

HOMES

for
**Aging in
Place**

*As more residents retire and as aging
“Bloomerangs” return to the town they love,
homes for the duration are what they want.*

By **Elisabeth Andrews** • Photography by **Kendall Reeves**



Bloomington is widely known as an excellent place to retire — AARP, *Forbes*, *Money Magazine*, the Rand McNally publishing company, and even *Golf Digest* have listed Bloomington

among their top retirement destinations. And while our town boasts stellar assisted-living communities, most of us, according to a 2012 AARP report, would prefer to stay in our current homes as we age.

In this story, we feature the homes of three couples who have planned ahead to make the goal of aging in place achievable. One house is the creation of two Kansas architecture professors who moved to Bloomington to retire. Another belongs to two former Indiana University professionals who built a home for their future. The third is the longtime residence of a couple who have worked in the Bloomington community for decades. In each case, the occupants describe a mutual exchange with their dwellings: they care for their homes so that, as time goes by, their homes will help to care for them.



The Colman home showcases the skills of its original owner, master limestone carver Harry Donato. The Spanish Colonial façade (left) and the hand-carved fireplace date to 1928.



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A Beauty Well-Preserved on 1st Street

Michelle Martin Colman doesn't think of herself as owning the home she shares with her husband, David, on East 1st Street. Nor are they merely caretakers for the striking Spanish Colonial Revival house. A more precise term for the relationship she has to the 1920s' limestone dwelling is that of confidant.

"The house talks about what it likes and dislikes," says Michelle, a former shop owner and etiquette expert who describes herself as a "social entrepreneur." She asserts that the structure welcomes handmade things and shuns mass-produced goods. "I'm careful not to bring in anything too processed," she says.

Accordingly, she and David, a retired attorney, fill the house they have lived in for 30 years with antiques and one-of-a-kind objects. In addition to the home's original rugs and complete set of Harvard Classics (for which the built-in dining room bookcase was designed), Michelle has added touches such as a 19th-century mirror her relatives brought over from Hungary and heirloom baby buntings she repurposed as pillow shams. Her kitchen island started life as an obstetric table — she removed the stirrups and added the marble slab that the home's original Italian matriarch, Christina Donato, used for rolling out pasta dough.

The Colmans are only the third owners of the house, which limestone carver Harry Donato designed for his family in 1928. The home features wrought-iron-framed arched windows, a hand-carved limestone fireplace, and a vaulted belfry entrance that indeed attracts bats. In between the Donatos and the Colmans, the home belonged to Otto and Alma Henthorn, who ran the eponymous Henthorn Bar in the 1940s and '50s.

Michelle and David have taken great care to maintain the home's historic character, crediting Nashville woodworker Randall O'Donnell, Nasir Jallal of Bloomington's Kashan Rugs, and the experts at Kleindorfer's Hardware and Variety Store with ensuring the home's preservation. The light fixtures are original, aside from the hallway ceiling lights that once hung in a movie theater. Features the Colmans added were chosen to reinforce the sense of history, such as a bathroom sink from the early years of the West Baden Springs Hotel and Art Deco-style sandblast etchings on the sunroom windows by Nashville artist Timothy Fannin.

Having raised three children in the house (the eldest of whom, Gabriel, runs The Venue Fine Art & Gifts), the Colmans intend to remain in their home as long as possible. In order to make this plan viable in light of the expense and time required to maintain the nearly century-old structure, they have become advocates for changing the zoning laws that restrict residence to no more than three unrelated adults.

"I think it would be a great solution for our neighborhood to enable owner occupiers like us to share their homes with more than one other person," says David. "To age well in place, we're going to need some help."

1. Individual panes of glass fit within each opening of the wrought-iron window frames in David and Michelle Colman's living room, which features the room's original light fixture and rug.

2. "The house doesn't really demand much, but it will absorb anything we make available," says David, here with Michelle.

3. The back bedroom, another 1940s' addition, overlooks the backyard, providing a private retreat for guests.

4. The front bathroom retains its 1920s' fixtures and handmade marbled-glass tiles. Visible in the back mirror is the original copper-framed shower door.

5. A sunroom, added in the 1940s, looks out over East 1st Street and displays some of Michelle's heirloom fabrics.



Perfect for Aging in Place *(Down to the Tiniest Detail)*

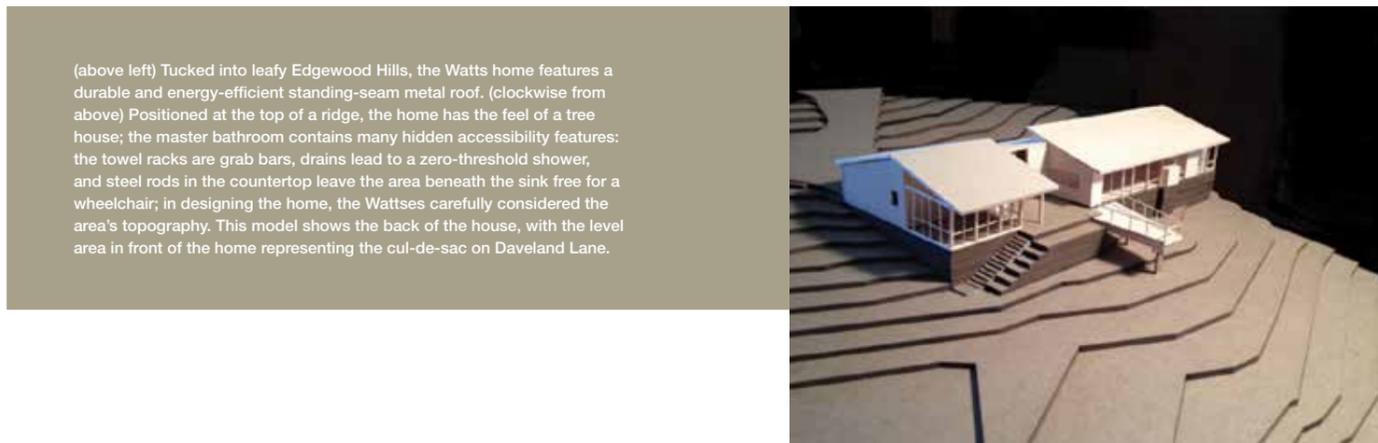
When architecture professors Don Watts and Carol Martin Watts planned their retirement from Kansas State University, they dreamed of designing a home that reflected their minimalist aesthetic while enabling them to comfortably age in place. Geometric precision, natural light, and striking sight lines would combine with practical considerations such as single-story living, minimal maintenance, and wide passageways to accommodate walkers or wheelchairs.

Today, their custom-built home in Bloomington's Edgewood Hills achieves that harmony, reflecting both their many years of architectural study and their desire to enjoy their home for decades to come.

Don, 69, and Carol, 66, chose Carol's hometown of Bloomington to be near her family, which includes brother David Martin, sister Melinda Martin, and mother Nancy Martin. (Carol's father, the late David Martin, was a business professor at Indiana University.) To their delighted surprise, the Wattses' son David also moved to Bloomington shortly before their relocation. (Their daughter, Lena Flannery, lives outside Boston.)

Although Bloomington was a natural fit, finding the right spot was a tougher decision. They spent a year searching for a site before hearing from a friend about an unlisted Edgewood Hills lot for sale. Nestled against a forest that slopes down to a creek, the quiet cul-de-sac offered a serene setting just east of the city limits.

After making the purchase in 2012, the two architects commenced a three-year journey of planning and preparation. Through scores of meticulous two- and three-dimensional renderings — including a 1/8-inch-to-1-foot scale model of both the house and the surrounding



(above left) Tucked into leafy Edgewood Hills, the Watts home features a durable and energy-efficient standing-seam metal roof. (clockwise from above) Positioned at the top of a ridge, the home has the feel of a tree house; the master bathroom contains many hidden accessibility features: the towel racks are grab bars, drains lead to a zero-threshold shower, and steel rods in the countertop leave the area beneath the sink free for a wheelchair; in designing the home, the Wattses carefully considered the area's topography. This model shows the back of the house, with the level area in front of the home representing the cul-de-sac on Daveland Lane.





(below) Don Watts, a Nebraska native, met Bloomington-raised Carol when they were both young architecture faculty members at Texas Tech University. (bottom) Thinking ahead, the Wattses laid out the kitchen with room on all sides to navigate a walker or wheelchair. The breakfast bar sits low and projects freely to enable easy wheelchair access.

topography — they considered every detail, from low-threshold doorways to digital controls for the clerestory [high, narrow] windows. The final design called for 1,900 square feet of living space — large enough to accommodate three bedrooms yet sufficiently compact to ensure ease of maintenance.



The size of the home also required the couple to pare down their belongings, says Carol, explaining that their previous home in Manhattan, Kansas, had four stories and nearly twice the square footage. “We got rid of almost everything,” she says. “We only moved what was really important to us. Most of what we brought was art and books.”

To oversee the six-month building process that ran June through December of 2015, the couple moved from Kansas into short-term apartment housing on Bloomington’s east side. Each day was spent on-site with Bloomington builder Loren Wood and a team of subcontractors that, during the course of construction, consisted of more than 100 different professionals. The Wattses were careful to consider every decision as the home took shape, from landscaping to lighting to the final choice of fixtures.

“Everything took a lot of thought,” says Don. “Now we’re looking forward to living here through all the seasons.”



(above) No space is wasted in this 1,900-square-foot home. The library does triple duty as both a guest room and Carol’s exercise studio — her treadmill fits perfectly into the closet and hides behind a sliding door when not in use. (right) Both professors’ scholarly interests are reflected in the home’s design: Carol’s background in classical Italian architecture is evident in the placement of windows at every major sight line, while Don’s specialization in architectural geometry comes through in the creative shapes described by the walls, shelves, and beams.





Plants abound in this light-filled home that owners Doug and Pam Freeman describe as “contemporary with antique touches.”



(left) Doug Freeman’s 16-foot cactus required a specially designed stairwell to accommodate its height. (below) The peak of the shed roof lifts the ceiling for the soaring succulent. The greenhouse, seen at right, shelters many more cacti.



A Home Inspired by Cacti

“The cactus outgrew the house.”

This was the signal, Doug Freeman explains, that it was time for him and his wife, Pam, to build a new home. The 16-foot succulent, purchased from Lowe’s at a mere few inches, had at one point grown three feet in one year and appeared to be of the genus *Armatocereus*, which can reach up to 40 feet in the wild.

To accommodate the plant’s skyward extension, the Freemans enlisted Bloomington builders Bailey & Weiler to design a new house featuring a two-story windowed stairwell. Since the 2011 move to its sunny new spot just south of Rhorer Road, the plant has been so content that, for the first time in 13 years, it bloomed.

Doug, 69, began collecting cacti after he and Pam, 67, moved to Bloomington from Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1983. Originally from New Jersey, Doug met Pam, a Charlestown, Indiana, native, when they were undergraduates at Purdue University.

Both are now retired, Doug from overseeing the Indiana University School of Optometry’s library and as director of



(above) Pam's music corner overlooks the front yard. For several years, she was the accompanist for the Quarryland Men's Chorus; she now plays the organ for St. Mark's United Methodist Church. (right) The Freemans' kitchen has wide throughways to make way for potential wheelchairs. Doug's first year of retirement was spent installing the cabinets. The inlaid-square design at each cabinet corner is featured throughout the house, including the hand-hewn mantel Doug made from a local cherry tree.



(above) Doug constructed this wall of built-in bookshelves to house the couple's antiquarian collection. In keeping with the historical theme, the left-hand wall showcases family photographs dating back to the 19th century. (top right) Well into their fifth decade of marriage, the Freemans are looking forward to enjoying their home for many years to come.



optometry technology and Pam after serving 11 years as the university's associate dean of students. Along the way, they raised two children — Lynn Freeman Keller, a Monroe County deputy prosecuting attorney, and Ross Freeman, general manager at Kilroy's on Kirkwood — and several dozen other cacti that are now displayed in their greenhouse.

While the inside of the home displays these exotic flora, the setting showcases the fauna of Indiana. The 10-lot neighborhood of Summerwood has treated the Freemans to sightings of wild turkeys, hawks, woodchucks, coyotes, opossums, skunks, five kinds of woodpeckers, and a peacock that roosted on Pam's car.

As nature lovers who for many years spent their summers traveling to remote areas in a Volkswagen camper van, the Freemans treasure the wooded location. Doug, who did much of the work on the home himself including building the decks, cabinetry, and bookshelves, made sure to preserve wood from a cherry tree cleared from the lot to construct a mantel above the fireplace. At night, he takes long walks through the quiet streets, while Pam is often up before dawn to head to the Southeast YMCA.

Although the cactus was the harbinger of their transition, the couple's primary intent was to build a home that would meet their needs in retirement. All the main rooms are on the ground floor, doorways are wide, and there's plenty of space to host their monthly dinner group, a 30-year tradition. Best of all, they can spend time with 3-year-old granddaughter Addison and the newest addition to the Freeman family, granddaughter Zoë, who arrived on April 28. ✨