

Eco-Friendly Updates for Year-Round Comfort

written by **Stacey Manganelli** photographed by **Taylor Reschka**

Thoughtful, cost-effective changes were the key to unlocking the latent possibilities of this Southwest Roanoke home.



Choosing to Work with Building Specialists, Inc.

While John and Karen loved some elements of the home, they also wanted to make improvements. They had been remodeling it since 2021 when they moved in. They completed one project after another, including knocking out a wall, installing ceiling lights, installing new drains and building a garage. They also replaced the plumbing, electrical wiring, paneling and a dropped ceiling. They completed all these projects with a company other than Building Specialists, Inc., or BSI.

These other projects gave Karen and John experiences that they could compare to working with BSI.

Their conclusion?

“We’ve been very happy with BSI. It’s been a very good experience,” Karen says.

Karen and John attribute the tidy timeline of this renovation to the professional expertise of Camden Walters, the project superintendent. This renovation took only five months to complete. Many of the smaller, less-involved projects that they completed before contracting with BSI took almost the same amount of time.

Karen and John believe this is because Walters did a great job coordinating everything,

When they moved inland from the coast, John and Karen fell in love with the location of their Southwest home. Thanks to a renovation with Building Specialists, Inc., they’ve also now also fallen in love with the look and feel of it. A series of small, budget-conscious changes have made a big impact in revealing its hidden potential.

Perks of Location and Lower-Level Living

John and Karen moved to Roanoke from Chesapeake in 2021 to be closer to their kids, who stayed in the area after attending college.

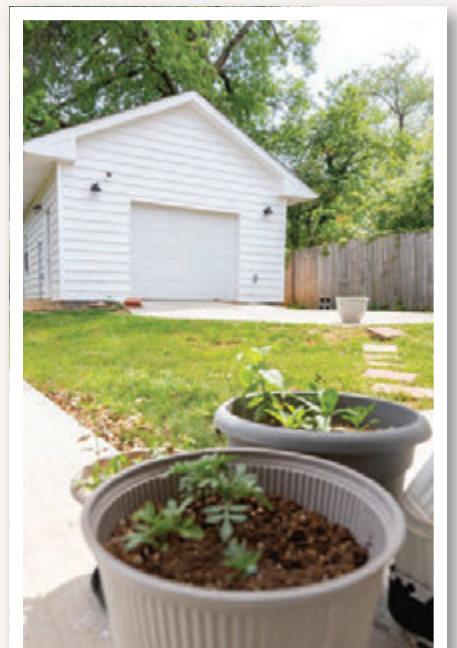
After choosing Roanoke, they settled on the Southwest neighborhood because of its walkability and pleasant social interactions. Karen explains, “Many people walk in the area, and people are always saying hello as they pass on the street. I love having sidewalks.”

Karen’s job influenced their decision to purchase this particular home within Southwest. As a nurse practitioner who has done home health, she has seen many people who can’t get up and down stairs because of a medical condition.

Karen didn’t want to ever have to convert her living room into a bedroom as she and John age, so comfortable lower-level living was a must-have. This home already had a first floor with two bedrooms and a bathroom. They’ve made potential first floor living even more comfortable with this renovation.



Karen chose the tile, flooring, paint colors, etc., by looking at examples online, watching HGTV for inspiration and picking what appealed to her.





The siding color of the addition is wicker, the shingles are pewter and the metal roof is charcoal.

including when different tradesmen had to work on things at the same time. Walters continuously coordinated getting someone into the house to complete work without large, unnecessary lags between different projects.

John and Karen also believe that hiring BSI to oversee everything made more financial sense. Karen explains, “BSI had good communication and advocated with subcontractors to remove asbestos quickly and get fair prices.” Karen and John wouldn’t have known how to determine fair pricing on their own.

Energy Efficient Heating and Cooling

BSI connected John and Karen with architect Chris Hudson of Cadence Architecture to make the plans for the renovation. While John and Karen initially considered expanding the upper level by adding a large dormer, Hudson knew it wouldn’t be cost-effective. He was instead guided by this principle that architects use: “Identify an appealing, untapped amenity and leverage it.” In this case, the most appealing, untapped amenity was a private, sunlit and relatively flat backyard.

Leveraging an amenity that was already there also helped the renovation team to address one of their main goals: keeping the home warmer in winter.

Built in 1946 atop a concrete masonry slab,

it required a lot of energy to heat. John and Karen consequently wanted to incorporate passive heating into the design for the addition. Passive heating captures the sun in the building’s materials and then releases that heat when the sun is absent.

The team achieved this by adding energy-efficient windows. With the architect’s plans in hand, BSI knocked out the windowless back wall of the kitchen and added on the sunroom. The sunroom’s windows allow six hours of direct sunlight to enter during the day, warming the house up considerably.

The new bedroom has energy-efficient windows for this same purpose.

Additional temperature control was

achieved with a two-zone mini split. A mini split is often used to control the temperature of an area without redoing ductwork, as the mini-split systems are ductless.

The two-zone mini split allows for temperature control of two distinct areas with one unit. In this case, it heats and cools the new, larger bedroom and the sunroom. Redoing the wiring to connect to main heat and air conditioning would have been much more expensive.

Project manager Walters says, “With a new open concept design and the sunrise visible through the sunroom windows, the home is now bright and comfortable.”

Maximizing the House You Already Have

While the addition provides an extra 500 square feet of living space, it also makes better use of the space that was already there.

The square footage of the kitchen didn’t change, but it feels more open since BSI removed a wall that separated the kitchen and dining area. They also removed soffits that Karen says made the space feel “dark and small.”

Storage is much more practical thanks to new cabinets and a coffee bar. These allow Karen to fit everything she needs to in the kitchen without struggle.



John and Karen had looked at semi-custom cabinets and then consulted with Rutrough. When they discovered that the custom cabinets from Rutrough weren’t much more expensive, they chose to go custom for that element of the kitchen. Karen says the carpenters at Rutrough were “very easy to work with” and the quality of the work was “excellent.”

The countertops are from Johnson Granite. They are Carrera Mist quartz.



The bedroom has three windows that were in the original plans. Karen requested a fourth window on the side wall because she wanted a cross-lighting effect.

When It’s All Worth It

With this renovation, John and Karen’s formerly cramped living has become expansive.

They have increased the resale value of their home, as the layout will appeal to many people if they ever move. The home is also more comfortable for the two of them for as long as they live there.

They have another large bedroom to choose from if they transition to first floor living, and are enjoying observing the wildlife through the sunroom windows. The original bedroom closet that was just a few feet wide and couldn’t fit their clothes is now a distant memory.

While the journey has taken years, the Karen and John say teaming up with BSI on this renovation finally moved them forward in the way they wanted. After years of limping along without a contractor overseeing everything, Karen and John said, “If we’re going to do it, let’s just do it. So we did. And I’m so glad we did.” ☆



Another storage win was taking a closet that was already present and reframing it to add a linen closet. The linen closet had a lot of dead space that no one knew about until BSI started knocking out walls. BSI reframed the closet to be bigger and use the dead space, thereby leveraging an untapped amenity that would have remained hidden.

Karen opted for wall-to-wall reach-in closets rather than walk-in closets. While she likes walk-in closets, she didn’t want to lose square footage for the main living space in the home. She views a lot of the space of a walk-in closet as walking space, not direct storage space.

Finally, Karen has a front-loading washer and dryer for the first time. She loves that they’re stackable and save floor space.

Project manager Walters says, “The best remodels aren’t always the grandest; it’s often the small, thoughtful changes that make the biggest impact in the functionality and comfort of your home and maximize your budget.”



The tile in the mudroom, laundry room and sun room is Adrock Nickel #27 with silver grout from Morris Tile. The rest of the home is luxury vinyl flooring.



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