

Architect R.J. Kietzman plants his flag on KC's Beacon Hill

July 11th, 2014



Architect Randy Kietzman and his wife, Jane, live in a home Randy designed in Beacon Hill that is one of several the couple have built in the neighborhood. **David Pulliam** – The Kansas City Star

By Alice Thorson

Drive east on 24th Street just past Troost Avenue, and you're in Beacon Hill. Construction in this urban residential neighborhood has been heating up, especially in the 2400 block of Forest Avenue, where architect Randy Kietzman and his wife, Jane Kietzman, of Kietzman Urban Homes, have been designing and building homes for the past three years.

How did you get involved with the Beacon Hill area?

We stumbled on it in 2005. Jane and I came from the suburbs and thought since our kids are grown, we should move downtown. We drove around and looked at the West Side and all around downtown. We drove on the Paseo and saw a sign for Beacon Hill. It had this great view of downtown but nothing was happening. We saw a "for sale" sign on this lot and bought it.

We felt like we were explorers and planted our flag. We had no idea of any of the issues or what the other lots cost. We saw the view and decided “This is cool.”

Issues?

At the time, Beacon Hill was going through bureaucratic red tape, and it was very hard to purchase a lot. Things weren't being developed.

We bought this lot ready and willing and able to build a house. The alley to the west hadn't been built, and it was necessary for access to the garage. We were assured the alley would be built, so we designed the house and waited through a number of delays while everything was tied up in the courts. After a year, we thought, “Let's find a place to build another house,” and we ended up on the West Side at 20th and Summit. Within a month of purchasing two lots there, the developers started construction of the alley.

So you eventually got your house in Beacon Hill.

We built this house before we sold our West Side house and moved in here in 2011. The developers (J.E. Dunn Construction Co., Taliaferro & Browne, and Zimmer Real Estate Services) decided to do a broadened green space, “the Forest Loop,” and to develop 20 lots in the northwest quadrant between 24th and 25th streets. Jane and I decided to buy lots and build houses. It was kind of jumping off the end of the Earth for us.

So your involvement here goes way beyond building your own house.

We bought five of the 20 lots with plans to start building. We had an agreement with the city that we would start construction by the end of three years. We ended up with seven lots. We built houses for Jane's brother and our son on two more lots.

There are 10 in all that I've designed or built or have under construction; Jane has been the builder on six of the 10. John Hoffman bought seven lots. Jane and I have designed and built one house for him, and I designed two others. We've worked with John before on new houses we've built and designed south of KU Med Center.



Randy Kietzman sprays down the entryway deck of his Beacon Hill house, which has a water feature.
David Pulliam – The Kansas City Star

What's your design philosophy?

The easy way to make money is to come up with a floor plan, build to the lowest common denominator and sell to the masses. What we're doing is difficult but more satisfying.

We're not building by assembly line. We're not building minivans; we're building custom sports cars — buildings for people who appreciate good design and good architecture.

We look at each lot completely differently — what does each site have to offer? — and let the design evolve from the site.

Can you give me an example?

Lot 1 at the southeast corner of 24th and Forest offered a magnificent view, so I designed the house with seven spaces open to that view.

Lot 2 next door to the east opens into a 45-foot-wide green space, and we worked very hard to maintain the existing trees. Instead of doing a basement, we're creating a terrace/patio area beneath the house with a glass panel floor in the room above. It's like a bridge between the garage and the front of the house. In every house, we try to do something we haven't done before.



Many found pieces, including this wooden mirror and countertop in one of the bathrooms, accent the Kietzmans' house.

David Pulliam – The Kansas City Star

What's the vocabulary in terms of materials and style?

We're not trying to replicate early 20th-century architecture. We're designing 21st-century homes within the framework of that tradition.

The developers set certain restrictions to protect property investment. The exterior materials are limited to shingles, lap siding, tongue and groove cedar, brick and stucco — and no vinyl. The master document stipulates a desire to make a neighborhood based on more traditional settings: front porches, rear-loading garages, two stories, no ranches, on narrow lots. They want pitched roofs — no flat roofs — traditional massing in the shape of the house and traditional materials, but with a contemporary flair.

What about the interior design?

We're trying to make it comfortable for 21st-century living, with the kitchen, dining and living areas interconnected. We favor warm, soothing colors, and we love wood. We're always searching for new ideas and materials.

What's the price range on these houses?

\$300,000 to \$750,000. The city took great joy in us selling a house for a half million east of Troost.

And who is buying?

We have a retired couple from Prairie Village, a surgeon from Truman with kids in college, single attorneys, a retired priest, a couple with four kids. We have people of every racial background, age and sex orientation.

Tell me about your place.

It's three-story, open plan with a front terrace that extends the main living area and a small, cantilevered deck off the master bedroom that takes in the skyline view. This house was an award winner for best modern architecture in Kansas City Homes and Gardens in March/April 2012.

We planned to put in cork floors but at auction saw some teak flooring and bought it. We can switch gears fast. The kitchen counters are Corian granite Green Bamboo. Everything else, including the sage cabinets and green walls, keys off that.

The furnishings are low with clean lines.

The dining room table and chairs are from House of Denmark. I replaced the scuffed top with a drip painting I did and covered it with glass. We love old midcentury stuff, like the floral upholstered chair in the living room that Jane restored.

In the bathroom, Jane used a piece of redwood for the vanity and another slab of natural wood to frame a mirror.

Several years ago, her brother was bringing her a piano and it fell out of his truck. We kept the box of piano keys and we made piano key art.



The Kietzmans' dog, Rici, relaxes on a mid-century chair that Jane Kietzman restored. **David Pulliam** – The Kansas City Star



The wall art was made from the remains of a piano that was dropped and broken during moving. **David Pulliam** – The Kansas City Star



Randy and Jane Kietzman and their dog, Rici, relax at their Beacon Hill home. The main level of the house features an open floor plan.
David Pulliam – The Kansas City Star



The main deck of Randy and Jane Kietzman's Beacon Hill home has a good view of the Kansas City skyline, a feature that first drew the couple to the property.
David Pulliam – The Kansas City Star