

SPECIAL GREEN ISSUE

# TIMBER HOMES

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# On Mountain Time

Leaving the corporate commute behind.

After Drew retired from Texaco and the intensity of his corporate, New York-to-Connecticut commuting lifestyle, he and his wife, Sally, sought a change of pace in North Carolina. Initially they planned to build a vacation retreat on 10 acres along the New River, but after a taste of life in the mountains, they quickly decided to leave Connecticut for good. Their new house was completed in the summer of 2004, and by the following spring they had moved in full-time.

The North Carolina home was the couple's first experience with timber framing. "We had looked for vacation homes for five to 10 years, looking through magazines and dreaming about our home," Drew says. "We liked the openness and the art, the construction technique, of the timber frame."

## ***Planning Gets Personal***

After they had sketched a floor plan, the couple investigated timber companies and chose Blue Ridge Timberwrights in Christiansburg, Virginia. "Some of the timber frame companies we contacted wanted us to build one of their packages, but Blue Ridge worked with us to get the plan we wanted. They gave us an open book to design," Drew notes. "Blue Ridge seemed to focus more on the art and craft, rather than just the building, of a timber frame."

That is the Blue Ridge approach, says Rick McCurdy, who served as the couple's Blue Ridge project coordinator. "We consider every home custom; fit to the customer's personality. Since 1983 we've never had the same frame twice. Each is different in terms of size, wood species or design elements."





The front facade, which resembles a modest Cape Cod-style home, belies the spacious, open interior and extensive outside living space. "It's one of the biggest 'small' houses in existence," says Rick, noting the home has a small footprint but three full levels of living space. The couple's oversized, two-car garage is detached.

For Drew and Sally, one unique element is their home's hybrid construction as two stand-alone frames. One frame accommodates the majority of the main spaces, including the kitchen, dining and great rooms, pantry, laundry/mudroom and loft. The other frame contains the master bedroom suite. The frames are connected by a common area, much of it hallways, closets and bathrooms, built using a structural insulated panel (SIP) enclosure system. "The couple didn't want timber posts in the bathroom," Rick notes. "And this construction saved money: You don't need timbers in the shower or the closets."

### ***Light from Above***

Also uncommon is the loft design. It has one opening above the great room, and another above the kitchen-dining area along an exterior wall with three arched windows that rise to the peak. "Drew and Sally came up with the idea of having the loft floor stop four feet short of the exterior wall over the kitchen/dining area to create four feet of cathedral space in those areas," says Rick. "When I first saw this on paper I thought it was goofy with a capital G. But when it was done, I saw it gave so much light from upstairs, and makes the kitchen and dining room look so much bigger and brighter."

The couple kept the large loft fully open to the main level, creating separate areas for sleeping, sitting and office work, but not enclosing them. (There is also a loft bathroom.) The loft sitting area is a favorite spot for Drew, in part because of its great mountain views and partly because of the up-close view of the timber framing craftsmanship there. The common rafter of the main house extends beyond the valley intersection at the sitting area of the loft, creating visual interest while helping to execute the joinery.

The home's above-grade lower level sports a guest bedroom, large bath, activity room with fireplace, and utility and auxiliary laundry rooms.





Drew and Sally enjoy this homey front porch, which serves as their waiting place when their grandchildren are coming to visit. The porch railings, which combine pressure-treated wood railings with cedar posts, were built by Blue Ridge.



The sleeping area of the loft sits beside the four foot opening along the windowed wall that provides a view-and natural light -down into the main level kitchen and dining area below. Drew's loft office space is to the right of the sleeping area.





The home's timber frame features gunstock posts. Variable-width oak flooring continues through the main floor. A tree of life tapestry hangs above the front door.



The reclaimed timber framing, soaring to 21 feet in the great room, is highlighted by the neutral colors of walls and the light-hued pine tongue-and-groove ceilings. Set about 30 feet above ground on a steeply sloping lot, the great room offers a tree-house view.

### ***Acclaims for Reclaimed***

Drew and Sally say one of their best decisions was to use reclaimed southern yellow pine for the timber framing. Although using reclaimed wood is environmentally friendly, because of labor costs the recycled wood is more expensive than harvested wood. So why did they choose it? "When you see it, you know why," Sally says enthusiastically. "The color is so rich and so beautiful."

Rick agrees. "The timber selection is what makes this house spectacular and unique," he notes. He also points out that the reclaimed wood has an interesting history. "We were told the timbers are from piers built in the Savannah, Georgia, harbor in the 1600s," Rick says. "The patina's very unusual, rich greenish hue is from the minerals in the seawater." In recognition of the timbers' origins, the couple's home appears on Blue Ridge's web site as "The Savannah."

Drew and Sally's builder, Stony Creek Builders in Deep Gap, North Carolina, used some of the reclaimed wood to custom craft the loft and stair railings and balusters, as well as the mantel for the great room's stone fireplace. The home's floors are random-width oak; ceilings are tongue-and-groove pine with a natural yellow tone that accentuates the rich hues of the timber framing.

### ***Embracing the Lifestyle***

Drew says living in his home on the south fork of the New River is like being on vacation all the time. "We are on mountain time now," he chuckles. But, while the lifestyle isn't intense, it's still busy. The couple often entertains family and friends overnight-the 2,000-square-foot home (not including the lower level or their two-car detached garage) has plenty of sleeping space-and they enjoy fishing, kayaking and tubing with their grandchildren. Drew also loves to barbeque. He has a huge smoker in his garage, and the couple often hosts friends for a North Carolina cookout of smoked pork, ribs or turkey.

The home's inviting, open nature is enhanced by tall ceilings (10 feet in the main level rooms such as the dining room-kitchen and in the lower level, vaulted in the master bedroom, and peaking at 21 feet in the great room) and banks of oversized windows looking onto several tiers of decking and the river below. In keeping with that character, the couple keeps their décor comfortable, uncluttered and informal. "We used to be casually elegant, but now we're mostly just casual," Sally laughs.





A wall of tall windows, a door to the deck, 10-foot ceilings, and the 4-foot opening to the loft, all combine to bring natural light into the dining room.

A 4-foot gap between the loft floor/kitchen ceiling and the exterior wall (above the door and the wall cabinets on the left) allows natural light from the loft windows to reach the main floor. The kitchen's center island is topped with an oak butcher block handcrafted by a North Carolina mountain artisan.



This area between the activity room and guest bedroom is home to a piano sometimes played by Drew and Sally's granddaughter, Alison. The lower level ceiling is a space enhancing 10 feet high. Because the house sits on a steep hill, the lower level receives plenty of daylight.





A Texaco sign in the sitting area of the loft is a memento from Drew's past; he also collects antique maps and oil memorabilia. The loft is Drew's favorite space. "I love to look out and see the snow and the mountain ridge across the river." He also admires the joinery in the ceiling.

The airy master bedroom features a vaulted, pine tongue-and-groove ceiling and access to one of the home's many decks. The covered master bedroom deck faces the morning sun and mountain views. Quarter-round windows in the gable add light and architectural interest.

