

MKE lifestyle



BRICK & MORTAR: Warren Barnett Interiors

BY TERRY SCHUSTER | PHOTOS BY LAURA DIERBECK

When Warren Barnett Interiors moved its Capitol Drive showroom in Brookfield to the inside of old St. Mary's Catholic Church on Watertown Plank Road in Elm Grove this spring, both the building and the interior designers found synchronicity.

The iconic church, built on the convent property of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, has a rich history of serving the community and an orphanage the Sisters once ran. Though it was no longer the parish church, the community fought hard to keep the cream city brick building and its steeple standing as a monument that greets visitors who enter Elm Grove from the east.

The building was sold to Warren Barnett in 2021. "We intend to preserve this historical monument and this history of the building in the most respectful way possible," said Mike Bachman, owner of Warren Barnett Interiors.

The church was selected both for its location and for the certain aesthetic it lends to customers. "We had a clear vision of how we wanted our new location to feel," says Emily Ebben, Warren Barnett director of design and marketing. "We toured many buildings all over the greater Milwaukee area, seeking something more boutique feeling than a typical vanilla box. From the moment we walked in the front door, the feeling was perfect. The building has an amazing history, stunning architecture, and we were excited to put our spin on it. We're thrilled to now be located in a community setting, and we're only miles from our original location."

The classic interior reflects the design firm's approach with its clients, she notes. "Our showroom is meant to feel aspirational, warm



and approachable. We're passionate people, and we love what we do."

Working with a client is a deeply personal journey, she says. "After we have gone out to a client's home to measure, we come back and lay out room plans on our CAD system," Ebben explains. "This process allows people to visualize spatially exactly how things will fit in their space. When clients come in for a presentation, they can expect to see proposed room plans, fabric and rug samples, proposed finishes, paint colors, etc.

"Regardless of project size, we like to help the client see, touch and feel, and really get an idea of how the space could transition. We love to create spaces that better reflect the people living in them. It's one of the best parts of our jobs."

And supply issues and a changing world means businesses such as Warren Barnett need to pivot with it. "The world has changed in almost every facet of life," Ebben says. "We're 90 percent U.S.-made custom furniture, so we aren't bogged down with the container issues, other than random parts and pieces. That said, depending on the vendor and other factors, custom furniture is running anywhere from 6-10 months behind across the board [from build to delivery]. Every single furniture store or design studio across the country would likely give you the same answer. We're really lucky our clients have accepted it.

"We just returned from our bi-annual market trip, and everything seemed quite positive and trending toward improvement, so we're hopeful that one day soon things will turn around." MKE