



2011 fall **HOME** enhancement

a look inside
**a local
double-dome
home**

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a home in two domes

By Jo Colvin
echo@echopress.com

Mike and Bev Cleary didn't want an average, everyday getaway on the lake — they wanted something unique. So instead of a boring, square cabin, they built a dome.

"It's open space, there are no supporting interior walls and you can move them around any time you want to," Mike said of a dome-shaped structure's many benefits. "It's easier to heat because it's more open."

"It also withstands very strong winds better than a flat square or rectangular structure," Bev added. "There are no straight walls to push against. It's very comforting when the winds are gale force off the lake."

Built in 1979 on Stowe Lake near Brandon, the Clearys' original rounded structure was 33 feet in diameter and had a kitchen, dining room, living room, bathroom, one bedroom and a loft in an open floor plan. Built for function rather than fashion, the dome was "very basic, very rough," and had wafer board for a ceiling.

While the dome was energy efficient and insulated with 6 1/2 inches of Fiberglas insulation, it wasn't user friendly. Access to the loft was up a ladder and the unfin-



ished basement had a dirt floor and only an outside entrance. There were few windows and it was lacking ventilation.

Although the dome served its purpose as a summer weekend escape for several years for the Clearys, who lived in the Twin Cities, they knew they wanted their dome to eventually be their home.

A MORE HOMELIKE DOME

In 2000, with plans to someday move there permanently, the couple decided to transform their dome into a year-round home.

"We needed more living space, and we didn't like the lack of ventilation," said Mike, a part-time certified public accountant and owner of Lake Country Wines.

There was one problem — it's not easy to add on to something round.

After consulting an architect, they decided the best way to go was up. This meant that the dome was lifted off its 3-foot-high first floor riser wall and was set back down on a new 9-foot high wall.

"In addition to creating a usable second story, this allowed us to place conventional doors and windows in the first floor walls and to install an interior staircase to make the lower level usable also," Mike said.

With the remodel, the couple fin-

ished the basement, adding a family room and bedroom. A spiral staircase replaced the ladder from the main floor to the loft, which was converted to a bedroom and an office.

The renovation, which took about 10 months, increased the living space from 850 to 2,000 square



Jo Colvin | Echo Press

Mike and Bev Cleary stand on the spiral staircase that leads from the main floor to the upstairs of the first dome that they built in 1979 and remodeled in 2000.



feet. And it transformed their dome into a home.

A SECOND DOME

In 2007, the Clearys wanted to make the move to their dome on a permanent basis. Again, there was a problem.

The Clearys had stuff. Lots of it.

The couple decided to construct a second dome adjacent to the first, and connect the two with a walkway.

“This was no small feat, as there were lot elevation challenges and a strong desire to incorporate the outdoor views,” Mike said.

Once again enlisting the aid of a designer, the Clearys began construction on the second dome in June 2007.

The second is larger – 36 feet in diameter – and is also taller.

“It got taller by virtue of a different configuration of triangles,” Mike explained. “This one [original dome] has 75 triangles, the new one has 105. You get height by adding new rows of triangles.”

Dome number two has 15-inch-thick exterior walls that are insulated with 13 inches of Fiberglas,



creating an energy-efficient structure, even with the large amount of window surfaces.

The new structure added another 2,500 square feet to the Cleary residence. The main floor boasts a master bedroom suite, living room, wet bar and office. The second story has a bedroom suite and a library. An unfinished basement provides plenty of storage space

for “stuff.”

Unique to the second dome is a third floor view cupola, a small observation area that also helps cool the dome by pulling air through the top.

The two domes are connected by a hallway, which the Clearys refer to as “the link.”

“We built the second [dome], stood back and looked and said,

...handcrafted to fit your lifestyle



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'How are we going to connect these?' " Mike said. "On paper it looked great, but when it came to pounding the nails in the link between the two, we kind of designed it as we went. There was not a blueprint for that."

Except for the electrical, plumbing and inside finish work, the Clearys, with the help of family and friends, did all the work themselves, which they also did when they built the initial cabin and completed the first remodel.

THE AESTHETICS

From the initial, rustic 850-square-foot dome, the Clearys' finished dome home now boasts 4,500 square feet of living space. It took from June 2007 to April 2008 to complete.

Several windows in various shapes – rectangle, circle, pentagon and triangle – let natural light stream in during the day and provide a

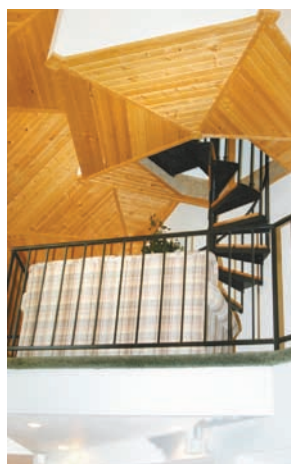
view of the twinkling stars in the night sky.

Throughout the domes and the link, a variety of wood creates an "up north" feel. The walls and ceiling are finished with white Englewood spruce; the interior doors are yellow birch; the woodwork is hard white maple; the bookcases and hutch are hickory; and the furniture is a mixture of maple, Canadian birch and cedar.

The domes are heated with a single forced air off-peak electric thermal storage furnace and the basement floor in the larger dome is heated with off-peak electric thermal storage cables.

Now that the dome is truly a home, the Clearys are content and have no intention of contemplating any further renovations.

"No, we're done!" Mike concluded. "We've been there, done that."



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