

Best of Show Stunner





Arbor Haus kitchen remodel thrills homeowners — and CotY award judges

BY AMY CARLSON GUSTAFSON

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More than a decade before starting his own contracting business, Nate Stangler was a snowboarding instructor at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort in Wyoming. The Minnesota native learned some important skills as he taught people how to navigate their way on the slippery slopes.

“Patience and understanding — and being an excellent communicator,” Stangler said about what he learned as a snowboard instructor. “And checking for understanding. You have to make sure people understand what you’re saying.”

Those skills have been a vital part of Stangler’s success. Even though he launched the Excelsior-based Arbor Haus just three years ago, he’s already racking up major awards.



In November, Stangler and his small crew were honored with three Contractor of the Year (CotY) awards from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry of Minnesota. Not only did a kitchen remodel they did for husband and wife clients Jeff Nowak and Jenny Butenhoff win a gold award at the event, it also snagged the coveted “best of show” prize.

“We were just excited that we took home a gold award,” Stangler said. “When we found out our kitchen project was rated the highest of more than 90 entries (to win best in show), we were stunned. Completely awestruck.”

Stangler says since receiving the accolades, he’s seen a spike in calls coming into his “boutique remodeling shop.”

“Our phone has been ringing off the hook,” he said. “We have folks who are willing to put money down on a project with us after only one meeting. They want to get on our calendar. It’s changed the game immensely. We knew we did great work before, but to have folks validate that means a lot to us.”

Butenhoff can believe it. “We’ve been so happy with all his work,” she said. “And he’s a genuinely nice guy. You can work with people and they do a good job, but you might not connect with them. Nate’s someone you want to be friends with outside the job. He’s so conscientious. If something isn’t right, he wants to make it right. He wants you to be happy.”



BAKER'S BLISS IN CHANHASSEN

Stangler first met Jeff Nowak at the Commons, a co-working space in Excelsior. Both were launching start-up businesses — Stangler with Arbor Haus and Nowak with Rocket Man Digital. Nowak and Butenhoff were looking for someone to redo the lower level of their 1993 Chanhassen home they've lived in for eight years. Tammy Magney, an architect and co-owner of the Commons, suggested Stangler.

"Nate did our basement first, so we knew him pretty well," Butenhoff said.

The basement was such a hit, their next-door neighbors hired Stangler to remodel their lower level. That lower-level project also won a silver at this year's CotY awards.

Then came the kitchen. Nowak and Butenhoff once again enlisted architect Magney, the Stangler-led Arbor Haus crew and interior designer Lindy McClure to tackle the project.

Butenhoff loves to bake everything from elaborate cakes

sculpted with fondant to fun, decorated cookies. This meant the kitchen had to be designed with her baking needs front and center. Stangler appropriately dubbed the project "Baker's Bliss."

"It started with me not liking my kitchen appliances," Butenhoff said. "I guess the less expensive route would have been to replace them. But then we started looking at the efficiency of the kitchen layout. We had a refrigerator that you couldn't open if the dishwasher was open."

With "Baker's Bliss," Stangler was determined to give the couple everything they asked for in a kitchen with the biggest challenge being the project's time frame. While they started designing and dreaming about the remodel last year, the physical work was packed into a few months: Stangler crammed 16 weeks of work into 12 to make sure the new kitchen was ready for the couple's youngest son's high school graduation party at the beginning of May.



The result?

A bright white, blue and gray palette lightening up the space that now includes dual dishwashers, touch-activated faucets and soap dispensers, appliances that seemingly disappear into the walls, a custom baker's station with a large lazy Susan making it easy for Butenhoff to access all her supplies, oversized apron sink, high-end appliances, custom wood cabinets and a grand kitchen island at the heart of it all.

The project also featured an inviting breakfast nook with corner booth overlooking their woody back yard. Their dog, Puck, even got his own cush-

ioned area with an outdoor view and a place at the base of the kitchen island for his food and water.

"They have the nicest kitchen I've ever seen," Stangler said. "They didn't miss a beat. They have dual dishwashers so she has clean dishes when she's baking. Everything is hidden — it's panel-ready so it all just blends away. There's a drawer microwave, which is a newer concept. It comes out and you put dishes into it instead of reaching high over your head. There's a Cuisinart toaster recessed into the wall — so it's not even taking up counter space."



HAPPILY, EVER AFTER

The first thing that Butenhoff baked in one of her new ovens was a delicious batch of M&M monster cookies for the Arbor Haus team.

“It’s enjoyable to work in,” she said about her new kitchen space. “I don’t get frustrated anymore. My cookies aren’t burning because my appliances aren’t working right. It’s just the efficiency of everything. You can have multiple people working in here and you’re not bumping into each other.

“Some people redo a kitchen just to redo a kitchen,” she continued. “But for me it was about getting things in the right spot to use it efficiently because I use it more for just preparing a meal a couple times a week. It’s worth patience in the long run because you’re not going to be happy with how things turn out if you’re rushed. I think we thought of everything with this kitchen.”

At a recent party the couple hosted, not one person left the kitchen, which wouldn’t have been possible in their old space.

Butenhoff says her favorite thing about the remodel is her baker’s cabinet that contains everything she needs to whip up one of her delectable creations, while Nowak loves the double dishwashers.

“There’s never a dirty dish laying around in the kitchen. And if there is, I hear about it,” he laughed.

“Nate definitely overdelivered,” Nowak added. “We love it.”

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