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*Tranquility*  
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California Retreat  
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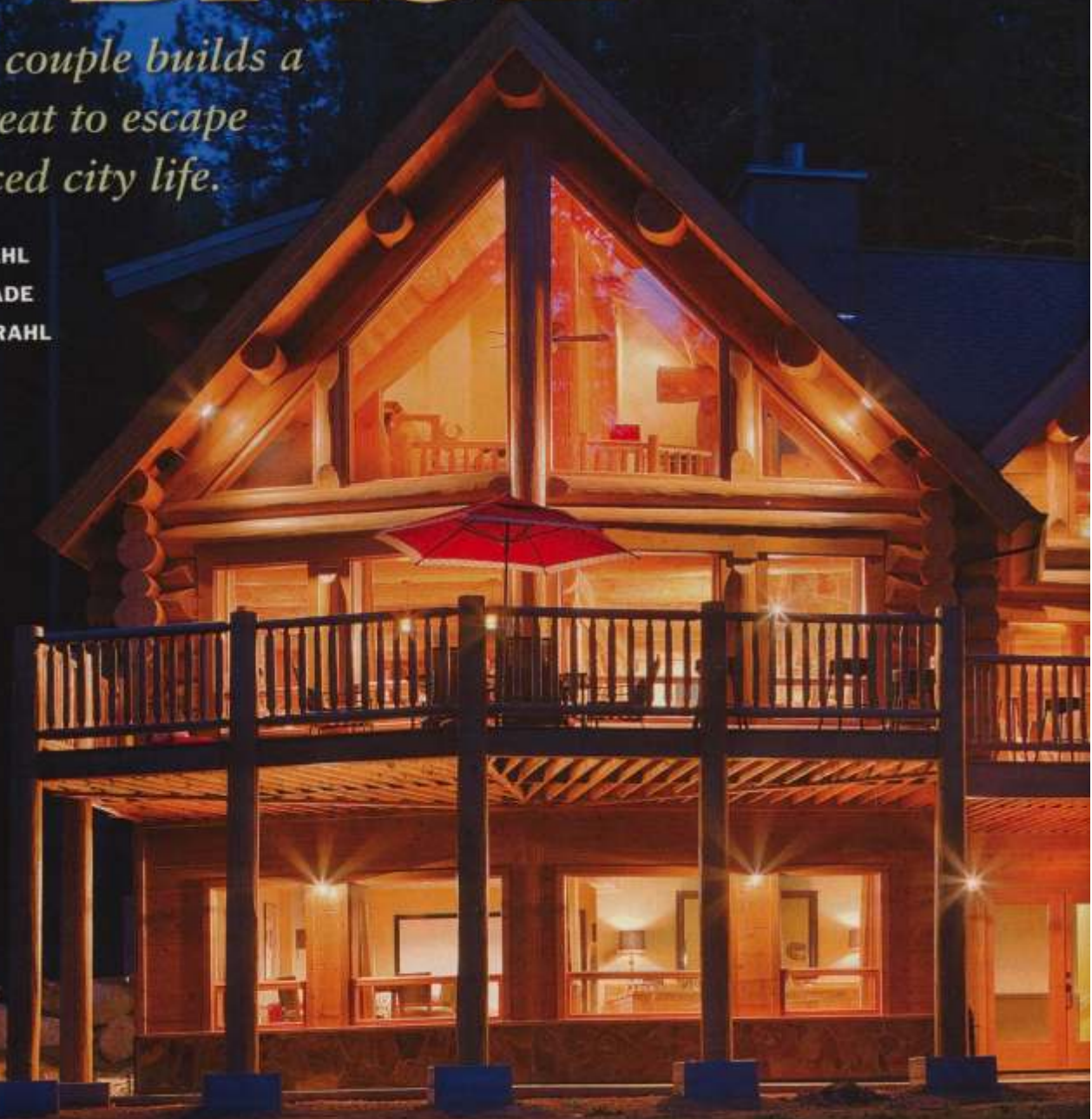
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# Tranquility BASE

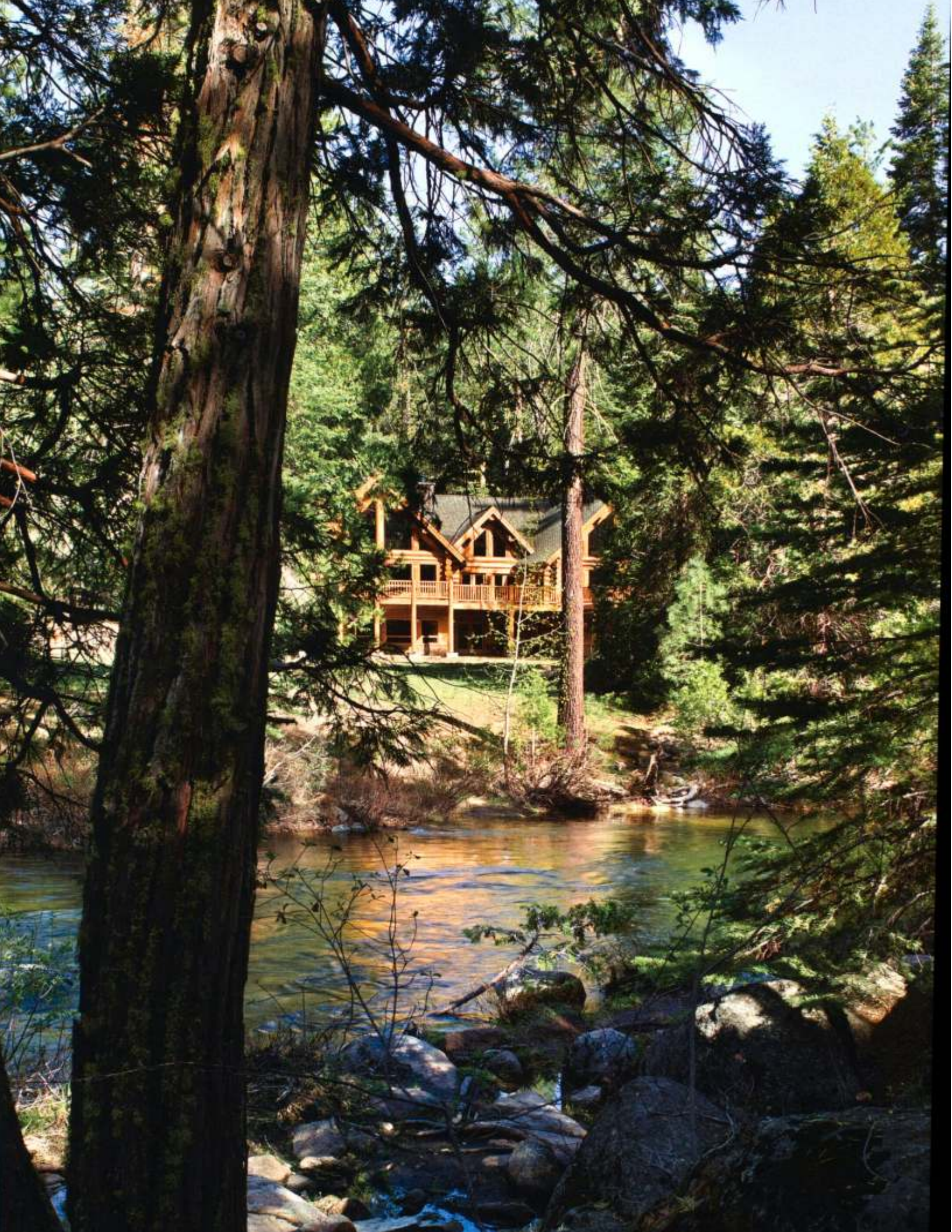
*A California couple builds a  
riverside retreat to escape  
their fast-paced city life.*

STORY BY DEBRA GRAHL  
PHOTOS BY ROGER WADE  
STYLING BY DEBRA GRAHL





**Richard and Debbie Basile** say their log home is like a beacon of serenity, surrounded by redwood trees beside the Stanislaus River in northern California. They're able to visit at least twice a month throughout the year, enjoying long weekends of fishing and hiking in the summer and skiing in winter.





**W**hat name do you bestow upon a home nestled in the midst of tranquil forestland in northern California's Sierra Mountains? Utopia? Nirvana? Simply Heaven? "Bunnywood," says homeowner Richard Basile. "I know it sounds corny, but Bunny is my pet name for my wife, Debbie, so we call it 'Bunnywood.'"

It makes sense. For Debbie Basile, this magical getaway home is a refuge from their fast-paced life in the San Francisco Bay area. Debbie's days there are filled with meditative hikes with her three dogs, planning and lovingly preparing slow-cooked family meals, and spending evenings gazing at the stars. "It sounds idyllic," Debbie says, "and it is."

The only activity resembling a chore is cleaning fish that Richard catches on

the Stanislaus River, which he has known all his life. "My grandparents owned a cabin, which has since been inherited by my mother, about a half-mile up the river from our place," he explains. "Since infancy, I've spent winter and summer vacations up here with my folks in the mountains. It has always been a special family retreat."

Being connected to the area helped Richard and Debbie find their own retreat. They learned of a riverside property listing through a local friend. "Debbie and I bought the property within days of the parcel going on the market," Richard recalls. "We made an offer after an hour of walking the land. It felt that right for us."

Acquiring the property may have been simple but deciding what kind of

**ABOVE:** The great room is furnished with comfortable upholstered pieces, punctuated with brightly colored accessories such as the bold striped pillows on the sectional sofa.

**OPPOSITE:** The Stanislaus River is the Basiles' nearest neighbor and best friend. "I feel so content in the river," says Richard, who has fished the river since boyhood. "All the worries or concerns about everyday life in the city just melt away when I head down to the river."



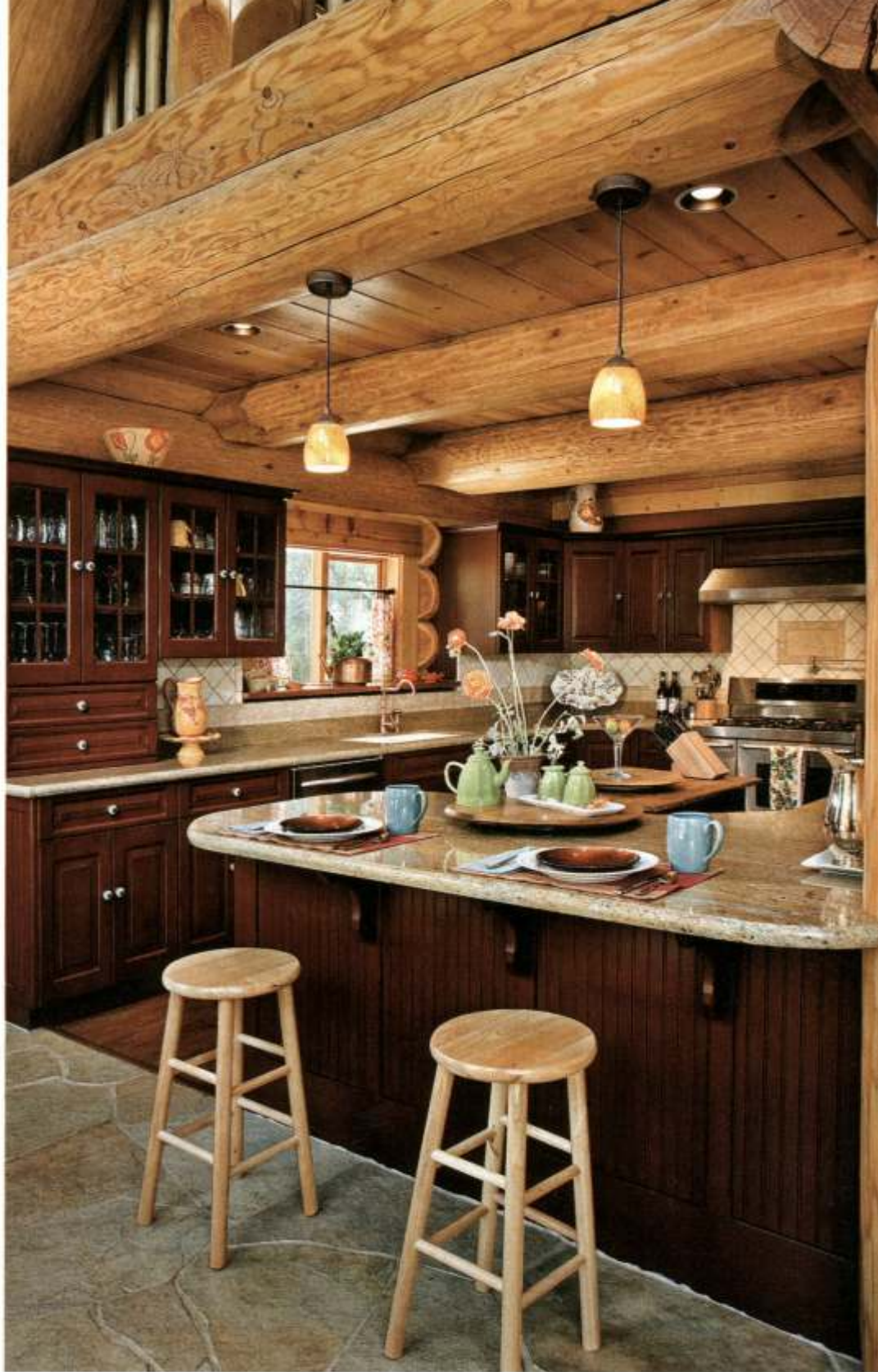
home to build involved some negotiating. Richard wanted a log home, which he felt was a natural fit for the redwood environment. Debbie, however, was concerned that “log” would translate to “massive” and “masculine.” Still, she agreed Richard could pursue his log home as long as he let her handle the interiors. “This way,” Debbie explains, “I felt that I could soften the ambiance of the home, keep it light, airy, even whimsical.”

Debbie’s primary goal in furnishing Bunnywood was comfort. “I didn’t want to do the typical log-cabin decor with antlers, Indian rugs, bearskins and earth tones,” she says. “I wanted to achieve a less ‘lodgey’ look, so instead, the fabrics are adorned with flowers, birds and polka dots in purples, oranges and blues. I even chose leopard carpeting for the game room and made sure there was lots of color throughout the entire house. Somehow, it all worked, and, ultimately, I love the logs. The wood is so warm, and each log has its own lovely character.”

While researching log-home companies online, Richard noticed The Log Connection, a British Columbia hand-crafter, because one of its plans, the Pinecrest, had the same name as a nearby lake he is fond of. A virtual tour of the plan on the company’s web site showed it could work for the couple. “We liked the catwalk that wrapped above the entire first floor, and the Swedish-cope log construction was also appealing, as I didn’t want chinking between the logs,” Richard says.

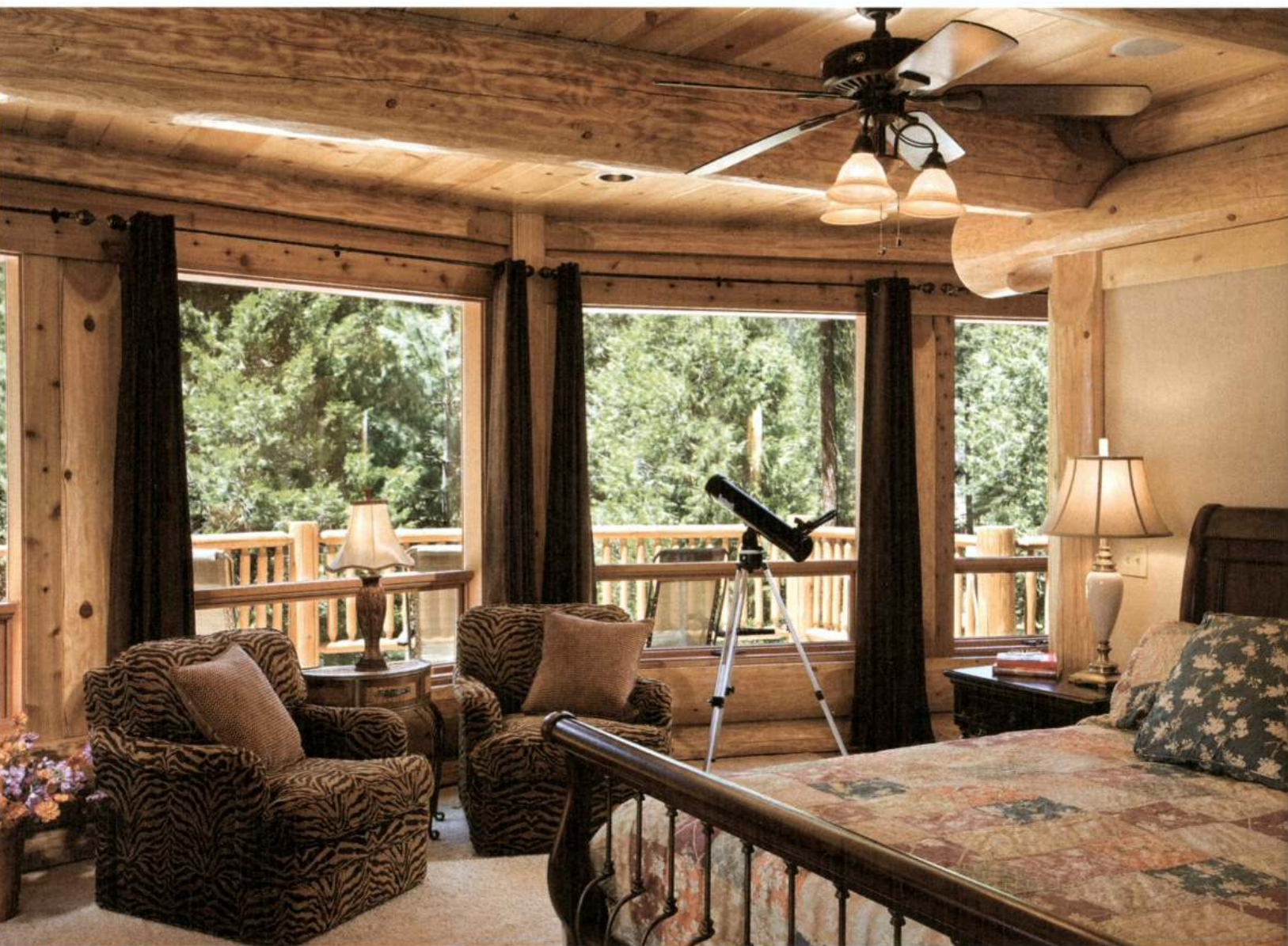
They wanted more bedrooms and bathrooms than the basic plan showed, however, so the company modified the plan and suggested adding doghouse dormers to create headroom in the upstairs bedrooms. The final plan provided five bedrooms, five bathrooms and two fireplaces, plus a finished basement accommodating a spacious theater, large bar, pool table and plenty of space for entertaining, all in 5,400 square feet.

When Richard and Debbie began pricing construction with their contractor, Ron Jensen, the cost of the project began to sink in. “I remember one of our initial meetings with Ron, showing him



**ABOVE:** Counter seating is the norm for casual meals in the hard-working kitchen. The cabinets are stained a deep, earthy red and feature glass upper doors to make them stand out from the big logs overhead. Granite countertops in a light sand tone complement the backsplash tiles throughout the kitchen, as well as the flagstone floors. “We opted for a wood floor in the kitchen rather than stone, which we felt would be hard to stand on for long periods of time during meal preparations,” Richard says.

**OPPOSITE:** A spacious dining area features a hand-made wooden table and eight chairs from a company that specializes in custom furnishings constructed from recycled timber. The dining room adjoins the rear deck, as does the kitchen, allowing both areas an easy flow of traffic through the great room.



the plans and trying to figure out if we could actually afford to build this place,” Richard says. “Ron told us, ‘Rich, I don’t need to make a lot of money on this project. I just can’t afford to lose any.’ With a handshake and sharp pencil, he helped us figure out how we could get it done.” One savings Jensen pointed out was buying custom wood doors and windows directly through The Log Connection.

Richard’s family had known Jensen for many years. He had purchased a lot from Richard’s grandparents that was adjacent to their cabin. “Ron was always very helpful to them, so we already had a good relationship,” Richard explains. “He and his crew were always polite and extremely trustworthy. One of Ron’s subs, Al Hodson, did an excellent job with the plumbing and electrical, always taking time to

**ABOVE:** The master bedroom doubles as a personal retreat, with oversized chairs providing a view of the forest and river.

**LEFT:** The bunkroom sleeps three. Debbie accessorized with bright, cheery colors, like the quilts that enliven the wood and painted drywall.

**OPPOSITE:** A whirlpool tub fills the corner of the spacious master bathroom. Cabinets and the tub surround are painted forest green to provide a cool complement to the warm wood. Countertop granite and backsplash tiles mimic the kitchen finishes.







A wide staircase ascends to the catwalk and loft area, which connects the two gabled wings. “Carpeting wasn’t practical for the main floor because of all the foot traffic, making low-maintenance, indestructible stone the obvious choice,” Debbie says. “Upstairs, though, we wanted a softer, cozier floor covering.”

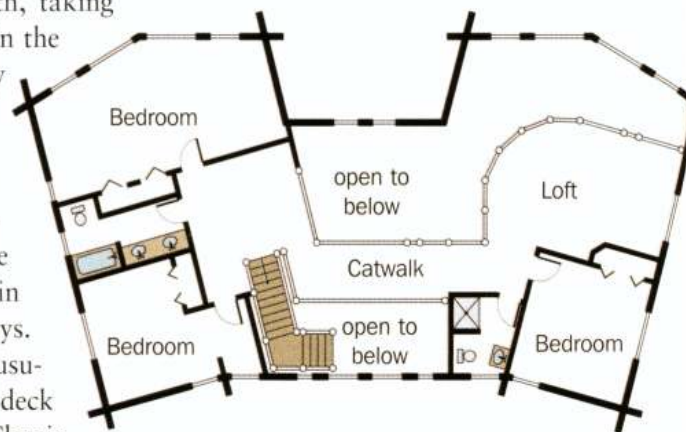
explain what he was doing and why. He made a lot of helpful suggestion during the building process.”

Construction took about 18 months from start to finish. The Basiles credit Jensen with making sure they received their certificate of occupancy by their bank’s deadline. “We went slightly over budget,” Richard admits, “however, given the size of the project, I was left with great appreciation for Ron and have a

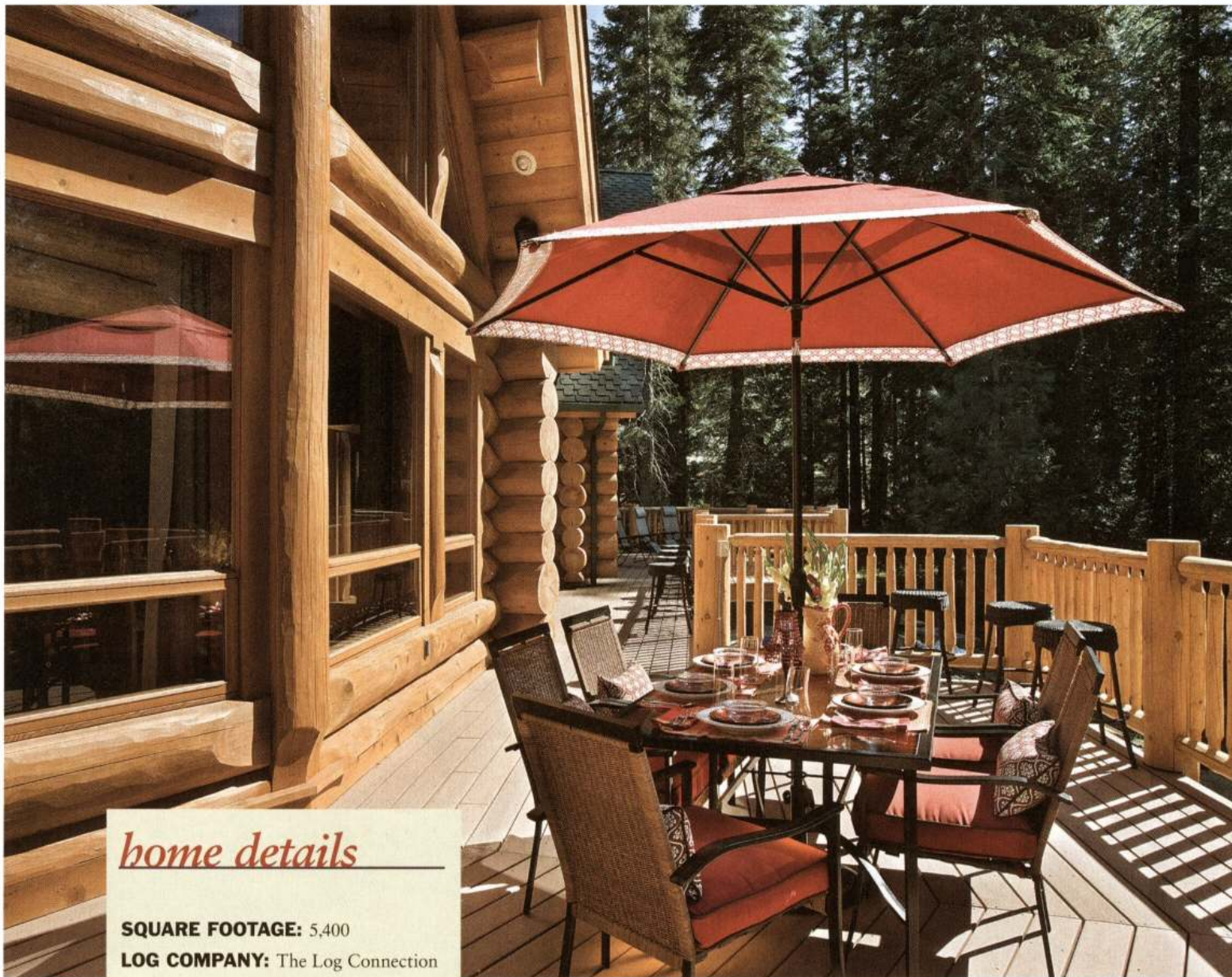
better relationship with him now than ever.”

With a three-and-a-half-hour drive between their two homes, Richard and Debbie are able to visit their mountain place at least twice a month, taking three-to-five-day weekends in the summer and skiing at nearby Dodge Ridge resort when it snows. “In the winter, we keep cozy and warm inside our home, but the summer is truly glorious with the gurgling of the river always in the background,” Debbie says. “Late afternoons I can usually be found on the rear deck listening to XM Radio’s ‘Classic Vinyl,’ with a glass of wine and a crossword puzzle. Now, that’s heaven.

Throw in a few friends, and that’s a party!” Turning to his wife, Richard gives her a squeeze and says, “Let the good times roll, Bunny.”



Upper Level



## home details

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 5,400

**LOG COMPANY:** The Log Connection

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
SEE RESOURCES ON PAGE 71

A spacious rear deck is perfect for grilling. "Weather providing, we find ourselves dining on the deck more than we dine indoors. Somehow the food always tastes better al fresco," says Richard, adding, "The view of the river on gorgeous summer days and evenings just can't be beat."



Main Level



Lower Level