

# Labor of love

BY CATHY CHESTNUT MAR. 02, 2019 MIDNIGHT

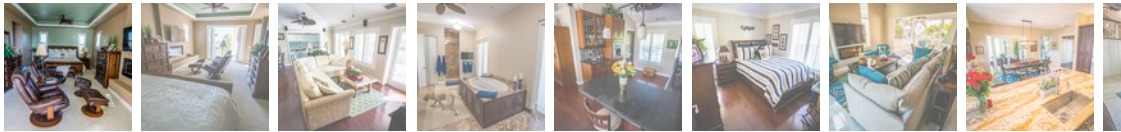
When Bob and Cindy Koenig moved into their new home, it was already full of interesting stories and comforting memories cemented through their own sweat equity.

Bob is vice president of construction for Chris-Tel Construction, a premier Fort Myers builder, so it's not surprising that he built their home on the west side of the Caloosahatchee on a bucolic site in North Fort Myers. Cindy designed the pool and sanded, stained and painted the elaborate ceiling trays. The four-bedroom, 4,000-square-foot home features six decks totaling 1,500 square feet — two open and four covered — providing varying views through venerable oak trees and options for finding shade.



Andrea Melendez

The master bedroom in Bob and Cindy Koenig's North Fort Myers home.



The Koenigs had been raising their three sons on the Cape Coral waterfront, but in 2001, Bob followed a hunch one day and traveled down Moody River Road. He discovered a unique diversity along the riverfront, “a piece of Old Florida,” he recalls. “It was all still a ranch with cattle and horses, and the other houses were built over time from the late ’50s to the current time.”

An unoppressive, mid-century Michigan home that had clearly weathered many storms was for sale, but when Bob inquired, it had already sold. A year later, he returned on a whim and it was on the market again, so Bob coaxed Cindy into looking at the run-down house again, and they bought it. After living in the old home, which had clearly sustained past flooding, they built a three-car garage with a two-bedroom carriage house and



demolished the old home. When the Koenigs originally moved in, one son was off to college, while one was in high school and the third in middle school.

In 2015, they began working with Fort Myers architect Joyce Owens on the design of the new home. Owens, a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, is well-known for her modern design acumen — although the Koenigs leaned toward more traditional, Old Florida sensibilities. Owens honored their desires and was more focused on taking advantage of the site’s natural amenities.

“It was really about understanding the site and the potential that was there,” Joyce says.



Andrea Melendez

It was all about this view for The Koenigs. They bought the land with an old house on it because of this view.

And she succeeded, Cindy says. “She nailed it.”

The new home

Owens’ split-level design married the new home with the carriage house, which Bob built in 2004 to such rigorous hurricane codes that Cindy recalls it was quiet inside while Hurricane Irma raged in 2017.

During construction, Bob worked on their new home on nights and weekends. He and Cindy did most of the work, except finish trades such as tiling, painting and carpentry, and specialties that require licensed subcontractors: electrical, air conditioning, plumbing and roofing. The project suffered a few unexpected delays, like when their carpenter disappeared, leaving his tools behind, and they had to find another one.

“I’d come over and they both would be exhausted and sweaty,” Joyce recalls, adding she would feel a tinge of guilt if she overstayed because she felt she was cutting into their work time. Cindy laughs that the early winter sunset did cut down on productivity.

“We did everything,” Cindy says.

The ceilings are made of cypress milled in North Florida, and Cindy finished them.

“I’m not allowed to paint much,” Bob halfway jokes. “We put a lot of work and pride in it.”

“I’m not sure I would do it again,” retorts his wife of 40 years.

“We’re still talking to each other, so it all worked out,” he adds.

The Koenig family is tall — Cindy’s the shortest at 6 feet, with Bob and the beefy football boys clocking in at 6-foot-5 or more. Owens says she kept their heights in mind during the design. The living room features soaring ceilings and is flanked by sliding glass windows to



augment the feeling of spaciousness and openness, for instance. The youngest son’s 280-pound strength moved along the installation of those “tremendously heavy” sliding doors, Bob notes.

Both agree that their favorite room in the house is the sunroom (a guestroom) featuring three walls of windows. One side overlooks the woods, another intersecting canals. The best view is of an old oak tree that was likely knocked down during Hurricane Donna in 1960 but has kept on growing horizontally. It became a central feature to Owen’s design.

“We built up to that oak. That was the limit,” says Cindy. When the grown kids visit with the grandchildren, “they fight over who gets to stay there,” she adds.



Andrea Melendez

It was all about this view for The Koenings. They bought the land with an old house on it because of this view. The balcony off the Master bedroom.



Bob agrees, “It’s a spectacular room. It’s very calming.”

They both agree the master bedroom suite is another favorite. The master level is at the top of the carriage house, with a view of the river and distant Edison and Ford Winter Estates beyond from the uppermost deck.

“We didn’t anticipate having that type of view,” Bob says. “It was a bit of surprise.”

The Koenigs like to entertain and never curtailed hosting large holiday or football-watching parties, whether they were living in the leaky old house or in the tight confines of the carriage house. Shortly after moving into their spacious new home in 2017, they hosted a big Halloween affair. Sure, as with most every labor of love, there is still work to be done: a closet here, a detailed accent there, and then the landscaping. But Cindy and Bob don’t seem to be in too much of a hurry.

“We like it all,” they agree.

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