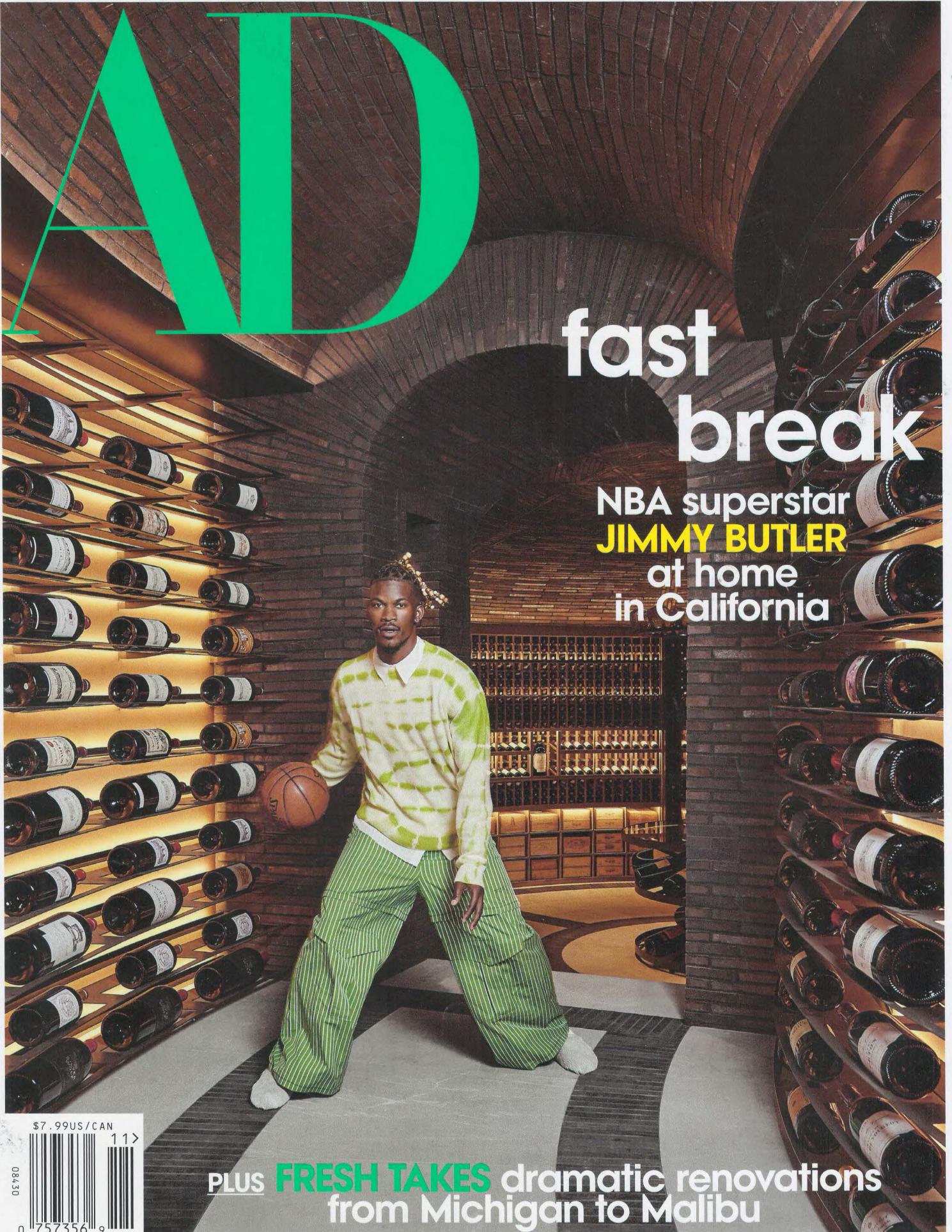


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ARCHIVAL PORTRAIT: COURTESY OF THE BRIGGS FAMILY

FRESHMAN



A family turns to *Lily Dierkes* to help update their vintage 1970s house on the shore of Lake Michigan

TEXT BY **ELIZABETH FAZZARE**
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MARTA XOCHILT PEREZ**

POSED ON THE SLOPING FAÇADE OF THE LAKE MICHIGAN HOUSE THAT THEY RECENTLY RENOVATED, KC (SEATED) AND ASHLEY (AT FRONT) CRAIN, ALONG WITH THEIR FIVE CHILDREN AND GOLDENDOODLE, RE-CREATE A 1970s PORTRAIT OF THE BRIGGS FAMILY, THE HOUSE'S ORIGINAL OWNERS.

KE



A CUSTOM BAMBOO MOBILE BY JAKE COAN DESIGN HANGS IN THE GREAT ROOM'S FIREPLACE ALCOVE. THE HOUSE'S ORIGINAL ARCHITECT, WILLIAM HENRY KESSLER, DEPLOYED CEDAR PANELING AND FIELDSTONE THROUGHOUT TO TIE THE INTERIOR TO ITS SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT.



On

On a westward-facing shore of Lake Michigan, a gabled roof appears to rise out of the dunes. Upon approach, a door, painted Benjamin Moore's Million Dollar Red, is set back in a large front notch. Enter it, and the house underneath this cedar-shingled pitch slowly reveals a spectacular blue vista just out the back. Built in the early 1970s by local architect William Henry Kessler for Detroit stockbroker Walter O. Briggs III, son of the Detroit Tigers owner, this late-modernist vacation home was intended to be a good neighbor to nature; its roofline "echo[es] the profile of the landscape which sweeps up from the water's edge to the tall trees behind," described the 1977 *Architectural Record Book of Vacation Houses*, which featured the retreat on its cover. The lowest level sits in a natural bowl on the site to keep the three-story structure at a respectful height. A sole dormer interrupts the slope of the front façade, while the rear opens to double-height windows that take in the lake view and a large terrace for entertaining.

Beyond the residence's expressive shape, wherein sliding glass doors and an exterior stair offer direct beach access, Kessler employed cedar paneling and fieldstone fireplaces to create a dialogue with the immediate environment. However, over the years, the historic house had been taupe-washed to fit a neutral trend. In the 1980s, Detroit publisher Keith Crain and his wife, Mary Kay, had purchased it from Briggs as a summer home. When Keith's son, KC Crain, president and CEO of Crain Communications, and KC's wife, Ashley, founder of luxury brokerage Crain Homes, acquired it three years ago, their first objective was to restore its original charm. The next was to adapt it more efficiently for their own family—including five children and a goldendoodle.

A few years prior, the Bloomfield Hills, Michigan-based couple felt they had "discovered someone special" when they first encountered the work of young design talent Lily Dierkes at a house in Lyford Cay in the Bahamas. At the time, Dierkes was working for AD100 designer David Netto, but has now gone on to found her own firm, the Hudson Valley-based LK Studio, during the early pandemic. In 2022, the Crains called her and their trusted Michigan-based architectural consultant Mark Johnson to form the team that could bring their beloved summer house into a new era.

"In a modern house,
form and color stand out
so much more,"
notes designer *Lily Dierkes*.



IN THE DINING AREA, VINTAGE
OAK AND CANE BØRGE MOGENSEN
CHAIRS SURROUND A CUSTOM
STEEL-LEG TABLE BY WAKA WAKA.
TO THE RIGHT, A LITHOGRAPH
BY ROBERT MOTHERWELL HANGS
ABOVE A BESPOKE SOFA IN A
MAHARAM FABRIC, CUSTOM WOOL
RUG BY PATTERSON FLYNN.



ABOVE THE DINING AREA, AND THE BACK OF THE HOUSE, OPENS TO LAKE MICHIGAN. BELOW THE KITCHEN CABINETS ARE PAINTED IN BENJAMIN MOORE'S VIKING YELLOW AND SIMPLY WHITE. WOLF RANGE; VOLA FAUCET; HARDWARE BY SUN VALLEY BRONZE; DISHWARE AND ACCESSORIES FROM THE CONRAN SHOP.



A SECTIONAL BY HAY IN A MAHARAM FABRIC WRAPS AROUND A WIGGLE ROOM COFFEE TABLE IN THE BUNK ROOM. THE WARREN PLATNER EASY CHAIR WEARS A PRINT BY JOSEF FRANK FOR SVENSKT TENN. GICLÉE PRINTS BY PETER DOIG.



ABOVE THE FRONT DOOR IS PAINTED IN BENJAMIN MOORE'S MILLION DOLLAR RED. LEFT THE PRIMARY BEDROOM'S BED IS DESIGNED BY SARAH YOLK; CUSTOM

PARCHMENT BEDSIDE TABLES IN THE STYLE OF JEAN MICHEL FRANK MADE BY ALAN STANDED; AJ SCONCES BY LOUIS POULSEN; WOOL TAPESTRY BY GUIDO MAGGIORI.

“With five kids, including a two-year-old, we couldn’t have a museum,” says homeowner *KC Crain*.



THE PROJECT CALLED FOR a major overhaul of the structure. It started with rehabilitating those painted-over cedar boards, inside and out, to return the home's warm wood glow. Johnson modernized the bathrooms, tightened the waterproofing, then made some light-touch revisions to the floor plan to create more privacy for the top-floor primary suite, more square footage for the children's rooms, and more storage for kitchen appliances and outdoor toys like paddleboards and kayaks. Two new sundecks with outdoor showers now create a buffer between the sand and the newly white-painted floors.

"The goal for all of the interior architecture was to peel back the layers to get back to the integrity of William Kessler's design," says Johnson. Dierkes took a similar approach with her decorating, embracing the home's 1970s mood gleaned from the Crains' collection of original Balthazar Korab photography while assuring the new design didn't feel dated. To do so,

"I was conscious of using color in a minimal way," she says. The kitchen's yellow upper cabinets reference the original goldenrod ombré scheme. The only other color interventions are through upholstery—like the green sectional by Hay in the four daughters' bunk room, the bespoke blue sofa in the living room, or the butterscotch leather seat cushions in an updated sunken inglenook—and artworks, including pieces by Ellsworth Kelly, Agnes Martin, and Alex Katz, all sourced by Dierkes. Otherwise, natural materials like stone, wood, and cork in combination with white paint create a fresh, bright, and airy interior, naturally lit by the home's surprisingly ample glazing.

Dierkes curated 1970s furnishings by the likes of Le Corbusier, Ward Bennett, and Frank Gehry alongside contemporary pieces that similarly focus on playful geometries. A ball-footed Sarah Ellison bed looks right at home in the



THE CRAIN CHILDREN IN THE BUNK ROOM. A CUSTOM OTTOMAN BY LUTHER QUINTANA UPHOLSTERY IN MAHARAM'S PASTURE FABRIC STANDS ON A ROUND RUG BY SERENA & LILY. TOLOMEO SCONCES BY ARTEMIDE. OPPOSITE THE PRIMARY BATH FEATURES A FREESTANDING TUB BY LAURA KIRAR FOR KALLISTA WITH A DORNBRACHT FILLER. ARTWORK BY ED RUSCHA; SIDE TABLE BY SETH KELLER.

primary bedroom, for example, one of the few spaces to maintain wall-to-wall carpet. To accommodate contemporary lifestyle needs while maximizing limited space, Dierkes and Johnson collaborated on custom built-in desks, cabinetry, and bunk beds for the daughters, who now have total control of their floor with areas for play, media, and beachside lounging.

"In a modern house, form and color stand out so much more," says Dierkes. Without the typical wall coverings, window treatments, or layers found in classical design, intentionality was a must.

"It's always a challenge to try and keep that vintage feeling while making it cozy. And with five kids, including a two-year-old, we couldn't have a museum," says KC. "The house, in general, is bold for us," adds Ashley. Style-wise, "we're

traditionalists." However, Dierkes had their full confidence from the first design meeting. "After seeing the proposal, I trusted anything she would do," confirms Ashley.

In addition to achieving a design that facilitates a current lifestyle within a vintage envelope, Dierkes and Johnson restored the home's personal appeal. As a child on summer break, KC notes that the house felt "divided. There was an adult side, and a kid side." Now, his family's favorite spaces are those where they can gather together—the living room with its sunken fireplace and the exterior terrace with its water view. With winter approaching, the Crains already have plans to spend some ski weekends at the abode, restoring Kessler's other intention—an all-season shelter, inherently connected to nature. ▲