

at home -

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A GRACIOUS HOME FOR AN EVER-GROWING FAMILY

The Kolb Residence

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS Sandy Kolb does when a new friend comes to her Elkhorn home is lead them to her living room, where a large family photo acts as an invaluable roadmap to the extended household. Kolb and her husband, Ed, have 10 children and eight grandchildren. And just as her family has transformed through the years, so, too, has the Kolb home.

“We had our daughters first—Emily, Sarah, and Caitlin. Then we adopted two biological brothers from Romania—Andrew and Stefan,” Kolb explained. “Then we heard about Charlie, who was born with spina bifida in China, and we felt it was important that he have a Chinese brother for the sense of connection, so we adopted Charlie and George together.” ▶



The Kolb clan gathers for a family meal in their renovated kitchen.



AT HOME

< **HERE, KOLB**, a school nurse, paused to provide some helpful background information. Ed, who is the director and chief medical officer of Boys Town National Research Hospital and Medical Clinics, formerly served as the director of the health system's international adoption clinic and continues to direct its craniofacial-cleft lip and palate team. Over the years, the couple has developed an acute understanding of the need for international adoptions, and the specific medical and cultural requirements of internationally adopted children. "Through our adoption agency, Holt International, we heard about Christian, who was turning 14, which is when children age out of the adoption system in China, and we knew we could help," Kolb said. "And in the process, we got Lucas, who was also about to age out. We brought them home on Christmas Day 2010."

But the family wasn't quite complete yet. "One day, we were walking out of church, and Ed said to me, 'I think there is a little girl in China that belongs with us.'" Enter MarieClaire, then age 4, now, a bright and creative 11-year-old. >





◀ **“MARIECLAIRE LOVES PINTEREST,”** Kolb said, showing off one of her daughter’s seasonal creations for a brunch celebrating that month’s birthdays. Now that the older siblings are in their 20s and 30s, only three of the Kolb kids currently live at the clan’s Fire Ridge Estates home—but it is definitely the heart of family activity, particularly since a recent kitchen renovation. The reno was no picnic, mandating Kolb relocate cooking duties to the basement for three long months. “We all love to cook, but the old kitchen just had a little oven and stovetop,” she explained. “I used to tell everyone that they had to bring things over fully cooked because there wasn’t space to prepare it here. Now, I say, ‘just bring it all over and you can make it when you get here.’”

The Kolbs have been through a few kitchen renovations before and had a fairly clear idea of what they needed, including extra stovetop space and a second refrigerator. Kolb also desired a traditional look. “This is actually our third home in Omaha,” Kolb said. She and Ed are native Californians, but they’ve been here for most of their married life. “And we lived in this house for five years before we started with the renovation, so we knew what we wanted.”

The resulting space definitely pokes holes in the “too many cooks” theory. Family gatherings usually kick off with the adults congregating around the large kitchen island to work on various meal prep projects. The grandkids settle in with their favorite toys, while the teens and tweens drift to the backyard basketball court (“That’s one of the reasons we bought this house,” Kolb noted). It’s a well-orchestrated symphony and Kolb, who clearly runs the show, makes it all look effortless.

“Everyone has a job to do, and there’s a place for everything,” she said simply. “My parents emigrated from Budapest, so maybe it comes from my Germanic heritage. I believe that when children are surrounded by beautiful things, they step up to that environment. Our home can be loud and chaotic at times, but we all love aesthetics, and we all try to take care of our surroundings.”

Throughout the home are heirlooms and pieces collected from the family’s travels, including delicate porcelain dishes, ornate Hungarian fine art, and many representations of the Madonna and child—beloved iconography to the mother of 10. Because everyone enjoys getting together to bake traditional Hungarian sweets, particularly during the holiday season, the children from China are eager to meet their Hungarian relatives (a visit is in the works for Summer 2021). Kolb, who spent a year abroad in Norway as a student, also makes a kransekake, or Norwegian wedding cake. “Our son, George, insists on it every year for his birthday,” she said.

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The Kolbs honor their Chinese children’s heritage with frequent visits to one of their favorite restaurants, New Gold Mountain, where two of the boys work. They celebrate Chinese New Year and, in a time-honored tradition started by Kolb’s father, they order Chinese takeout every Christmas Eve.

“We have our family traditions, but the main thing is that we try to stay flexible. We’ve learned that what might be the right thing for one of our children isn’t necessarily the right thing for another one,” Kolb said. “Being the mother of a big family is a great gift, but it’s also a great responsibility, and I always try to remember both of those things.” OmahaHome