

# ACHIEVING SUCCESS WITHOUT FOLLOWING THE NORM:

Brian and Kim Billick's "Idea Book" Becomes Reality

*By Mary Ann Treger. Photography by Helen Norman.*







*The dramatic entry has oversized arched mahogany doors inspired by a Tuscan Villa. The over grouted stone and stucco exterior with a heavy limestone cornice works in harmony with copper gutters, copper roof detailing and slate roof. The tree-lined driveway to the right leads to the Wye River, horse barn and riding field.*





**Above Left:** Kim Billick and Freddie Hecht designed a kitchen that is both utilitarian and beautiful. Distressed painted and stained kitchen cabinets and refrigerator doors are custom made by Habersham in Georgia. The plaster range hood over the 48" Viking range continues the home's Tuscan Villa style. Island countertop is 2" thick Verdant green soapstone in a honed finish, complimented by the honed Jerusalem limestone countertop against the walls. Photo by Angie Myers.

**Top Right:** An impressive wood octagonal ceiling of reclaimed beams and heart pine planks from Primitive Woods adds drama to the cozy breakfast area. Walls are over grouted with a Pennsylvania Stone Veneer, "Raven's Blend." The wrought iron Rivoli chandelier from Niermann Weeks has an aged gold leaf finish.

**Inset:** Seated with the 'Idea Book': Kim Billick (left) Frederike Hecht Standing: Brian Billick (left) Bret Anderson. Photography by Angie Myers.

**Right:** Library walls are covered in Antique Pine from Primitive Woods. The same over grouted stone used in the breakfast area reappears on one library wall perpendicular to the fireplace.

**A**t first blush the idea of building a 9,000 sq. ft. home (11,000 sq. ft. with loggias) on the Wye River without an architect seems as crazy as the loons swimming in it.

But not to Kim and Brian Billick.

"I always dreamed of having enough property on the water to have a horse. When we found this land on the Wye River I knew this was it," says Kim.

Brian Billick, an analyst for FOX Sports and The NFL Network, was the former Coach of the Baltimore Ravens. He coached the team to their only Super Bowl championship in 2001. Kim Billick, a New Mexican native, shares a passion for the Chesapeake with her husband Brian, who is actually from fast-paced Los Angeles.

Prior to moving to Queenstown, the Billicks lived on a 70-acre farm in Reistertown with their boat docked in Annapolis. "Every time we got in our boat we'd head to St. Michaels or the Wye River. I'm slow on the uptake sometimes but it finally dawned on me. Since we like it over here so much, we should look for property," said Brian.

On a biking and antiquing trip in 2003, Brian quickly lost interest in antiques. "I walked into a real estate office and said, 'Whatdaya got?'"

He received 12 plot maps. They fell in love with the first property they saw—15 acres along the Wye River. They struggled through cornfields to reach the water's edge, so Brian rented a helicopter for a better view. When he flew over the property, he felt the magnificence of the land was inescapable.

They purchased it soon after but delayed the building process for three years.

When they were ready to move forward, the Billicks interviewed a number of architects but quickly became frustrated. "Either they wouldn't tell you what they charged or the attitude was something like, 'I know more than you. Shut up, I'll design the house I want.' That went over real big with me as you can imagine," bellows the former coach.

Frederike (Freddie) Hecht, the Billicks' Reistertown neighbor and designer, previously designed several homes including her own. The Billicks always admired her home. They knew Freddie's skills were more advanced than the interior design firms they worked with in the past. And their tastes and personalities meshed. "We wanted to be involved in the design of our house. The architects we spoke to didn't encourage that. With Freddie we could be very involved," says Kim. A cohesive working team was formed.

Confident that they could build a home without an architect, Freddie shepherded the Billicks through the process, asking lots of questions: "What are your needs? What are your goals? What might it look like?"

Throughout their 30-plus-year marriage, the Billicks had plenty of opportunities to hone their home design preferences. Brian's various coaching jobs meant they moved a lot around the country. While they renovated a few of the 14 homes they lived in, they never built a home "from scratch." "We'd see bits and pieces of what we liked. You know the old expression, 'if we ever build a home I'd like to do this or that,'" says Brian.

Some couples collect antique clocks or Faberge eggs or silver spoons. The Billicks

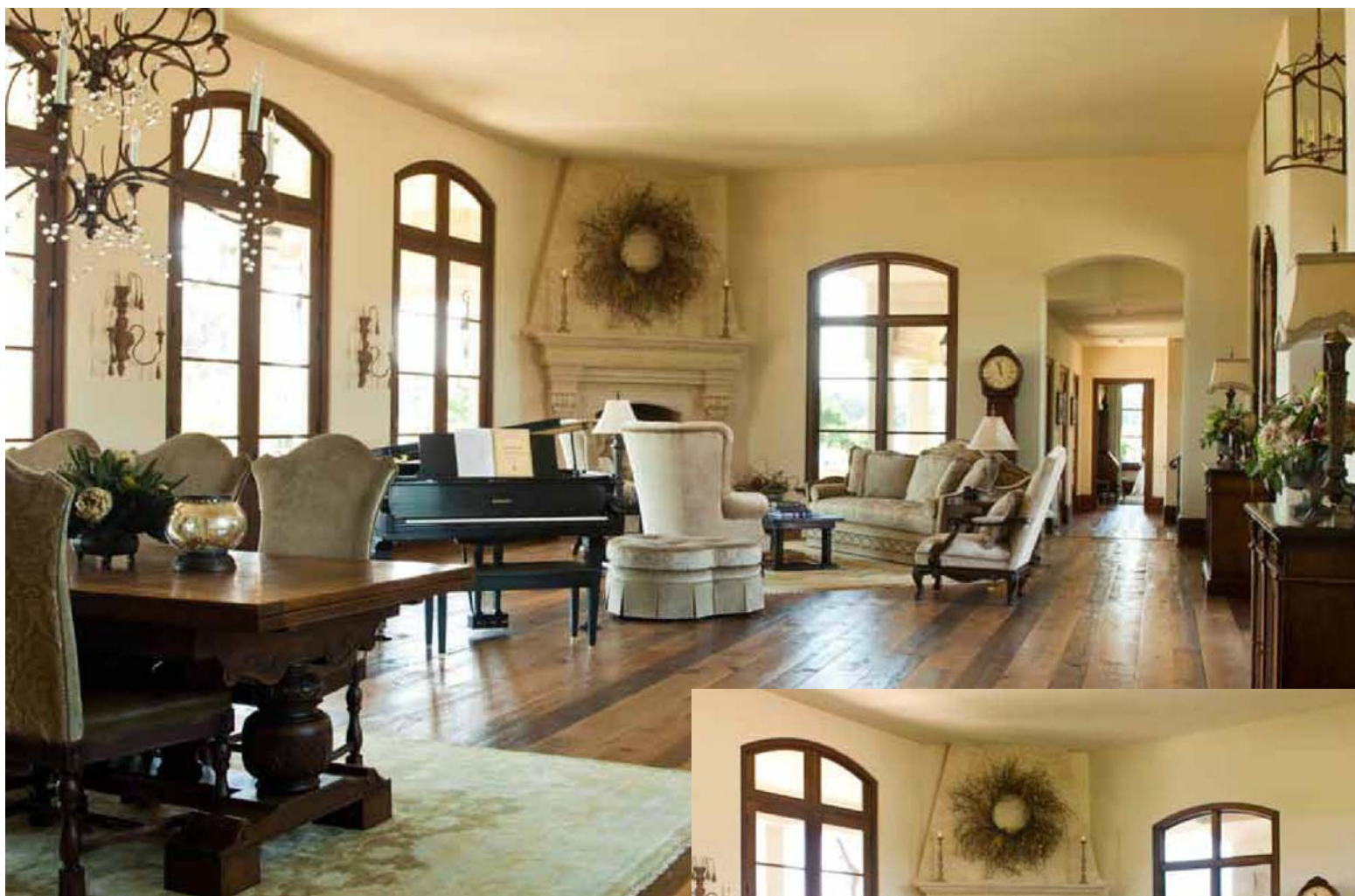












collect ideas, enough to fill a large, well-organized binder. The very first photo Kim collected was a picture of a loggia, a roofed open gallery or arcade in the side of a building commonly facing an open court. That became the beginning of their Queenstown's home. "Freddie took that picture and started building our entire house around it," says Kim.

Their direction was clear. They wanted the house to be open, comfortable and flow on one level (with the exception of a two-story guest wing). And, they wanted to maximize the Wye River views. Since the Billicks have two daughters ages 27 and 22, plenty of room for future grandkids was a must. "That was a big part of the design," says Kim. Their eldest daughter is now expecting.

The project was exceptional in its scale and ambition. The overall plan demanded a tennis court, pool and paddock for Kim's horse plus a pier for their Hinckley picnic boat. And it was imperative that the house be dog-friendly for their two frisky standard poodles, Cooper and Gilly.

"In the beginning Brian thought he was an architect," said Kim. "He used a computer

architectural program and learned just enough to be really dangerous and annoying," she teases. Brian nods in agreement. "I was Kim and Freddie's worst nightmare because I actually pretended I knew what I was doing."

But with the help of Freddie's draftsmen and support team, the trio put together their desired framework before interviewing several builders. They decided on Pyramid, a builder recommended by friends on both sides of the bridge.

"We said to Bret (Bret Anderson, Pyramid's President), 'We want to build a house. We have no architect and we want you to use some of the people we like.' That's how the conversation started," says Brian.

"At first it was pretty alarming," Bret adds. "Usually there is an architect and an interior designer. The architect is the catalyst who brings everything together in an orderly way. I was concerned. But as we began the process I became more comfortable," says Bret. The team addressed every issue from different perspectives- the designer's, the builder's, and the owners'. When decisions needed to be made regarding materials, Bret provided three choices at three price points,



**Left:** Ideal for entertaining, the dining room is open and bright. Dining chairs are a dramatic focal point: chair backs are covered in Paisley chenille and the inback fabric is strait velvet. Seats are olive leather. An original oil painting of a country scene hangs over a solid walnut sideboard. The forged iron Avignon chandelier from Niermann Weeks is in a rusty steel finish, accented with a rope of faceted crystals.

**Top:** Tranquility reigns in the comfortable and unpretentious living room. Sofas, chairs and ottoman are covered in velvet and linen velvet damask. The two solid walnut chests on the right are imported from Italy. Kim, an accomplished pianist, and her two daughters enjoy playing the grand piano, the room's focal point.

**Close up:** Kim and Freddie designed the massive sandstone fireplace custom-made to their specifications in Turkey. It took a year to complete. Hand troweled plaster walls throughout the house are painted with Benjamin Moore Berber White.



outlining the pros and cons of each so the Billicks could remain in control of the budget. “We traded ideas back and forth and built a consensus,” says Bret.

The Billicks’ highly detailed ideas binder made it easy for Bret to understand their vision and translate it into reality. The process moved smoothly. The Billicks began working with Freddie in 2006. Construction began in 2007. And in 2009 they moved into their home.

Initially, there was no rush to complete the home. The Billicks didn’t intend to live in it full-time for a few years since Brian was still coaching the Ravens. “When Bret would ask about a timeline, I’d say, ‘Relax man, the time doesn’t matter to me.’ Six months later I’m out of a job. I called Bret and said, ‘I’m your worst nightmare. I want it now!’ All of the sudden I was focused on the house. I had time and inclination. A lot changed quickly for both of us,” says Brian.

True to the design of a Tuscan villa, the Billicks chose a stone and stucco exterior and sandblasted the stone cornices for an aged effect. The hand-troweled plaster walls, height of the baseboards, stained millwork and plaster returns to the window and door

frames, the quality of the interior stone and the 12-and 14-foot ceilings reflect the Billicks’ commitment to maintain high quality throughout the house.

The home may be inspired by the old country but many of the building materials are American. Both the interior and exterior stone is from Pennsylvania and is over grouted so that it looks older but not contrived. While the heart pine wood floor from a local source is new, it also appears old. To achieve the exact color and finish, the team used the floor in a guest bedroom as a palette, testing and retesting colors for a week before making a final decision.

Though change orders were kept to a minimum and snags were easily resolved, at times it didn’t seem that way. When the vanity, a Vanderbilt reproduction, was to be installed in the guest bathroom, it didn’t fit in the allocated space. “I went ballistic,” says Brian. “Our foreman Rick said we would have to move a wall. All I heard was ‘move wall.’ I’m a coach so I pulled a blue veiner.

“Rick said, ‘Coach, it’ll take 20 minutes and it won’t cost you a thing. It’s just frame.’ We were ahead of the curve enough so even a change didn’t matter. The room came to-

gether even better than the original plan. That’s the way the whole house went.”

Bret knew that living on a secluded waterfront estate would present challenges. He recommended installing a high-tech alarm and smoke detection system and a full-house generator, something Brian questioned. “It’s big and expensive, why do we need that?” Brian asked. “But after living here two years and losing power on and off over three weeks thanks to a hurricane, having that generator was a great idea,” says Brian. And, recently their sophisticated smoke detection system detected a small fire that was easily contained.

“The minute you tell people you are going to build a house they say, ‘Oh, I had to sue my contractor. It’s a mess.’ That’s all I heard from day one. But the comfort zone we had with Bret and Freddie made the process so easy,” Brian adds.

Today, this working team’s strong relationship continues. “I don’t know how typical this is, but I was in LA and Kim was in Charleston when we had that small fire. I called Bret. Though he has no responsibility here, when we got home his team was already taking care of it. Each time we have a ques-

tion we call Bret or the project manager. It’s not like they built the house and that’s it,” says Brian.

The Billicks love calling Queenstown “home” and plan to become more involved in the community. Recently they opened their home to a fundraiser for the Queen Anne’s Emergency Center. But Brian’s busy schedule makes getting to know the neighbors a challenge. Each Sunday he flies to L.A. to shoot three shows before taking a flight home on Tuesday. “The minute I hit that bridge my body relaxes; my mind relaxes. I can’t wait to get home,” he says wistfully.

A great football coach gives credit to his winning team. Coach Billick and his wife Kim apply that same strategy. They continue to sing the praises of their design and building team to anyone who asks, “What’s it like to build a house without an architect?”

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**Left:** *Leather chairs in front of fireplace in family room:  
Two large leather chairs create a cozy conversation space in the family room adjacent to the kitchen. Oversized heart pine trim is used throughout the house as well as reclaimed rough random width plank heart pine flooring.*

**Top:** *The spacious master bathroom features a simple white claw-foot bathtub. Floors are covered in chiseled travertine tile to give it an old world feel and countertops are Jerusalem Bone Limestone in a patina finish. The French inspired hand-blown glass sconces and Chandelier feature aged gold and silver leaf forged iron work.*

**Right:** *The dual sink vanity with brown imperial marble top is a Vanderbilt reproduction. Large 24"X24" floor tile of chiseled travertine with imperial brown inlay from Chesapeake Tile was chosen to be in proportion with the large room.*







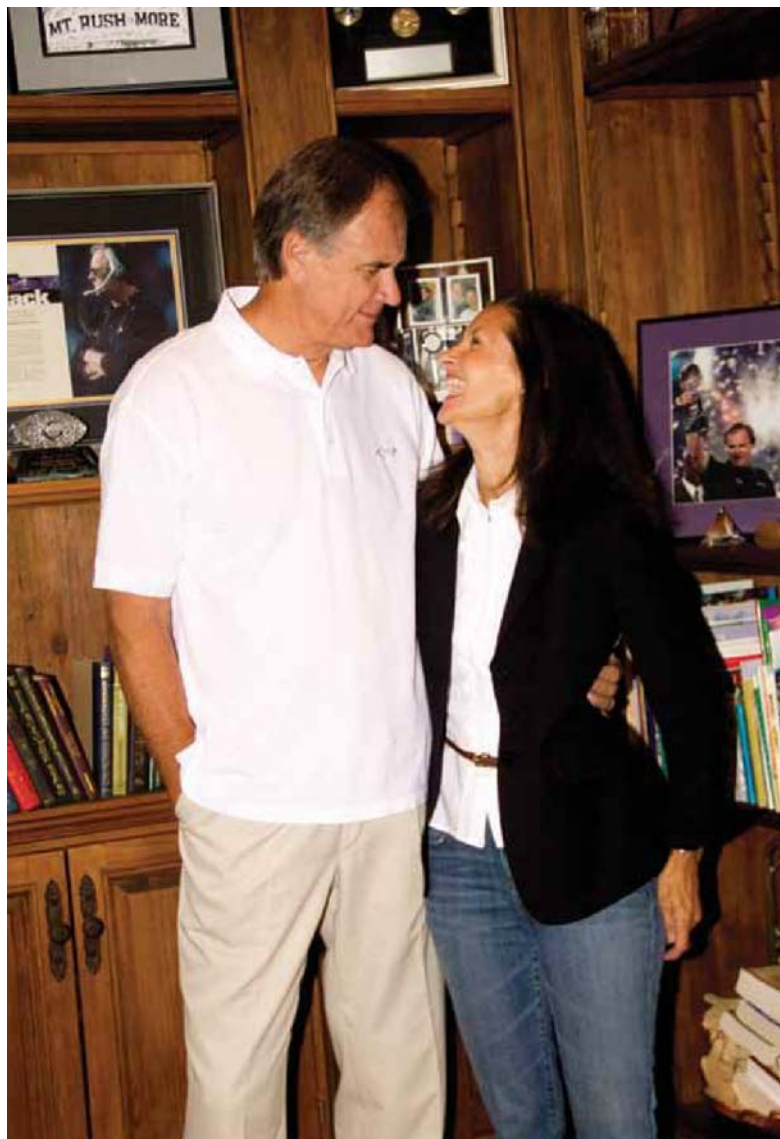
**Left:** The Billick's favorite times are spent outdoors. The wraparound loggia includes a gazebo which faces an outdoor fireplace.

**Below:** The outdoor deck on the second floor of the guest wing has an Ipe heartwood floor, selected for both resiliency and beauty. The expansive outdoor entertaining stone terrace overlooks the pool, pool house, tennis court and boat dock.

**Right:** Kim and Brian Billick are surrounded by football memorabilia in their library, a room also used as Brian's home office.







As unusual as this process may seem, the Billicks maintain a track record for achieving success without following the norm. For example, their courtship took place primarily by phone. The Billicks met when Brian was working for the San Francisco 49ers and Kim was working for the Dallas Cowboys. A mutual friend in San Francisco introduced them while Kim was visiting. After she returned to Dallas, she and Brian talked on the phone at least twice a day before they decided to marry. They were physically together for only three days before they tied the knot. "I'm very good on the telephone," says Brian with a twinkle in his eye.

*Photo by Angie Myers.*

#### Sources:

**Exterior Photo:** *Windows:* Jeldwen Desert Sand; *Stucco:* L&L Supply custom color to blend with OC Mortar; *Stone:* Pennsylvania Stone, "Ravens Blend" L&L Supply (correction from Pyramid, not Athena Stone); *Fabricated Stone Crown, Stone Water Table, and Stone Sills* are from L&L Supply (sand blasted for aged appearance); *Exterior Lights:* Canterbury- Savoy House; *Copper French Dormer Window:* Beach Sheet Metal; *Copper Finials on Roof:* Beach Sheet Metal; *Roofing:* Slate; *Copper Gutter Baskets:* Beach Sheet Metal; *Kitchen Walls:* Stone: Pennsylvania Stone Veneer, "Ravens Blend" L&L Supply OC Weather Jointed Mortar; *Kitchen Cabinetry:* Layout Designed by Kim Billick and Frederike Hecht; *Cabinet Maker:* Habersham Furniture Company; *27 Step process on finish;*

*Island and Upper Cabinets:* color Muslin; *Lower Cabinets and Armoire Refrigerator:* color Brittany; *All Wood Floors:* Antique Pine Primitive Woods, Queenstown, Maryland; *Chandeliers:* Currey and Company.

**Breakfast Nook:** *Chandelier:* Niermann Weeks; *Ceiling:* Primitive Woods;

*Walls:* Stone: Pennsylvania Stone Veneer, "Ravens Blend" L&L Supply.

**Library:** *Walls:* Antique Pine: Primitive Woods; *Construction of Library Built-ins:* Mr. Yung Kim; *Hand Made Interior Doors:* Primitive Woods.

**Dining Room:** *Chandelier:* Niermann Weeks; *Chairs:* Stanford Furniture; *Outback Fabric:* Paisley Chenille: Stanford Furniture; *In back Fabric:* Strait Velvet: Taylor King Furniture; *Seats:* Leather Remi color Olive: Stanford Furniture; *Table:* Antique; *Sideboard:* Sarreid; *Candelabras on Sideboard:* Uttermost Co.; *Painting:* Original oil painting.

**Living Room:** *Large Sconces:* Currey and Company; *Fireplace:* Hand carved in Turkey, Shubh Collection; *Chairs, Ottoman, and Sofa:* Taylor King Furniture; *Fabric:* Strait Velvet, Taylor King Furniture; *Seat and Pillows on sofa:* Hickory Chair Linen Velvet Damask; *2 Chests on Right:* David Michael, Italy; *Lamps On Chests:* John Richards; *Foyer Chandelier:* Visual Comfort; *Grandfather clock:* Antique; *Rugs in Living Room and Dining Room:* Exquisite Rug. *Wall Color in Entire House:* Benjamin Moore Berber White.

**Kitchen Fireplace:** *Tufted Sliced Leather Chairs color Chocolate:* Stanford Furniture Company; *Floors:* Primitive Woods; *Antlers:* Sarreid; *Walls:* Stone: Pennsylvania Stone Veneer, "Ravens Blend" L&L Supply.

**Master Bath:** *Tile:* Chiseled Travertine: Chesapeake Tile; *Inlaid Border:* Onyx Cobblestone: Chesapeake Tile; *Vanities:* Will Kauffman Cabinetry; *Hardware:* Barrevelid; *Vanity Mirrors:* Habersham Furniture Company; *Sconces and Chandelier:* Currey and Company; *Bathtub:* Kohler Birthday Bath.

**Guest Bath:** *Tile:* Chiseled Travertine: Chesapeake Tile. *Inlay:* Imperial Brown: Chesapeake Tile; *Vanity:* AFD Company; *Sconces:* Currey and Company.

**Exterior:** *Exterior Furniture:* AFD Company; *Exterior Fireplace:* Shubh Company;

*Flooring:* L&L Supply Irregular Flagstone; *Light Fixtures:* Canterbury, Savoy House; *Fans:* Treventi, Fanimation Company.