

MANSION

BALANCE SHEET

If the Creek Don't Rise

A young couple bought a piece of formerly flooded land and built their house to survive a deluge



By J.S. MARCUS

A once-in-a-century flood led to opportunity for Canadian couple Bill and Erin Kent. They got a great deal on a well-placed Calgary lot rendered vacant by floodwaters, then combined flood-proofing measures with luxury finishes to build a new two-story home with a finished basement. The \$1.279 million, four-bedroom home has an elevated first floor that starts above the high-water mark of 2013's historic Calgary deluge, while seamlessly bonded, foam-insulated foundation panels will help keep the structure dry.

With a façade of weathered cedar and limestone detailing, the 4,350-square-foot house is in the upscale neighborhood of Roxboro. The couple, both in their mid-40s, have two daughters, 11 and 13. The family moved into their new home in late 2018.

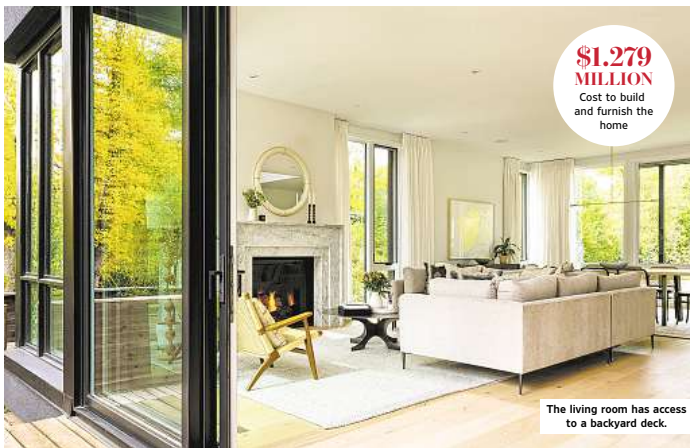
Ms. Kent, a speech pathologist, is a Roxboro native, but at the time of the June 2013 flood the pair were in Chicago, where Dr. Kent, an Ontario-raised surgeon, was finishing his residency. The Kents moved back to Canada that summer, and, eager to return to Ms. Kent's hometown, they decided in 2016 to buy the empty 1/7th-acre lot. They paid \$722,200—at least \$376,000 less than a similar lot might have cost before the flood, says Ms. Kent.

Municipal and provincial mitigation in the wake of the 2013 floods, which affected much of southern Alberta, has included improving existing reservoirs and building barriers in neighborhoods at higher risk. The couple felt confident enough in those changes to invest in the scenic spot overlooking the Elbow River. Rushing down toward Calgary from the Canadian Rockies, the Elbow had devastated the site's previous structure, a single-story 1970s home that was later torn down. The need to elevate the whole first floor meant that the outdoor decks hover above the yard, which Dr. Kent feels somewhat isolates the house from its setting. But they were able to incorporate river views into the home from an upper-floor terrace.

The couple worked with Alloy Homes, a Calgary-based company that combines architecture, construction, and contracting services. Architect Christopher Lemke, an Alloy managing partner, has experience restoring flood-damaged homes, as well working on new flood-resistant measures. He said the couple had to spend an extra \$38,000 to build here, compared with locations elsewhere in the area not generally threatened by floods.

The big challenge came when deciding exactly where to put the home's new technical facilities, which local building codes now stipulate must be elevated above the flood line.

Mr. Lemke chose to isolate the windowless utilities room in the center of the elevated first floor, while



The living room has access to a backyard deck.

\$1.279 MILLION
Cost to build and furnish the home

BUDGET (USD)

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Foundation and framing | \$116,600 |
| Window and door | \$125,600 |
| HVAC | \$21,800 |
| Limestone | \$54,200 |
| Bathrooms | \$30,000 |
| Kitchen | \$82,800 |
| Flooring | \$60,200 |
| Landscaping and exterior decks | \$43,600 |
| Lighting and electric | \$45,100 |
| Interior decoration | \$98,000 |
| Marble | \$17,300 |
| Architect's fee | \$52,700 |



Custom-made lighting from Montreal's Atelier Anaka in the stairwell.



The dining room.

using oversized windows and sliding glass doors to visually compensate for lost space elsewhere. The couple ended up spending nearly \$128,000 on their glass doors and windows, which have triple glazing to protect against bitter-cold winters.

While pre-2013 Roxboro homes had their first floors overwhelmed, the Kents felt secure enough to fill theirs with decorative splurges. "We wanted to use stuff that was native," says Dr. Kent, alluding to Canadian-designed light fixtures and a gilded leaf print that presides over the living room.

The couple spent another \$98,000 on new furniture and other decorative touches, and \$45,000 on lighting and electrical work.

The family called in Toronto-based Cromia Design—owned by Dr. Kent's sister, Amy Kent, and Ryan Martin—to work on the interiors. The studio used a process that Amy Kent likes to call "minimal but natural" to distinguish the L-shaped, open-plan first floor, which is marked by blond-wood floors and white walls.

Aesthetics were a chief concern for the exterior of the house, which is placed on a corner lot. The couple spent \$54,200 on limestone trim, instead of less expensive material, such as masonry. And they opted for an unusual slanting roof that "flares up" toward the corner, says Mr. Lemke, giving the home "a greater visual presence on its most prominent side."

The couple used Carrara marble in the kitchen, which turns the island into a stylish bar area. Elsewhere in the \$82,800 space, Cromia Design suggested a mixture of Canadian and

American elements, including a handcrafted brass light fixture from New York's Allied Maker studio.

The couple say they will stay in the house until their children have finished school, and they planned aspects of the project with a resale in mind.

"We could have gone smaller, but you have to have at least 3,000 square feet in this neighborhood," says Dr. Kent.

"Every home here has to have a gym, a spare bedroom, and a media room," he says. "So we added all that stuff."



The kitchen features a Carrara marble island.

A 2013 flood devastated a home that had been on the parcel of land that is now the location of Bill and Erin Kent's home. They bought the empty lot for \$722,200.



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