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APRIL 2007 MAGAZINE

**FREE**

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cover story

# Empty Nesters Rebuilt House to Create Special Spaces

By SANDRA BROWN KELLY

Barry and Libba Wolfe wanted a house to suit their "empty nester" lifestyle, and Barry had pledged to never, ever buy another old house, or one without a downstairs bedroom.

"So we bought an older house without a bedroom downstairs, and it was his idea," says Libba Wolfe.

They fell for the 1927 Tudor house in South Roanoke and set about making it fit them. With the help of architects Earl Shumate and Jennifer Lewis, and Roanoke contractor Building Specialists, the Wolfes got an updated house with a first floor master suite.

The old section of the house contains the original woodwork, doors, fireplace, windows and floors.

In the project, an addition gave the couple a new kitchen with sitting area and a master bedroom on the first level. The old kitchen became a his-and-hers showers room. A loft was added upstairs.



Wolfe house was expanded in 2004 for current owners

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"We don't have a big den where families sit around to watch TV," Libba notes. "The house really is designed for how we like to live."

The house, one of three on this year's Garden Tour, features a huge kitchen with a two-story ceiling and an island so large that when Libba first saw it she thought she "had made a major mistake".

Not so. The island serves as a good spot for guests or as a catchall for Barry's photography equipment. In addition to being a busy dentist with multiple offices, Barry is an accomplished photographer whose works have been displayed.

Libba, a former executive with The Roanoke Times and now a garden columnist for the newspaper, works fulltime as a volunteer. She has worked with the Roanoke Fine Arts Council, the Free Clinic and most recently she has begun helping the Boys and Girls Club.

When the house was renovated and expanded, the couple set up a digital office in what had been a bedroom on the second floor, although the coexistence has become

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## cover story



*Bookcases in dining room example of multiple use of space*

more difficult as Barry's photo equipment has grown.

As a result, the loft, which overlooks the kitchen, contains a printer so large it had to be delivered on a pallet, Libba notes.

"The loft was to be my quiet reading place where I could sip tea," she says. "But when have I sit and sipped tea?"

Long before the printer arrived, the loft had become a workout area complete with elliptical trainer.

The couple's interests are reflected in the furnishings. Works by local artists and photography by B. Wolfe are featured throughout the home. Collections of antique cameras and books are used to accessorize the bookcases that were added in the dining room during renovation.

A piece of bark cloth, brought back from Africa, serves as a dining table centerpiece.

In addition to volunteering, Libba set out to create the landscaping for the expanded house.

"We had no foundation plantings when we moved in three years ago. We had nothing out back but three overgrown forsythia bushes and two dogwood trees," Libba says.

Visitors for the garden tour will see just how much that has changed. A wall was built of old brick and memorabilia, such as wine bottles saved from Barry's 60th birthday party. Stone steps were repaired in recent weeks. And, Libba has planted and planted, including perennials and at least 800 bulbs.

She is now unsure just what some of the plantings were, and has been curious about the plants that began peeking



*Large kitchen island comfortable for food preparation or as serving area for guests*

through the ground in recent weeks.

"We will just see what happens back there," she says.