



As Good As

WITH CAREFUL WORK, ONE NEW JERSEY COUPLE CREATES AN OLD-FASHIONED-LOOKING LOG HOME THAT FITS SEAMLESSLY INTO THE SURROUNDING HISTORIC COMMUNITY.

STORY BY Joely Johnson

PHOTOGRAPHY BY John P. Hamel

Cooperstown, New York, is probably most widely recognized as home to the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, but those who reside there know it has so much more to offer. Boasting world-class museums, theater and ample community activities, the well-preserved community often finds itself to be a tourist hotspot.

Those attractions, plus the natural charm and beauty, are what drew Bill and Liz Miller to the area when they decided they wanted to build a vacation home. The Millers knew from the start, the new home would have to be log. However they weren't as clear on what type of log home they'd have. In their eagerness to settle in upstate New York, they initially purchased a lovely milled-log home that they intended to renovate. But it wasn't long before Bill realized what he really wanted was a handcrafted log home.

LEFT: An arresting flared stairway leads from the lakeside to the deck, where the residents take in their spectacular view.



Old



ABOVE: Cheerful ruby-red-and-white upholstery enlivens the great room. The owners skillfully combined florals, stripes and leather to create an eclectic look.

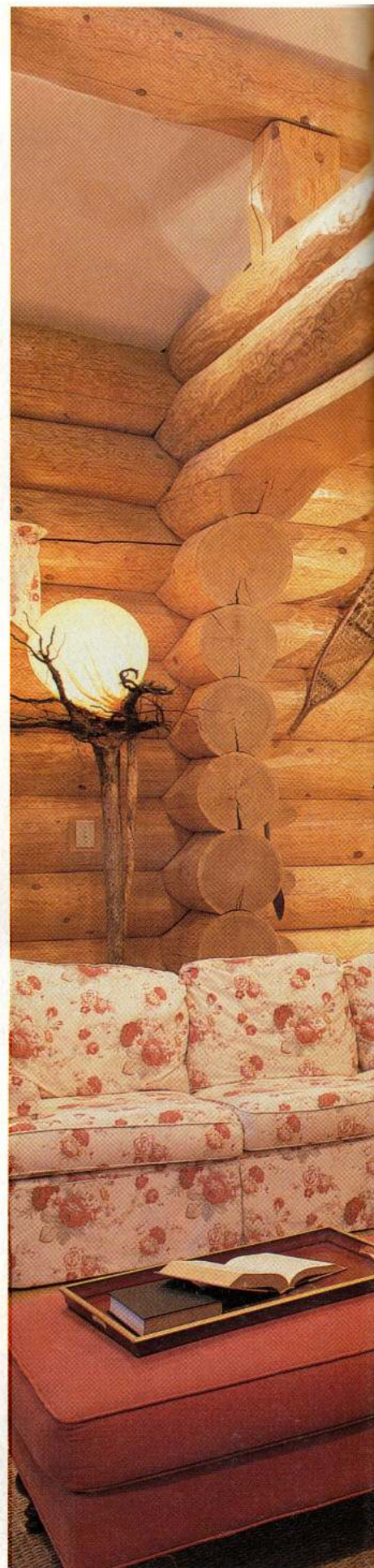
Fortunately just a year after the couple bought the milled home, someone offered to buy it. So sell they did—and Bill immediately started searching for the perfect property on which to build a handcrafted house. He found the spot, barely a stone's throw from the first house, on a lot fronting Lake Otsego and situated between the Catskill and Adirondack mountain ranges.

Averting Early Disaster

To realize their dream, the Millers decided to build a 4,000-square-foot home with five bedrooms and four baths. The Log Connection from Penticton, British Columbia, designed the home and Tree House Log Homes, in Lumby, British Columbia, supplied the logs. The walls are

14-inch-diameter Douglas fir logs, which fit well with the scale of the home. "In a house this size, it made sense aesthetically to go with large logs," says Bruce Mooney from Tree House Log Homes.

Initially, the logs were scheduled to be delivered in the spring, but complications delayed their arrival. By the time the log package was assembled, Bill's roofing crew was no longer available for immediate work. A wet summer proceeded to pour rain on the roofless structure, and the Millers watched as non-stop moisture turned their pristine, air-dried logs into a fuzzy, fungus-blackened mess. The thought of reversing the damage was daunting. "It was depressing," says Bill. "I never thought the house could be cleaned up to look the way it does





To enhance the great room's fireplace, a gnarled character log mantel is topped with a cathedral-style mirror. The recessed nook was designed to fit it perfectly.



ABOVE: The stairs leading to the second level are discretely tucked behind the soaring stack of stone at the rear of the home's three-story fireplace.

now.” The entire interior had to be bleached and then sanded by hand to preserve the irregular milled surfaces. “I called on some good friends,” says Bill. “It was hard work, but the result was worth it.”

A Grand Cabin

Although grand in scale, the Millers' house retains a cozy, cabin-like feel, perhaps due to the focus provided by a central fireplace and staircase. The half-round log staircase wraps twice around the massive manufactured stone fireplace and chimney, and ties the basement, first and second floors together in a substantial way.

The 10-foot-wide fireplace was also designed to accommodate a unique window-shaped mirror that Bill and Liz found on a shopping trip. “We purchased it before the house was even built,” says Bill. The mantel below the mirror is constructed from a massive “character log” that took five people to lift into place. Specially selected by Bruce, the mantel contains a number of unique cat faces and burls. Four coats of polyurethane bring out the rich honey color of the wood.

Twin glass and metal lamps hang in front of the fireplace to light up the main room. Although they look like antique

wrought iron fixtures, Bill admits the lamps were a Home Depot bargain find. They were the right size and the right price, but the wrong color—the metal was painted yellow. Bill took the fixtures apart, stripped the paint, then did a three-part antiquing process on the metal and the hanging chains. It might sound like a lot of work, but as Bill says, “If I wanted to buy true antique lamps, I would have spent hundreds of dollars, and the chances of finding a matching pair would be nearly impossible.” Instead, with a little creativity and labor, Bill ended up with ideal lighting for this dramatic space.

The Fine Details

The first and second levels of the house are finished with a “floating” hardwood floor. Rather than being nailed down, this Danish “Junckers” system is held together with flexible stainless steel clips. The nail-less, snap-together construction allows the flooring to expand and contract without gaps opening between boards, as often happens when wood floors are applied over a radiant heating system. The specialty engineered floor came pre-finished and was constructed of 1-inch-thick, tongue-and-groove oak.





Modern replicas of antique-style appliances lend a cozy, old-time quality to the kitchen, which is made more intimate by the lowered ceiling from the loft above.



TOP: A milky white ceiling and recessed lighting help brighten the master bedroom, which prominently features a one-of-a-kind burl-wood bed. ABOVE: A clawfoot tub adds to the bath's old-fashioned good looks. RIGHT: The dresser-style bathroom vanity is topped with a unique above-counter basin and water pump-style faucet.



Because the weather can get quite brisk in upstate New York, the Millers also fortified the basement floor with radiant heating, this time running it under decorative poured concrete. After the concrete was in place, workers scored it to create a diamond pattern that resembles Italian tile. The floor was then tinted with a cola-colored concrete stain and the grooves were grouted to take the illusion even further. The laid-tile effect is quite convincing, and it's warm underfoot to boot.

As added protection from the elements outside, a wraparound deck features a tempered glass windbreak rather than railing and balusters. The "exhibition glass" panels came from a local building that was being torn down. Bill was able to get the panels for next to nothing, but because the tempered glass could not be cut, the deck was designed around the size of the glass panes. This clever and economical find buffers the wind while letting the beautiful view show through without interruption.

This is only one element that makes the home's facade exceptional. The flared staircase leading down from the deck toward the shore of Lake Otsego is another eye-catching detail. Ironically, it was almost an afterthought. "We had originally designed a straight staircase originating from a different location on the deck," says Bill. The final deck construction, however, called for a new spot. On a whim, Bill asked Bruce if he had ever put together a kind of bell-mouthed staircase. "He found the gently curved trees for the rails and stringers," explains Bill. "They came from much bigger trees and were carved down to the right diameter."

The Millers' house was completed about 20 months after construction started, thanks to the help of talented friends including electrical contractor Jimmy Leo and plumber Jim Zaengle. "I'm the first to say that this house is a collection of the efforts of a number of people," says Bill. Perhaps it's the community spirit engrained in the residents of Cooperstown showing through. ■

HOME DETAILS

■ **Square footage:** 4,000

■ **Package price:** \$185,000

■ **Designer:** The Log Connection

■ **Log producer:** Tree House Log Homes

For more information, see Resources on page 100.

