



LIVING THE Suite Life

Bill and Evelyn Olsen may live with their daughter and son-in-law, but the renovated lower level is a home that's all their own.

Story by ELIZABETH HOCK

FROM THE OUTSIDE, Dr. John "J" and Cheryl Entwistle's house looks like a typical single-family home. Similar to others in South Roanoke's upscale Wellington neighborhood, the decade-old manor house has plenty of curb appeal and space — 7,000 square feet — more than enough for the couple and their four, soon-to-be five, young children. One feature sets it apart: It's two houses in one.

Cheryl's parents, Dr. Bill Olsen, 72, and his wife, Evelyn, 70, live there, too, in the basement. But this is no dark, musty dwelling. It's been customized to fit the couple's needs and remodeled into a pristine compact apartment that allows privacy when needed and intimacy when wanted. The 2,000-square-foot suite has its own feel, yet meshes with the ambiance of the upstairs.

Multigenerational living is becoming more common, but



HIGH STYLE ON THE BOTTOM FLOOR

A contemporary kitchen, 10-foot high ceilings and plenty of windows give Bill and Evelyn Olsen's suite a light and airy feel.



BLANK CANVAS

The upstairs of the three-story house required only new paint before the families moved in. Downstairs, the challenge for architect Earle Shumate of Hughes Associates Architects & Engineers of Roanoke was to redesign a basement whose focus was a wet bar into an appealing in-law apartment.

"It was a walk-out and it was pretty much empty," Cheryl recalls. "It was like a blank canvas with open rooms that could be whatever you wanted them to be."

During the three months of renovations by Roanoke's Building Specialists, Inc., the Olsens stayed in a guest room with bath, separate from the apartment, on the lower level. "They made those two rooms their home; they were troupers," says Cheryl.

One of the most attractive features in place were the large windows that flood the family room/kitchen and the bedroom with light. "That's what drew us to the house," according to Bill. "It's not like a basement; it's a lower level." Ten-foot-high ceilings help, too.

Steps from the main floor lead to a pair of tall glass doors, installed for privacy and to mute the noise from above ("It helps a little bit," Evelyn says with a smile). They open to the apartment's living area/kitchen. Quartz countertops, a dining room table and a bar that seats six were added in the kitchen area. To the left is a small sitting area with comfortable seating and set apart by architectural columns that replicate those on the main floor. To the right is another gathering spot with a piano and television. Throughout, the colors are muted with gray walls and poured-concrete floor.

Sliding barn doors lead from the bedroom, used as a pool room by the previous owners, to a large walk-in closet, formerly a craft room. Past the washer/dryer is an office/study that displays items linked to the Olsens' Norwegian heritage. "It was a wine cellar," Bill recalls, "but really it was just an empty room."

Another feature the Olsens treasure is the view from their suite. Past a porch with a swing, a favorite gathering spot for grandchildren, stands a gazebo and fiberglass columns. The backyard stretches as far as the eye can see, part of the property's 4.3 acres.

"It's like living outside inside," Bill explains. "We have panorama [view] and look out on a beautiful back yard. We see a lot of deer."



INSIDE, OUTSIDE

The Olsens' patio provides their own outdoor space and a private entrance to the suite. In the sitting area, classic columns and arches mix with contemporary etched concrete floors.

the Entwistles and Olsens have been way ahead of the trend. Through the years, they've lived together in several locations. The extended family has embraced the arrangement, relishing the benefits and hammering out challenges.

A position as a vascular neurosurgeon with Carilion brought J, 36, Cheryl, 38, and kids to Roanoke last year from Jacksonville, Florida. The couple looked at a number of houses on the market, but most needed extensive renovations, according to Cheryl.

"This one was kind of our out-of-reach house," she says. "I told J, 'let's just look at it and dream.' But it actually worked out. We're in love with this house, but we had to redo the whole lower level to make it work."

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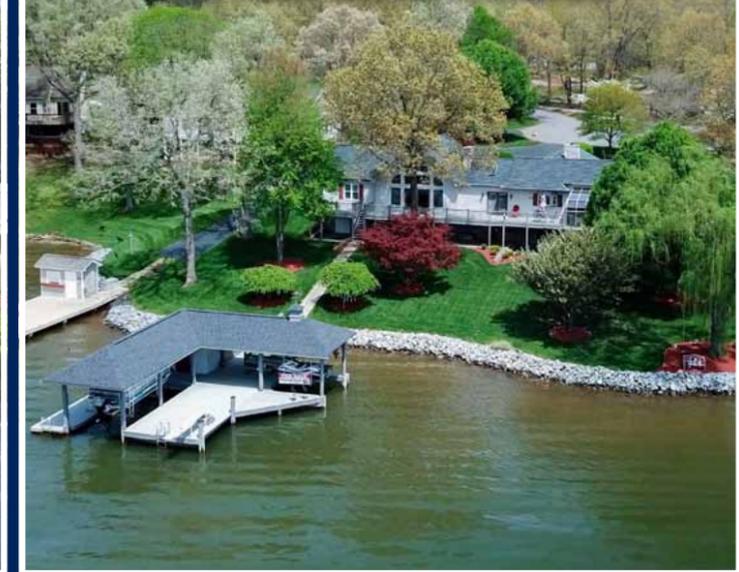
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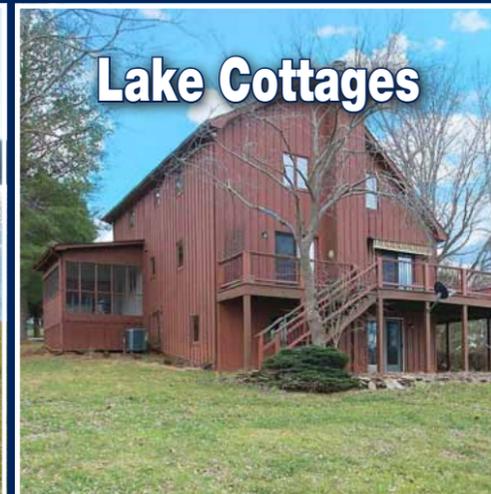
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HOW IT WORKS

There's a lot of knowledge living under one roof. There's J, the neurosurgeon; Cheryl, who has worked in marketing and banking; and Evelyn, a retired nurse. Bill worked as a mechanical engineer for Exxon, before returning to school to become a minister. He conducts informal counseling and facilitates Biblical Marriage Seminars for Belmont Baptist Church in Roanoke.

The families first lived together in New Jersey while J, a graduate of the Edward Via Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg, was doing rotations. They did it again in Florida, where J completed a fellowship.

"We learned we could live together," Cheryl says. "We've all always gotten along. Even when J and I were dating, we actually spent a good amount of time with them in New Jersey."

The arrangement was not foreign to Bill and Evelyn; her elderly mother lived with them for about five years before her death. "I had to physically take care of [Evelyn's] mother, but I felt like we were honoring her, and that was important," Bill explains.

Sharing a home works for all three generations and the dogs that reside there. Lili, the Olsens' 14-year-old

ALL TOGETHER
Cheryl Entwistle (left) and her children (from left) Paxton, 20 months; Sigge, 3; Myles, 6; and Eloise, 8, live with her parents, Bill and Evelyn Olsen, and their dog, Lili. (Cheryl's husband, J, is not pictured.) The brood is expanding: The Entwistles are expecting a baby girl in August.

Top Photo DAVID HUNGATE; Left Photo HEATHER ROUSSEAU

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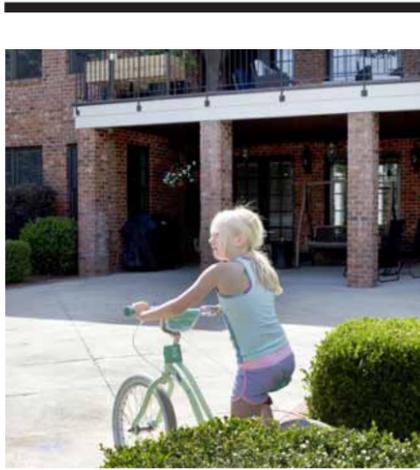
dachshund/Chihuahua/Jack Russell mix, and the Entwistle's terrier mix, Doc, 13, have adjusted. Mostly, that's by ignoring each other, according to Evelyn.

The families have had to acclimate to some role reversal.

"I'm not the patriarch," and that's taken some adjustment, Bill says. Minor disagreements, such as one with J over the knobs on a cabinet, typically are worked through.

The families eat dinner together most every night. But now, it's Evelyn who assists Cheryl in preparation instead of the other way around.

Issues involving the Entwistle children is at times challenging, the three agree. As any grandparent knows, often the less said, the better. But the kids' affection for their grandparents is obvious. The Olsens say they are happy to pitch in with babysitting, but it doesn't control their lives.



"We have the privilege of watching these kids grow up."

"We babysit here and there during the week," Evelyn says.

"I encourage [J and Cheryl] to go out [on weekends]. And it helps that the kids are well-behaved."

Besides experience and a willingness to talk out problems, the three say a shared faith has helped make their situation work.

"We're all on the same religious page," Bill points out.

Financially, it has benefited the Olsens, who for much of their lives lived on a minister's salary. They contribute to expenses.

Cheryl and her parents don't hesitate when listing the advantages of their multi-generation home. "We've learned from them so much," Cheryl says.

"It's great just being together," Evelyn chimes in.

Says Bill, "We have the privilege of watching these kids grow up." ★

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