

Building Their Solar Home a Natural for This Couple

BY LOUISE HUTCHINSON

(Picture on page 6)

Mrs. Jean Wehrheim can install wiring, mix mortar, change diapers, and prepare formula.

She also can tell you about a solar house [she lives in one she helped design and build] and enlighten you on the problems of general contracting.

For Mrs. Wehrheim, 29 — wife, mother, architect, and general contractor—early this year began, as her own general contractor, building three homes of her own design in York Center, the cooperative

community at Meyers and Roosevelt rds. She lives in York Center with her husband, John, an architect, in the house John and Jean [Wehrheim] built.

Work at Home

This all started in 1948 when she graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in architecture. Her first job for a Chicago architect served as introduction to her husband, who worked in the same office.

After their marriage in May, 1949, and a honeymoon spent

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Designs and Builds Houses



Architect and general contractor is Mrs. Jean Wehrheim of York Center near Lombard. She checks plans with Carpenter Gerhard Beukema at one house site while her son, George, munches cooky from Beukema's lunch.

COUPLE PLOTS, PUTS UP OWN SOLAR HOUSE

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beginning the designs for their present home, both moved on to new jobs in the office of another Loop architect.

"A year later, I came to Glen Ellyn to work for a contractor and finally I gave up and began doing some work at home," said Mrs. Wehrheim. "Then, John gave up his Loop job and made his office here at home until life became too hectic and he opened an office in Lombard."

Feedings and Subcontractors

The hectic element was the arrival of George, the Wehrheim's 16 months old adopted son.

"After the baby came, I gave up trying to do drafting work — you need peace and quiet for that — and got the idea to try general contracting."

So, between feedings and naps, Mrs. Wehrheim holds conferences with subcontractors, makes visits to her three home sites, and cares for the five room house she and her husband designed and constructed on a lot nearly an acre in size.

"Designing these three homes I'm building now wasn't as hard as designing our own home," she laughed. "It takes a long time for two architects to plan their own home, you know, and we've got enough plans left over for 10 other homes!"

Warm in Winter

John Wehrheim is now official architect for the York Center cooperative community where house plans for all prospective residents must be inspected by him. He and his wife built their own house from pouring the foundation [ready mix cement] to laying the roof planks.

"It's a solar house," explained the family's feminine architect. "That means the entire south wall—52 feet long — is all glass. An overhang prevents the summer sun from entering but permits the winter sun to heat the entire house during day hours.

"Even in zero weather, we can shut off the heat on a sunny day, and occasionally it becomes so warm, I have to open the door."

Son Likes Cookies

The Wehrheims estimate they built their own home for \$9,300, exactly half of what it would have cost had they had

it built for them. The homes that Mrs. Wehrheim is building range in price from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Son George has adapted well to his mother's schedule. While she confers with workmen, he ransacks their lunches for cookies. And father Wehrheim?

"I guess he takes it all as a matter of course," says his wife.

Career life comes naturally to Mrs. Wehrheim. Her father, Harry Wiersema, a graduate in architectural engineering from the University of Illinois, is assistant to the chief engineer at the Tennessee valley authority.

Career Family

One sister, Mrs. Diane Ehlers of Columbus, O., a geologist, is married to a geologist on the faculty of Ohio State university. Another, Mrs. Lila Dannhauer, a chemist, is wed to a doctor now starting his internship at the Menninger clinics, Topeka, Kas.

A younger sister, Alice, is majoring in chemistry at the University of Illinois, and a brother, Harry Jr., still in high school, intends to be an engineer.

"And what of your mother?" Mrs. Wehrheim was asked. "Well, she attended the University of Chicago, worked as a legal secretary — and reared five children!"