Justin and Kylie Hicken might be in the business of changing people's houses but they think a lot about preserving memories.

For them, it's personal.

Kylie's family, the Hoovers, have lived in Dickinson County for nearly 140 years. Four years ago Justin and Kylie moved into the house on the land acquired in 1880 by her great-great-great grandparents Samuel and Maria Zook(their granddaughter Ruth married Kylie's great-grandfather Jesse Hoover).

In 2015 the family had just buried her grandmother Geraldine Hoover.

"When we talked about renovating grandma's house there was some chatter in the family, like, 'I don't want to come see it because it will make me cry if you change too much,'" Justin recalls. "This is the thing we run into, that anchor to the past. Everyone wants an old house, they want the charm of an old house, but they don't want the problems."

The Hickens' business, Wizard of Odz and Ends, offers remodeling services that suit their clients' tastes. These don't necessarily involve incorporating the latest in electronics and materials but some clients want them to.

In their own home, at 3125 Hawk Rd., Justin and Kylie have chosen to strike a balance – creating new features they want but retaining key elements that tie them to the past. They have had plenty of opportunity to exercise this philosophy.

Kylie's father grew up in the house but as a young man went to aviation school in Texas, then moved to Pennsylvania, where Kylie grew up. Justin grew up in Florida, one of nine adopted children, most with special needs.

It soon became apparent he had an aptitude for problem solving, a skill that to some extent was developed through necessity.

"My first bike, they gave me in a box," he says. "If I wanted to ride the bike, I had to put the bike together."

His grandfather was a wonderful mentor.

"He was the grandpa who made airplanes out of beer cans," he says. "He was just so skilled. My dad didn't have any of that. My mom always told me, 'If you can fix stuff, you never will not have a job.'"

Justin landed a job with a company that offered interior design services, initially as an installer and eventually as its national installation manager. Kylie went to work doing design and sales for the same company.

They loved the challenges and opportunities the work provided, but they also relished the visits to Kansas. Kylie had fond memories of visiting when she was growing up.

“Coming out here was like real cowboy land,” she remembers. “We would swim in the cattle trough. It was so fun.”

It turned out Kansas charmed Justin too. Thinking that farming sounded like fun (how hard can it be?), he spent time in 2014 helping with harvest.

“He actually fell in love with Kansas,” Kylie says. “He got the idea this might be a place for our family.”

By that time Kylie’s grandmother was in a care home, and the house was being rented. She died the following year.

“We came out here for my grandmother’s funeral, and people started talking, ‘What are we going to do with the property?’ Nobody wanted to live here,” Kylie says.

Without really talking it over, Kylie and Justin each reached the conclusion this was where they belonged.

“Walking the property brought a feeling of peace,” she says. “We felt this was the right thing.” But they already owned a house in Atlanta. Kylie announced on Facebook they were selling their house. She posted on a Thursday; it was sold by Sunday.

Renting had not been easy on the family house. “Unliveable” was the word they used. “Structurally everything was fine, but there was mouse stuff everywhere,” Justin recalls. “We wouldn’t even let the baby crawl on the floor.”

The house was built in 1938 after the original home burned down. Its design is Practical Ranch – sensible layout, fru-fru free, and with built-in cabinets throughout.

Reminders of the past have been carefully selected and preserved.

“I remember sitting right here in this dining room and I would paint with [Grandma Geraldine] when I came up,” Kylie says. “I have always loved painting. I always felt I got that love of artistry from my grandma.”

And so in the dining room there is a glass-front cabinet with a set of Kylie’s grandmother’s hand-painted china, the last full set she made before she died. In the living room is the piano that Geraldine used when she taught piano lessons (they retrieved it from a relative in Wichita).

In the bathroom is a vanity they made using metal salvaged from the farm.

“You can pay homage to those other generations in other ways that have a nice design to them without actually keeping the bathroom exactly the same,” Kylie says.

Two years ago they were dealt another opportunity to modernize while keeping one foot in the past. A burst of straight-line winds swept through their property on a bright day, destroying several outbuildings, including the hay barn.

The Hickens have re-used some of the poles that survived the blast, with some of the reconstructed space functioning as a barn, and some as a gleaming showroom to display remodeling options.

Something old, something new.

“The idea about being passionate, and loving the space that you are in, we take that into projects that we do,” Justin says. “I think that’s a real freedom.”