

From the Ashes

A Birmingham family builds back better after a devastating fire

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Id Pruett grew up in Dadeville, spending almost every weekend on Lake Martin in one of the original Russell cabins, owned by his uncle. His wife, Sherry, grew up in Madison, camping and fishing on the Tennessee River with her family. They both love the water, so after retirement, they moved from Huntsville to Birmingham and were ready to begin a new chapter of outdoor fun with a house at Lake Martin.

In November 2016, they purchased their new home, located near Nero's Point and built by Chad Sterns and Ted Watts. The couple enjoyed that home with family and friends until March 29, 2021, when they received heartbreaking news.

"We got a call from our security company that the smoke alarm was going off; then, a call from our neighbor whose sister could see our house burning from across the water. Ed and I drove down immediately, and it was pretty devastating," Sherry Pruett said. "Several volunteer firetrucks were on the scene, but the house was fully engulfed by the time they arrived. The house burned to complete ashes, burned part of the seawall, melted the Jet Ski and Jet Ski port. We lost over 13 large pine trees. The only things I could save after the fire were an old iron cow bell and an iron ornamental gate, both from my family's farm in Limestone County.

"Chad was there when we arrived, and after much hugging and crying, he promised he would rebuild for us. He and his wife, Cathy, were great. And, Jeff Ryals, the project manager, was just really helpful through the whole rebuild."

The Pruett's rented a house in Dadeville that summer, so their grandson, then 14, would have a place to come and bring friends. She credits Justin Howard at Kowaliga Marina for really stepping up to help them get a new Jet Ski for their grandson when inventory was low and demand was high during COVID. Although their kayaks suffered burnt ends in the fire, they were still in working

order.

The couple bought new towels, sheets, pots and pans and other essentials for their summer rental. But unfortunately, at the end of that summer, everything was stolen from a storage unit.

"We were so disheartened, and no one was ever charged in the theft. But finally, we are in our new home for the summer of 2023," Pruett said.

The couple kept the floor plan of the original house, with only a few minor changes, including a selection of Needlepoint Navy as the exterior color and Iron Ore for the double front doors. Since the Pruett's were starting from scratch this time, they enlisted the help of their daughter, Leslie Murphy, as their designer. Through her company, "*Murphy Maude Interiors*" located in both Memphis and Nashville, Murphy selected all the colors, furnishings, rugs, fixtures, bedding, artwork and wallpaper. Textures blend beautifully in the furnishings and fabrics, including wicker, rope, rattan and linen.

"We wanted to build the same house our family loved so much but with just a few updates and tweaks. It was important for me to make lemonade out of lemons by improving slightly upon the already stunning original design. We took inspiration from nature and the beautiful surroundings of Lake Martin, aiming to create a peaceful retreat for the family. You can see hints of blues and greens throughout the palette. A sunset-like abstract mural is the backdrop for the master suite," Murphy said.

Murphy and her mother, using Zoom, selected all of the furniture for the home at the furniture market in North Carolina. Mother and daughter worked for three days on the installation.

"It was exciting and exhausting. We unboxed everything for the install, with the help of my grandson, two of my daughter's employees and a moving and storage company out of Montgomery," Pruett said. "We told Ed to stay



Above: The Pruetts chose Needlepoint Navy for the exterior of their new lake home; Right: Fire burned their home to ashes in 2021.









home until it was finished.”

They put a neutral sofa and two blue-green swivel chairs in the living room with a modern leather recliner. Fireballs were selected for the modern white stone fireplace. A live edge granite sofa table separates the living room and dining areas. The walls are painted Alabaster, and the interior doors are Gauntlet Gray.

The dining table seats eight. Four decorative plates serve as table décor yet also function as trays for appetizers, condiments or as trivets for hot plates. Three bar stools with cushioned seats and woven backs add seating at the island. A sec-

ond island in the center of the kitchen offers extra prep space. Both islands are painted Classic Gray. The backsplash and the countertops with mitered edges are Sereno Gold Quartz. Cabinets are painted Pearly White, and the brass hardware is Jasper by Emtex. The kitchen faucet is by Brizo.

The master suite on the main level has access to the covered sun porch and offers a peaceful retreat for the couple. Custom wallpaper behind the cream and khaki upholstered bed was designed by their daughter’s company, “Mable Originals”. Roman shades are utilized in the four bedrooms and were custom made by Calico in Birmingham.

“Mable Originals, named after my grandmother, allows us to create wallpapers, murals, bedding, pillows and beyond through partnerships with regional artists. It was a pleasure to utilize so much of the Mable Originals line in this home. You can see her love of the water and nature in a lot of the Mable products; soft blues and greens, sunset-like patterns, fish, birds, etc.” Murphy said.

The master bath features custom wallpaper behind the double mirrors over the marble-topped



Previous Pages: The large covered porch includes three distinct gathering areas; Facing Page: Top: The kitchen offers two islands for prepping and serving; Inset: Seasonal fruits and flowers provide a pop of color; This Page: Clockwise from Left: Mable Originals created the wallpaper in the master bath; Thirteen trees were destroyed in the fire, so landscaping decisions were key in the rebuild; Custom wallpaper from Mable Originals hangs in the master bedroom as well; Four swivel rockers allow views of the fireplace and the lake; Plates on the table serve as both décor and serving pieces; Neighbor Rod Billet custom made the personalized carving board.



vanity, which is painted Templeton Gray. The shower walls are Polished Statuarietto Panels and Elon Pearl White Basketweave tile floor create a luxurious shower. Hardware is Mod Hex by Emtek.

In addition to art from Mable Originals, the couple has enjoyed making purchases at local Lake Martin art shows. They are fond of dragonflies, so in addition to hanging two large prints, they recreated a jigsaw puzzle of dragonflies that hung in the house before the fire. It now hangs in the downstairs hallway.

One guest room and bathroom downstairs are just off the main room. Two bedrooms and a bathroom are upstairs. The bath upstairs has Italian

marble, and the cabinets are painted Sherwin Williams Raindance. Full-length mirrors with ornate, detailed frames hang in every bedroom, adding purposeful, decorative flair.

Two sets of French doors open to the covered porch overlooking the lake, the boathouse and the dock. A white stone fireplace with birch gas logs anchors a comfortable gathering area with four swivel rockers and a round granite coffee table. A television was mounted above the mantel for watching fall football, and a dining table for four balances the opposite end, near the kitchen and a grilling porch.

An investigator from Atlanta was called in to determine the cause of the fire, but the origin



Clockwise from Above: The Pruetts' daughter, an interior designer, suggested a more modern look for the new home; Artwork featuring dragonflies has always been an essential part of the couple's lake house décor; A painting from Mable Originals adds a modern touch to a guest room.



could not be found. The most plausible explanation is that a tree in the yard was struck by lightning, spreading slowly through the yard and up to the house. They will never know with certainty, and Pruett said she still feels anxious when they leave the house.

“After two years of dealing with our insurance company, we have learned a lot. We now have everything we own listed on a spreadsheet – receipts from everything we purchased for this new house. We recommend photos of all your belongings. Be prepared,” she said.

After the heartache of a fire and theft from the storage unit, insurance claims and a rebuild, the Pruett are happy to spend most of their time on the lake with their rescued pups, Ella and Harvey. Grandson Reeves and eldest daughter Lindsay plan visits from Birmingham as often as they can to enjoy boating, Jet Skiing and to fish.

“We have the best neighbors. They all reached out to help us after the fire, and we appreciate them so much. We just love being on Lake Martin,” Pruett said.

Top: The living, dining and kitchen areas offer beautiful lake views and easy porch access; Left: Fish swimming above a woven rush headboard add a touch of blues and greens in a guest room.