Celtic Charm

A woodlands cottage with a modern twist, nestled in The Sanctuary.

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photo METROPOLIS ICONIC SHOTS

Clay and Elaine Cavanaugh were quite happy raising two young children on Pawley's Island when reality hit them.

"We realized we needed to move to a good school district and be close to extracurricular activities," explained Clay.

When they received an offer to move out of their beach house in 30 days, the journey to relocate started in earnest.

In their search, the Cavanaughs added additional criteria: Clay's International business, JEC Aseptics, Inc., required frequent weekly air travel so a commutable distance to the airport was critical. Elaine wanted to be closer to family and to her brother, Gary Hamill, who is the Director and Head Coach of Men's Soccer at Wingate. These priorities led them to investigate communities in Waxhaw and Weddington at first.

It wasn't until they veered a little more north and set their eyes on The Sanctuary, that the big picture plan became self-evident. They were going to build a custom home, and they were going to build it there.

Buddy Edwards, President of Lynn Luxury Homes

"We did not know what we were getting into, but the decision was driven by what we saw possible in The Sanctuary. The extreme privacy, space, and tranquility of the lots here are what nailed it for us. We were going to be surrounded by forest and yet only 10 minutes from the airport. You cannot find anything like this in Mecklenburg County," added Clay.

"We are one of Charlotte's best-kept secrets, I guess you could say," explained Ron Shaw, Architectural Control Committee Chairman for The Sanctuary. "Our lots are between 2 to 13 acres with an average of 5 acres, which only costs $200K. These generous lot sizes allow for more unique architectural expressions, and we currently have homes under construction that range from 4,000 to 30,000 square feet within these types of land parcels."

From the start, the Cavanaughs' approach to envisioning their custom home was wrapped up in personal experiences and memories they wished to have around them to hold on to. Elaine grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland and sometimes felt homesick. Clay remembers finding the Irish the "most hospitable" folk in his travels.

"Complete strangers would take me in, let me sleep in their barns and hang out in their neighborhood pubs," recalled Clay. "The Irish are just like Southerners. They give you that warm feeling, you know?"

That is exactly the feeling they experienced when they met Buddy Edwards of Lynn Luxury Homes.

"Buddy was key to helping us find the right lot and understand what could be accomplished on this hilly swath of land," explained Clay. "He walked us deep down inside almost to our creek and gave us a vision as we looked back up. He is a laid-back younger guy.

Honestly, we just clicked. I knew he was going to help me rather than tell me what to do. What I thought was going to be a transactional, business type of relationship turned into a friendship.

He is down-to-earth and genuinely worries about how happy you're going to be. That personality and conviction resonated with us."

Buddy introduced the couple to Jim Phelps of Jim Phelps Collections and the drawings began. Clay underscored that they are not your typical custom homeowner: "We viewed this project as our twenty-year home. We didn't want something

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Their finished home is 7,200 square feet with four bedrooms, four and a half baths and two two-car attached garages. As one approaches the driveway, the view of the home nestled deep down into their five-acre property is simply breathtaking.

"There were massive trees that we wanted to preserve during the clearing process. Some close to 80 feet tall. So it was practically a surgical procedure to accomplish this without compromising the end goal," remembers Buddy Edwards of Lynn Luxury Homes.

The driveway from the road to the front door extends close to 400 feet in length, so it isn't hard for a lay person to imagine the steep mountain-like challenges the construction team faced daily.

"Imagine the weight of cranes, concrete, steel beams and lumber deliveries to this job site!" Buddy smiles. "We spent a lot of time just tending the maintenance of the construction drive to keep all our delivery drivers safe and happy."

There is no doubt this project required a talented builder. "We have great builders in the Carolinas and the best ones are in our guild at The Sanctuary," explained Ron Shaw. "They all stand out, but with regard to communication and attention to details, Buddy is among the best. Communication and follow-up is a big deal to the board here. Our biggest focus is the quality of the homes being constructed here, which is a continuing process requiring ongoing follow-through with us."

To this point, Clay Cavanaugh added with a laugh: "When we were going through this, I spoke more to Buddy than my wife!"

The most standout design feature of the home is without a doubt the windowed wall of the 20-foot-ceiling dining room facing out to the sloping hill.

Other memorable touches: The stained shiplap cedar exterior siding complimented by a sandy faced weathered brick; a three-story open stairwell, and uninterrupted weathered white oak beams that were reclaimed from an abandoned timber trestle railroad bridge in South Carolina.

But wait, no proper Irish-inspired home is complete without a pub. Well, that is how Clay felt: "Every day is St. Patrick's Day here. My wife grew up in a pub-style life, and I cannot exist without it. I put my foot down as far as the budget goes: Don't touch the budget for the pub!"

The pub needed to be heavily wooded with a dark atmosphere when candle-lit; mimicking the dark and dingy, old and worn pubs of Ireland.

As if all things Irish hadn't been thought of, the Cavanaughs had one more touch: the kitchen cabinets. All 'regular' cabinet stains did not look unique enough for their liking, when they passed a book cabinet into another display room. A pair of green bookends lay perched on the shelf caught his eye: "See this green? Stain our cabinets this color!"

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