Making the Old New Again

Move over millennials. One of downtown’s trendiest condos belongs to a Baby Boomer couple.

November 5, 2015 by Sean Robinson
Photography by Bill Sitzmann

Sherri and John Obermiller decided their new downtown condo reminded them too much of the suburbs.

They should know. The couple moved in 2011 from their five-bedroom, five-bathroom home in the white-picket-fence-lined neighborhoods off 180th St. and West Center Road to the eclectic, artsy downtown for a reason, and it wasn’t perfection and modernity.
“It was time to downsize and just get rid of stuff,” Sherri says. “Plus, this gave me an excuse not to do yard work anymore.”

The pair looked at five or six buildings before deciding the 902 Dodge Street condos were a natural fit for them. The building is located close enough to walk to yoga classes or sushi restaurants, but far enough from the bustle of the Old Market. “We don’t always like to be in the crowd, but we like to be near it,” Sherri says. “We enjoy being anonymous in a sea of people.”

An available condo on the fifth floor was too small and in need of a facelift, but the Obermillers saw its potential. Their first act as new owners? Asking their neighbor what amount of money it would take for him to move. Their new home instantly doubled in size.

To further construct their vision for the space, they enlisted the help of Stephanie Basham, principal designer and owner of Group One Interiors, and Don Stormberg, owner of Stormberg Construction. The couple rented and lived in a unit on the second floor of the building as Basham and Stormberg’s teams worked to renovate the condo to the Obermillers’ standards.

“It’s always challenging to work in a space that people are inhabiting [sharing] during construction,” Basham says. “The Obermillers have a finely tuned sense of contemporary style and an appreciation for urban modernism. And to top that, John and Sherri value attention to detail, which is a dream for a designer.”
From using lime green as an accent color to matching the gray of the exposed concrete ceiling to the condo’s columns, the detailed design was inspired from the Obermillers’ travels to metropolises like New York City.

To make the home feel larger, Basham took advantage of the high ceilings and crafted a floating translucent cloud above the kitchen island. The focal point of the home, the cloud creates a sense of separation between the kitchen and adjacent rooms without impeding the view. Local fabricators and installers used frosted acrylic to have the effect of tinted glass without the weight. This fixture is a personal favorite of the Obermillers.

“The cloud above and countertop below have the same steel lines, so they mirror one another,” Sherri says. “We strived for symmetry throughout our home.”
Following nearly a year of renovations, only the cherrywood cabinets in the kitchen remain in the now-2,400-square-foot condo. An entire patio was removed; new floors and appliances were installed; iron-welded, artisan-crafted barn doors were mounted; and rooms were ornamented in furniture from as far away as Sweden. The result is a simple, contemporary design that’s entirely unique to the Obermillers.

The Obermillers saw not only the potential of their condo but the value of the downtown area as well. While the CenturyLink Center was the major draw north of Dodge Street when the Obermillers first moved downtown, the area will soon be home to HDR’s high-rise headquarters and a collection of newly developed apartments, offices, and entertainment space.

“We are incredibly excited about this development and what’s next,” John says.
Embracing an urban lifestyle is a hot trend, yet the Obermillers aren’t concerned with following or setting trends. Instead, their new home serves as a space for them to reinvigorate their story together.

“We can walk to the trails by the pedestrian bridge or quickly go to the restaurants in the Old Market. It’s fun and incredible,” Sherri says. “It feels like we live in a much bigger city than what Omaha really is.”

When the Obermillers aren’t watching Nebraska sunsets melt behind the Woodman and First National from their building’s rooftop terrace, they enjoy a different view from their living room window. They look down onto the interstates weaving under and over themselves, roads looping and stretching in different directions. An image the Obermillers agree is beautiful. Just below the roads and between the urban sprawl of Omaha and Council Bluffs lies the river.

“We always thought at this point in our life we’d have a condo overlooking Lake Michigan,” John says. “Living happily next to the Missouri River in downtown Omaha? Well, that’s just the next best thing.”

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