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Beautiful aqua tiled walk-in shower.

such a good experience with Vahue Building was due to their willingness to partner with outside vendors the family brought into the project, such as their favorite interior designers from Greensboro.

"Vahue Building worked well with Vivid Interiors, a Greensboro design firm that not only made our house look amazing, they also turned it into a comfortable and functional home," Hope says. "Gina Hicks and Laura Mensch guided us along the way with suggestions and design options from lighting, outlet placements, and paint colors just to name a few. We can't say enough great things about them and will continue to use them on future projects. There's no better Interior design team out there."

Although the family plans to enjoy their Autumn Hall home for a long time, they already know the first two calls they would make if they ever decided to build again—Vahue Building, followed immediately by Vivid Interiors.

For now, though, they're happy exactly where they are. "As a family, we enjoy the beach anytime, but especially in the off season," Hope says. "It's where we can take Teddy for walks and reflect how lucky we are to have a beach so close to Greensboro. The fact that we now have a house at the beach to come home to is the icing on the cake." 910-352-6799, VahueCustomHomes.com 