

NARI MINNESOTA – 2026 ROTY AWARDS

PROJECT: THE NEXT LEVEL

CATEGORY: ENTIRE HOUSE \$500,000 - \$750,000

Our clients, a young family, loved their home, lake views, and deeded lake access, but the small, divided layout no longer supported their growing family. The kitchen lacked storage and gathering space, the main living areas felt disconnected, and much of the upper level was unfinished and unusable. They needed the functionality of a larger home without giving up the location and lake lifestyle they loved—and budget was a primary concern.

Rather than relying on costly new square footage, the design focused on maximizing the existing structure and directing the family's investment where it would have the greatest impact. The main level was completely reworked, removing walls to connect the kitchen and living room. The new kitchen provides custom cabinetry, a large seating island, improved appliance placement, and significantly more storage and preparation space. A new fireplace anchors the living area, while enlarged windows bring in natural light and better capture the lake views.

The existing unfinished upper level presented the project's greatest opportunity. Transforming this underutilized space allowed the family to dramatically increase the home's usable square footage within the existing structure. The completed level now includes three bedrooms, two bathrooms, laundry, and customized storage. The primary suite was positioned toward the lake views and includes a private bathroom with a walk-in shower and custom vanity.

Throughout construction, another critical objective was protecting the fully finished existing basement while completing extensive structural and remodeling work above it.

The exterior was substantially rebuilt to accommodate the finished second level. New rooflines, siding, windows, trim, and an updated deck create a cohesive appearance while maintaining the approachable character and scale of the original home.

Through strategic planning and thoughtful reuse of existing space, the family gained the functionality of a much larger home while preserving the property, lake views, deeded lake access, finished basement, and character they already loved.

CLIENT NEEDS

- Transform the compact home into a functional full-time family residence
- Maximize the existing structure while remaining mindful of the young family's budget
- Finish the previously unusable upper level to maximize existing square footage
- Protect and preserve the fully finished existing basement during extensive construction above
- Add three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and customized storage upstairs
- Add a dedicated upstairs laundry for convenient access from the bedrooms
- Create a private primary suite oriented toward the lake views
- Enlarge the hall bathroom to better serve the family
- Open the main level and connect the kitchen and family room



- Increase kitchen storage, preparation space, seating, and dedicated pantry space
- Position the kitchen sink to capture the lake views
- Incorporate additional built-in storage within the family room
- Create a practical, organized mudroom for everyday family use
- Relocate two home offices out of the basement and create dedicated, functional workspaces within the main living areas
- Add a fireplace and create a comfortable family gathering area
- Improve natural light and preserve lake views throughout the home
- Update the deck to expand outdoor living
- Preserve the property's lake views and valued deeded lake access
- Maintain the character and approachable scale of the original home
- Retain the existing staircase in its original location and design the new upper-level layout around it

BEFORE PHOTOS



KITCHEN

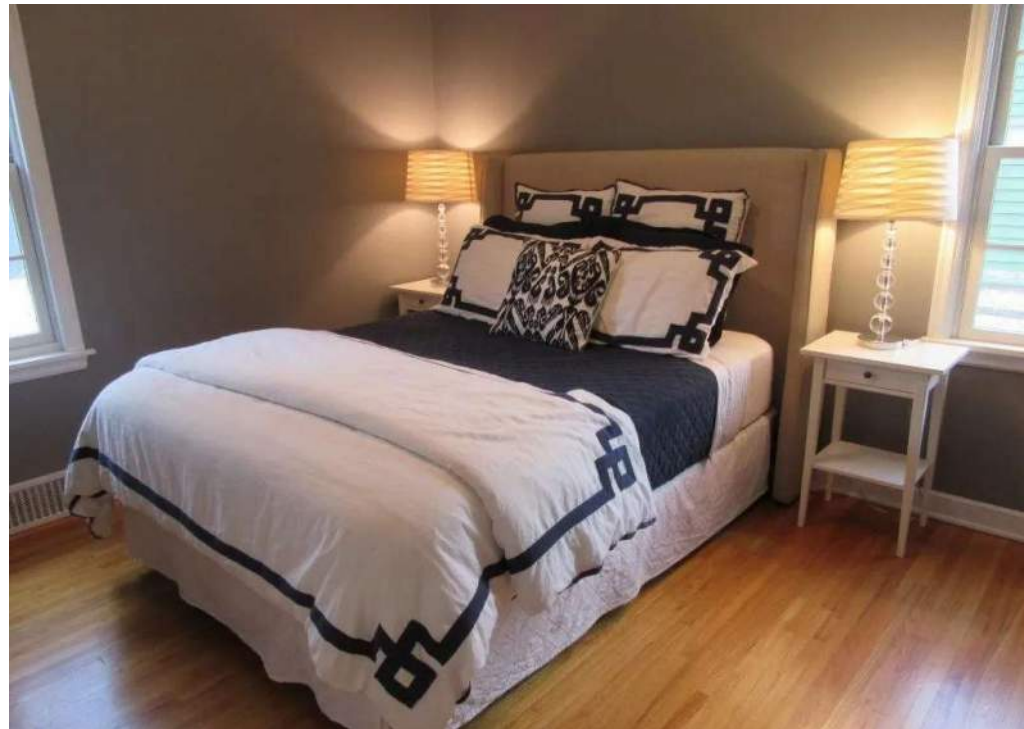


SEATING NOOK

BEFORE PHOTOS



FAMILY ROOM



BEDROOM 2

BEFORE PHOTOS



BEDROOM 1



UPSTAIRS

BEFORE PHOTOS



UPSTAIRS

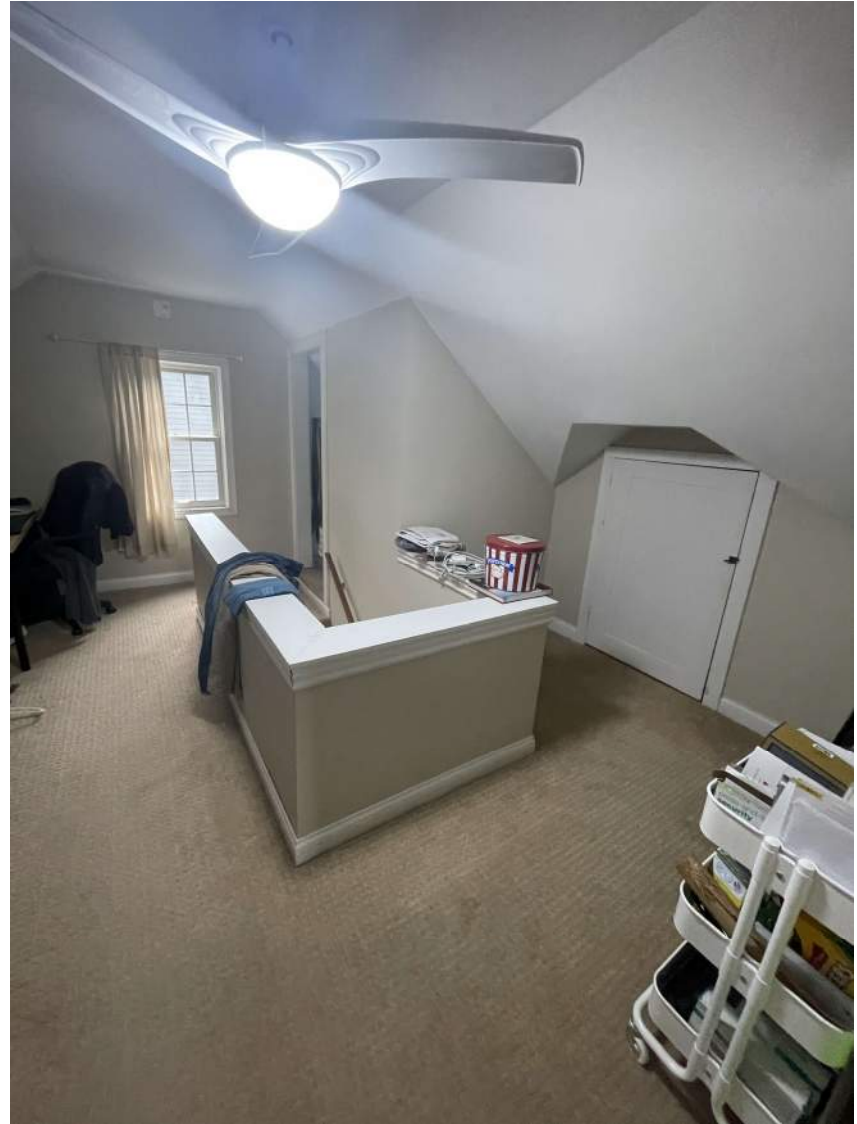


HALL BATH

BEFORE PHOTOS

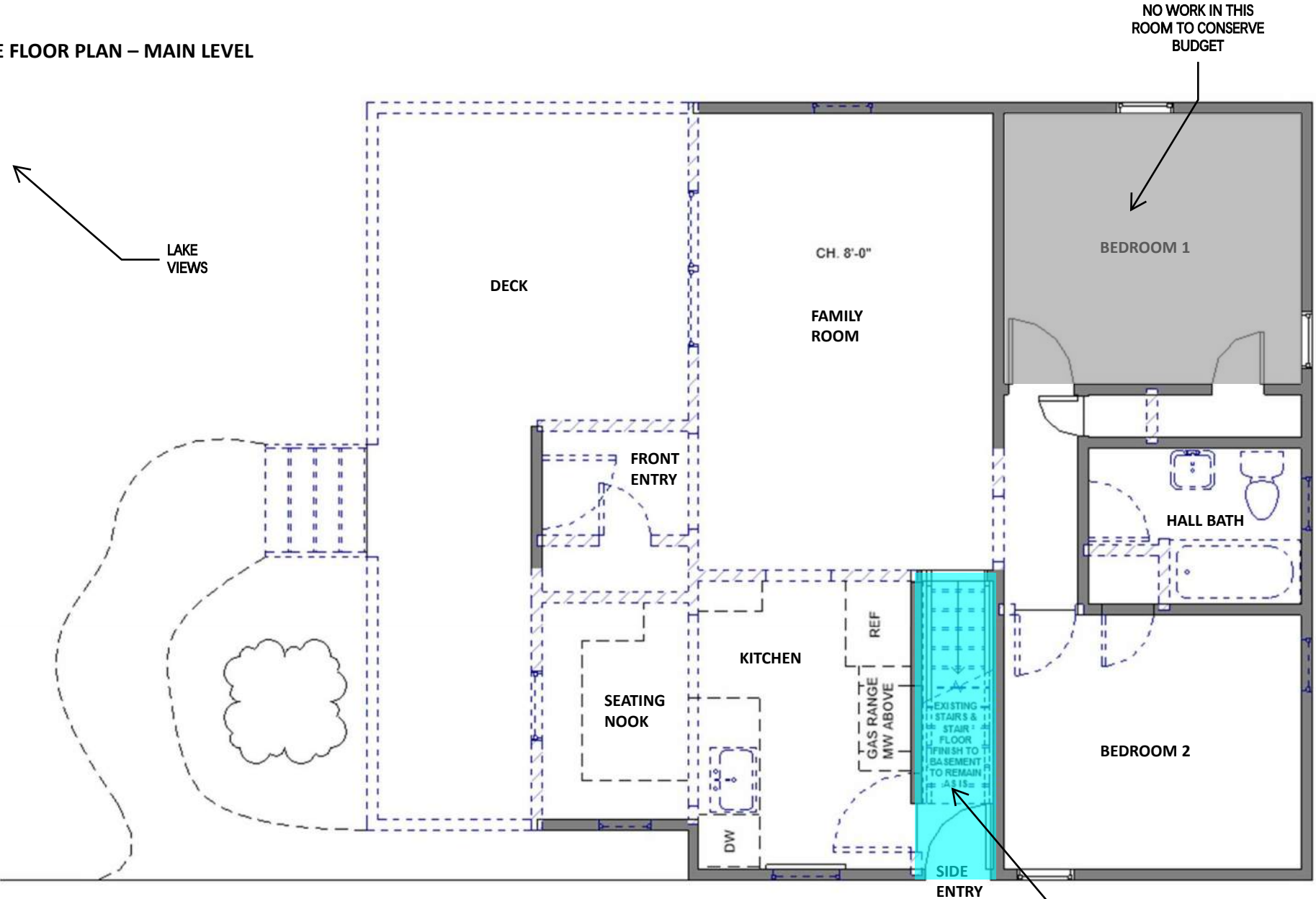


STAIRCASE

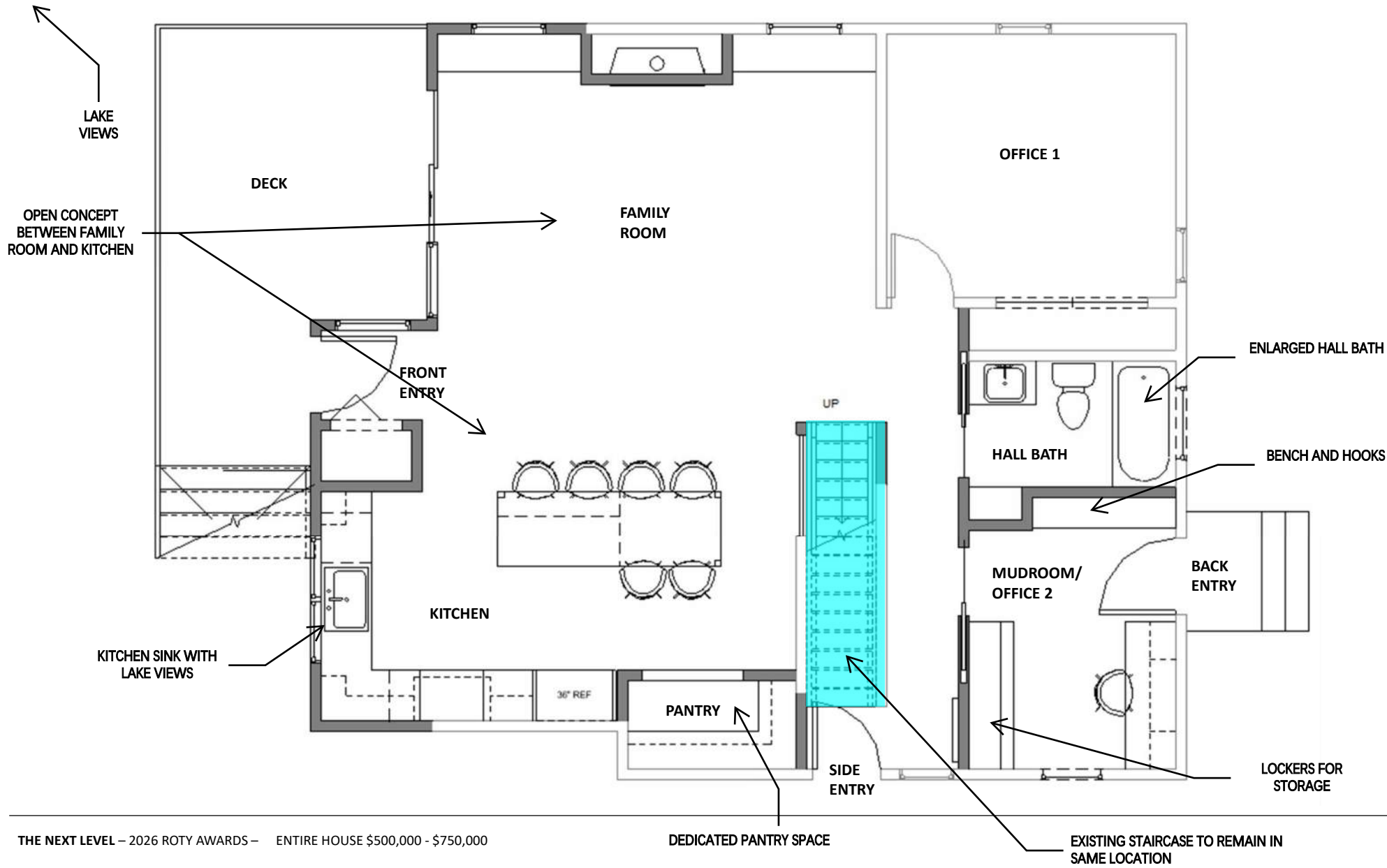


UPSTAIRS

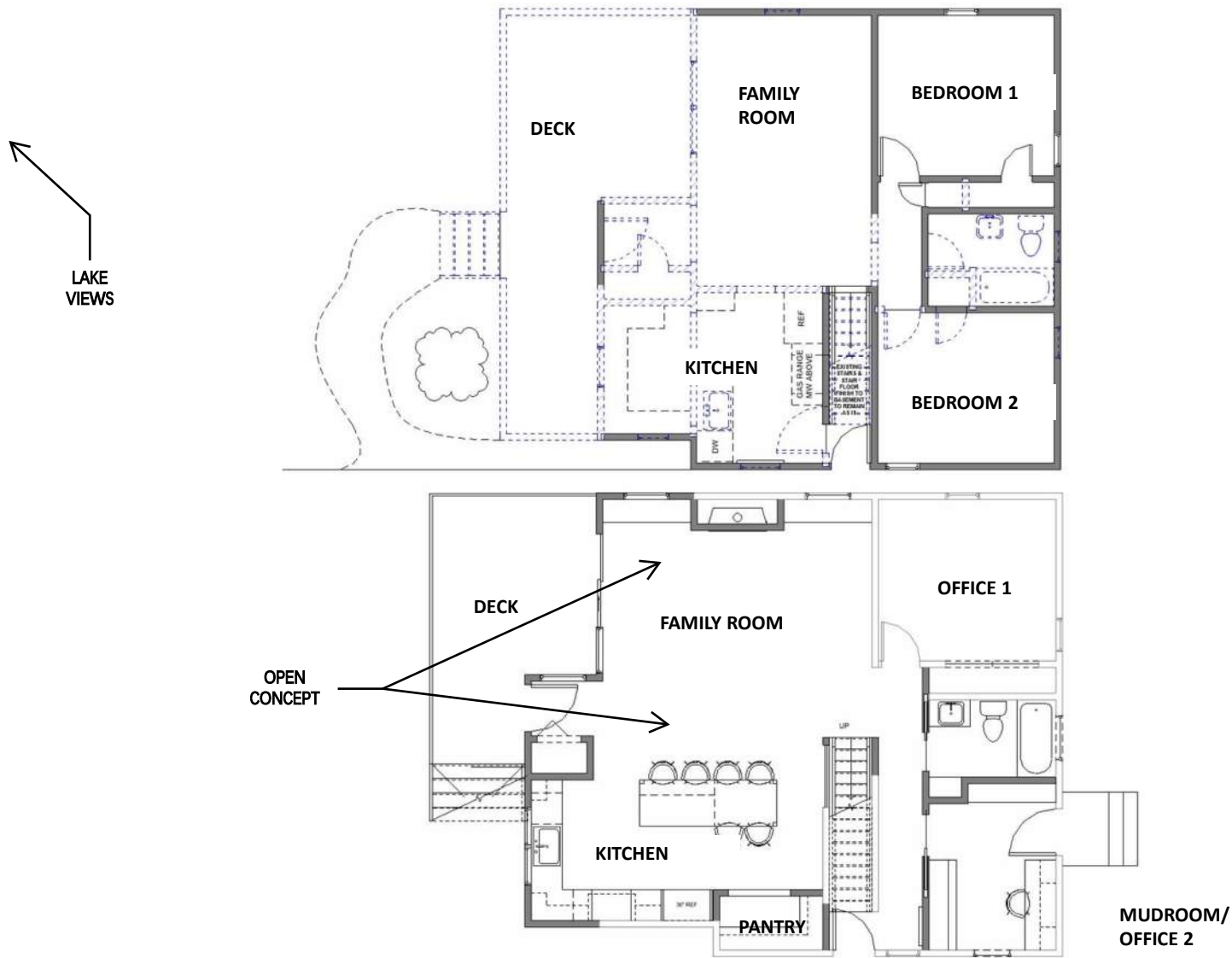
BEFORE FLOOR PLAN – MAIN LEVEL



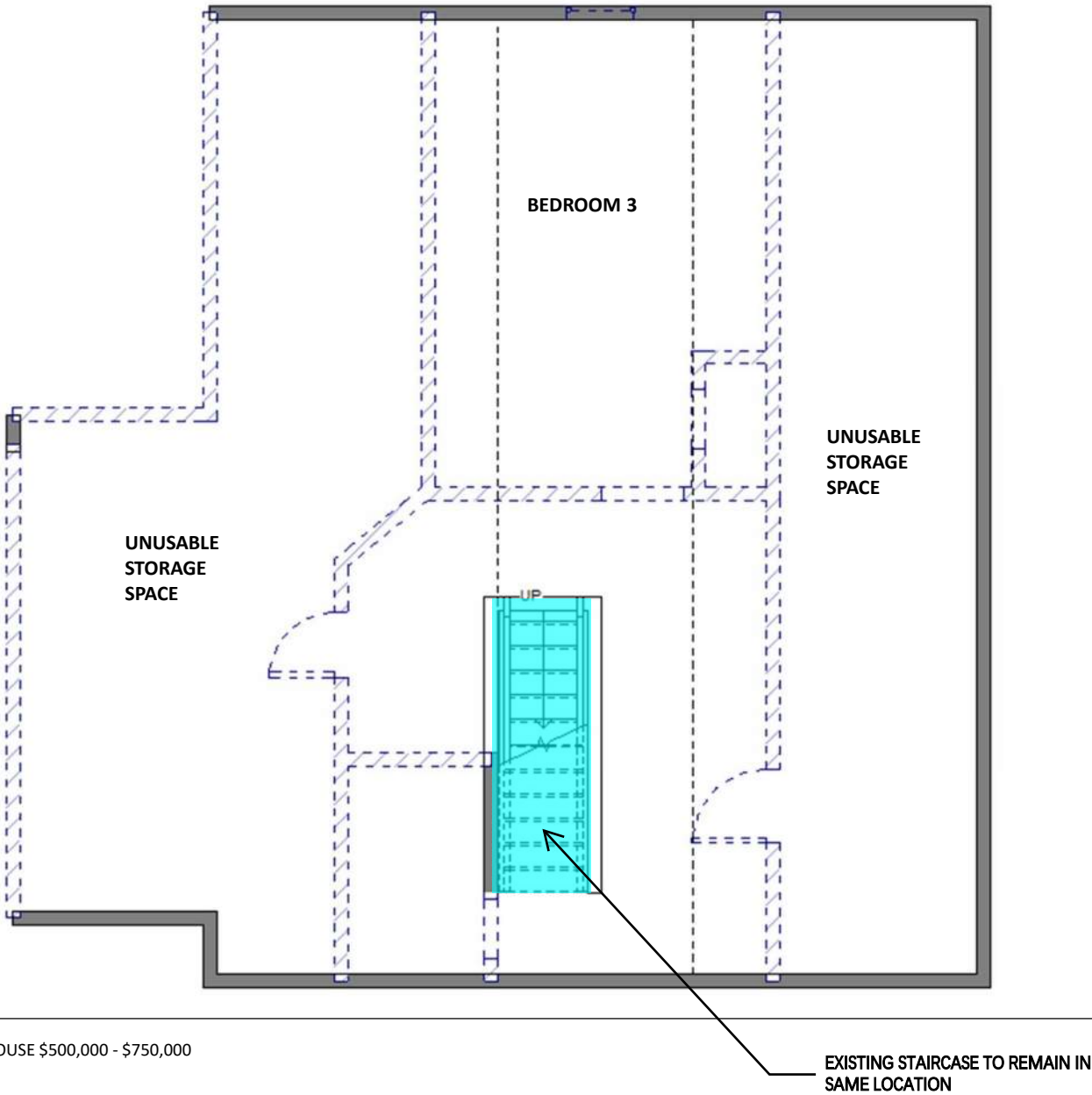
AFTER FLOOR PLAN – MAIN LEVEL



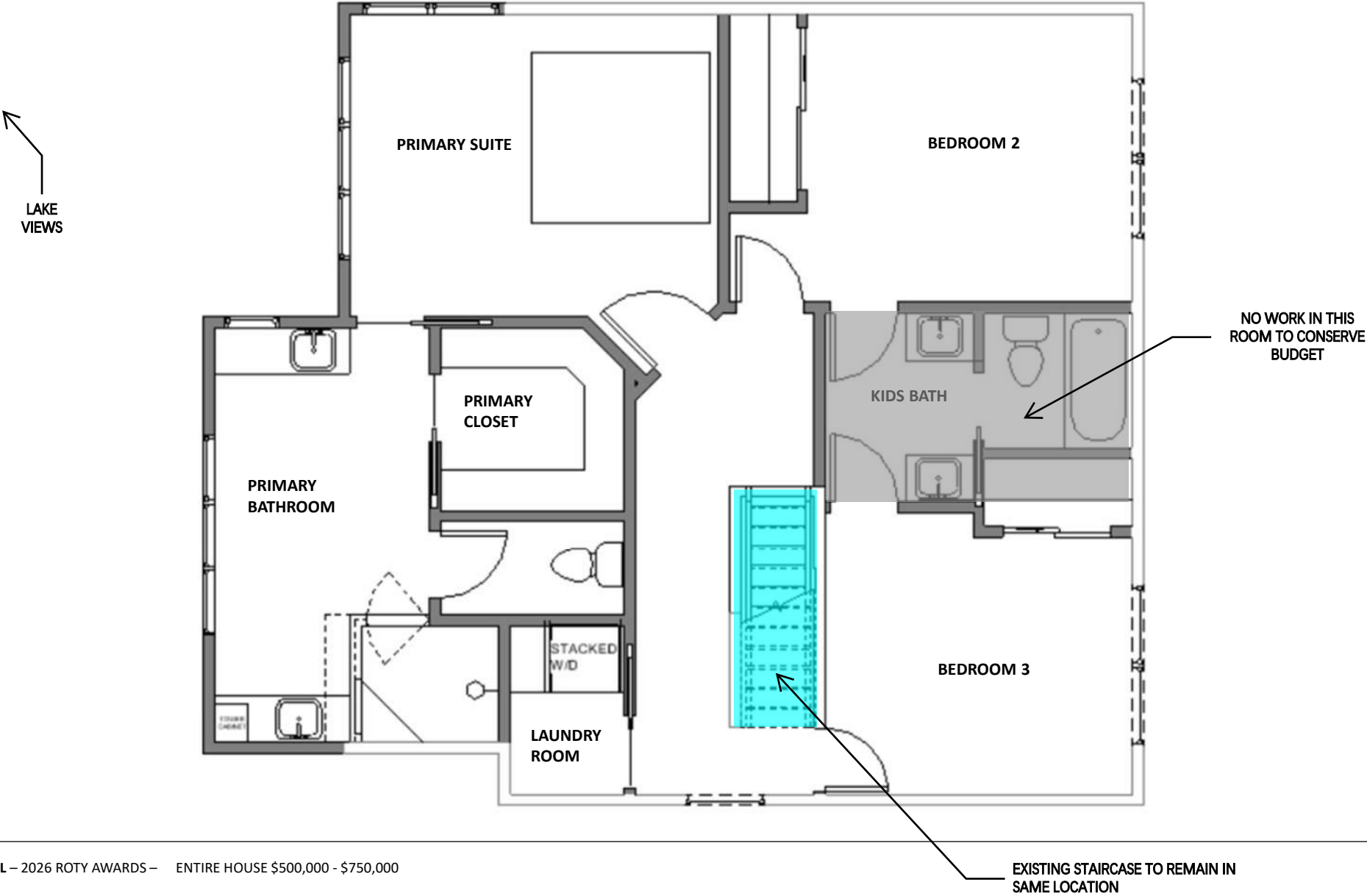
BEFORE AND AFTER FLOOR PLAN – MAIN LEVEL SIDE BY SIDE



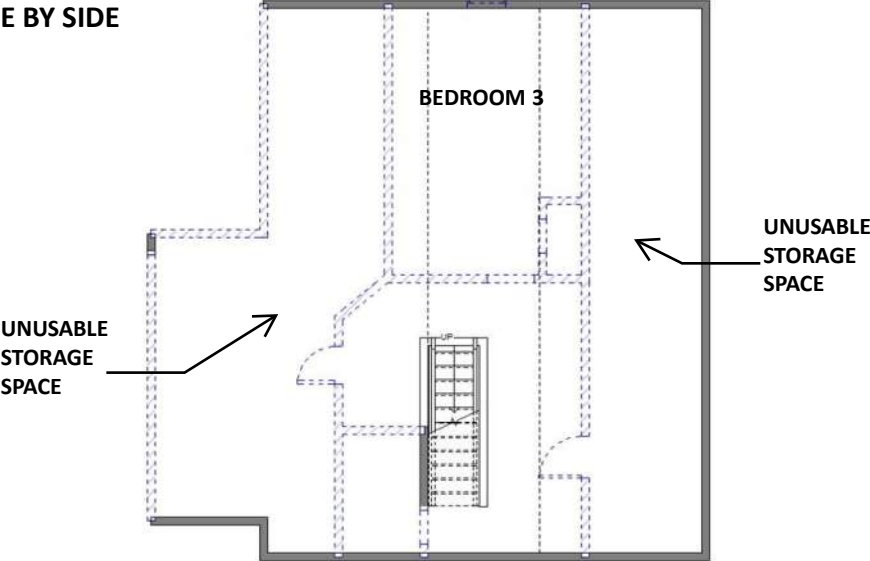
BEFORE FLOOR PLAN – UPPER LEVEL



AFTER FLOOR PLAN – UPPER LEVEL



BEFORE AND AFTER FLOOR PLAN – UPPER LEVEL SIDE BY SIDE



3D RENDERINGS



THE NEXT LEVEL – 2026 ROTY AWARDS – ENTIRE HOUSE \$500,000 - \$750,000

3D RENDERINGS



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO – LIVING ROOM



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO – LIVING ROOM



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO – LIVING ROOM



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO



BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO



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BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTO



THE NEXT LEVEL – 2026 ROTY AWARDS – ENTIRE HOUSE \$500,000 - \$750,000

FUNCTIONALITY

Open Main Level: To address the clients’ goal of creating a more connected family home, walls were removed between the kitchen and living room, improving circulation and creating one comfortable gathering space for everyday life and entertaining.

Efficient Kitchen: Responding to the need for more storage, preparation space, and seating, the redesigned kitchen provides increased cabinetry, a large island, improved appliance placement, dedicated pantry storage, and a sink intentionally positioned to capture the lake views.

Functional Mudroom: A practical mudroom was incorporated into the redesigned main level, giving the young family a dedicated place for everyday coats, shoes, bags, and household organization without sacrificing valuable living space.

Two Home Offices: Both homeowners needed dedicated workspaces but specifically wanted to move their offices out of the basement. The new plan incorporates two functional home offices into the primary living levels while efficiently utilizing the existing footprint.

Primary Suite: The homeowners’ goal of creating a private retreat was achieved with a new primary bedroom and bathroom intentionally oriented toward the lake, allowing the suite to take advantage of one of the property’s most valued features.

Larger Family Bathroom: Rather than simply adding a second bathroom upstairs, the new hall bath was designed with additional space and functionality to comfortably serve the children’s bedrooms and the needs of a growing family.

Convenient Upstairs Laundry: To simplify the family’s daily routine, laundry was moved to the new upper level near all three bedrooms, eliminating unnecessary trips between floors.

Integrated Storage: Custom cabinetry, closets, family-room built-ins, pantry storage, and storage tucked into challenging areas maximize every available square foot while addressing the clients’ need for significantly more organization.

Efficient Upper-Level Planning: Three bedrooms, two bathrooms, laundry, and storage were carefully organized around the existing staircase, which remained in its original location to control costs and preserve as much of the existing structure as possible.

Indoor-Outdoor Connection: New and enlarged windows, doors, and the updated deck strengthen the connection to the property while fulfilling the clients’ goal of preserving and better experiencing their lake views and deeded lake access.

Preserved Finished Basement: Despite the extensive renovation and structural work above, the fully finished existing basement was carefully protected and preserved, allowing the family to remain in the home during the renovation process.

THE NEXT LEVEL 2026 RISING AWARDS
RECONSTRUCTION COSTS: \$300,000 - \$750,000



AESTHETICS

- **Cohesive Transformation:** With extensive changes occurring throughout the home, a consistent design language was used to ensure the finished spaces feel intentional and connected rather than remodeled at different times.
- **Preserved Character:** The clients loved the approachable character of their existing home and did not want the renovation to overwhelm it. New architectural details, finishes, and proportions were selected to complement the original home while giving it a fresh, updated appearance.
- **Lake Views as a Design Feature:** The lake setting became an important visual element throughout the design. Enlarged windows and carefully planned sightlines frame the views from key spaces, including the kitchen sink and primary suite.
- **Light & Airy Main Level:** Removing visual barriers allowed natural light to travel throughout the main living spaces. White cabinetry, warm wood tones, and a restrained finish palette reinforce the brighter, more open feeling.
- **Architectural Focal Points:** The fireplace and surrounding family-room cabinetry create a strong focal point and add architectural character to the newly opened main level.
- **Consistent Millwork:** Cabinetry, built-ins, doors, trim, and other millwork were coordinated throughout the remodeled spaces, helping visually connect the original portions of the home with the newly finished areas.
- **Refined Upper Level:** The previously unfinished second level was designed to feel as though it had always belonged to the home. Consistent materials, trim details, proportions, and finishes create a natural transition from old to new.
- **Exterior Integration:** New rooflines, siding, windows, trim, and deck elements were carefully proportioned so the expanded upper level feels integrated with the original architecture rather than appearing as an addition placed on top.
- **High-Impact, Budget-Conscious Finishes:** Because budget was a major client priority, aesthetic investments were intentionally concentrated in areas with the greatest visual impact. A restrained material palette and thoughtful detailing created a polished, cohesive result without unnecessary expense.
- **Timeless Family Home:** Rather than following short-term trends, the overall palette and architectural detailing were selected to create a warm, timeless home appropriate for a young family and its lake setting.



CRAFTSMANSHIP

- **Protection & Construction Sequencing:** Extensive demolition, structural work, and reconstruction occurred above a fully finished basement. Detailed protection, temporary support, and carefully planned sequencing protected the completed spaces below throughout construction.
- **Structural Integration:** New framing and structural modifications were precisely integrated with retained portions of the original home, requiring careful field verification and coordination as existing conditions were exposed.
- **Old-to-New Transitions:** Flooring, drywall, millwork, trim, cabinetry, and other finishes were carefully transitioned between retained and reconstructed areas so the extensive renovation reads as one continuous home.
- **Complex Upper-Level Framing:** Precise framing was required to work within the existing staircase location, changing roof geometry, bedroom and bathroom layouts, and storage areas while maintaining clean finished proportions.
- **Roof & Exterior Execution:** New rooflines, siding, windows, trim, and exterior details were carefully tied into the retained structure so the completed upper level appears integrated with the original architecture.
- **Custom Cabinetry & Millwork:** Kitchen cabinetry, family-room built-ins, bathroom vanities, closets, and storage solutions were carefully fitted and detailed to maintain consistent proportions, reveals, and finish quality throughout the home.
- **Detailed Finish Work:** Tile, flooring, cabinetry, millwork, drywall, paint, and trim were coordinated across numerous remodeled areas, with particular attention given to clean intersections and transitions between materials.
- **Window Integration:** New and enlarged window openings required precise framing, weatherproofing, exterior detailing, and interior finish work while maintaining consistent architectural proportions and maximizing views toward the lake.



INNOVATIVE METHODS AND USES

- **More Home Without a Major Addition:** With budget as the family's greatest constraint, the design focused first on unlocking the potential of the existing structure. The unfinished upper level became valuable living space, allowing the family to gain three bedrooms, two bathrooms, laundry, and storage without relying on a large addition.
- **Planning Around a Fixed Staircase:** Relocating the existing staircase would have consumed valuable square footage and budget. Instead, the entire upper-level plan was developed around its existing location, requiring creative space planning to accommodate bedrooms, bathrooms, laundry, storage, circulation, and lake views.
- **Preserving Valuable Finished Space Below:** Rather than demolishing portions of the fully finished basement to simplify construction above, the project was planned around preserving it. Structural and construction strategies were developed to allow extensive work above while maintaining the family's existing finished lower level.
- **Capturing Underutilized Space:** Challenging areas created by roof geometry and circulation were intentionally converted into closets and customized storage rather than becoming inaccessible or wasted square footage.
- **Two Offices Without Expanding for Them:** Both homeowners wanted dedicated offices outside the basement. Creative space planning incorporated two functional workspaces into the primary living levels without adding square footage solely for offices or compromising the other major program requirements.
- **Using the Lake to Organize the Design:** Rather than treating the lake views as an afterthought, key sightlines helped guide the plan. The kitchen sink, primary suite, windows, and living spaces were intentionally positioned to make the views part of everyday family life.
- **Budget as a Design Tool:** Instead of applying the budget equally across the project, existing elements were evaluated for their value and potential. Retaining the staircase, finished basement, and usable portions of the structure allowed investment to be concentrated where it would most significantly improve the family's daily experience.



PROJECT CHALLENGES

- **Significant Goals Within a Defined Budget:** As a young family, the homeowners had a carefully considered budget but an extensive list of needs. The challenge was determining how to achieve the functionality of a much larger home while prioritizing where their investment would have the greatest impact.
- **A Large Program Within a Compact Home:** The clients needed three bedrooms, two bathrooms, upstairs laundry, increased storage, two home offices, a functional mudroom, pantry space, and improved main-level living—all while maintaining the approachable scale of the existing home.
- **Working Around the Existing Staircase:** The staircase needed to remain in its original location for both cost and practicality. This created a fixed point around which the entire new upper-level layout, circulation, bedrooms, bathrooms, laundry, and storage had to be organized.
- **Building Above a Fully Finished Basement:** The existing basement was completely finished and needed to remain protected and intact. Extensive demolition, structural modifications, framing, mechanical work, and reconstruction above had to occur without compromising the clients’ existing finished space below.
- **Making an Unfinished Upper Level Fully Functional:** Although the home contained unfinished square footage upstairs, converting it into comfortable living space required working through existing structural conditions, roof geometry, ceiling heights, circulation, plumbing, mechanical systems, and storage needs.
- **Maximizing Every Square Foot:** With limited space and a substantial list of client needs, there was little room for inefficient circulation or leftover areas. Rooflines, corners, and transitional spaces all needed to be evaluated for opportunities to add storage or function.
- **Opening the Existing Main Level:** Creating the open kitchen and family room the clients wanted required removing existing walls while coordinating the structural, mechanical, electrical, flooring, and finish implications of altering the original layout.
- **Accommodating Two Home Offices:** Both homeowners needed dedicated workspaces and specifically wanted their offices moved out of the basement. Finding appropriate locations without sacrificing bedrooms, family spaces, storage, or significantly increasing the footprint added another layer to the space-planning challenge.
- **Capturing the Lake Views:** The clients loved their property largely because of its lake views and deeded lake access. The challenge was improving views and natural light from key interior spaces while working within the existing structure and overall budget.
- **Integrating a New Upper Level with the Existing Home:** Substantial changes to the roof, windows, siding, trim, and exterior proportions were necessary, but the clients did not want the finished home to feel oversized or obviously added onto. The new work needed to feel natural to the home’s original character and scale.
- **Maintaining the Home’s Character:** Despite the extent of the transformation, the finished home needed to remain comfortable, approachable, and appropriate for its setting rather than feeling like an entirely different house.