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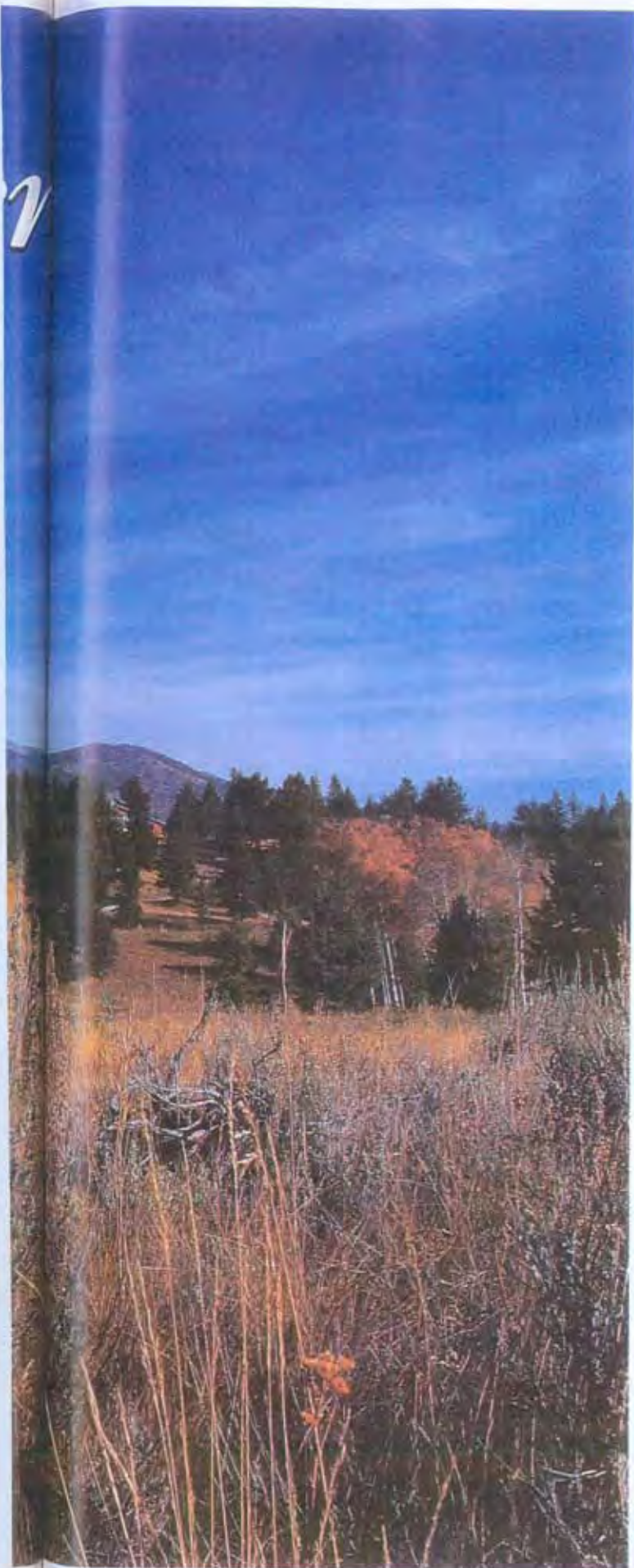
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Natural Wonder





Big Sky's rugged tranquillity lures a Minnesota family

Photos by Rick Keating • Story by Roland Sweet

Ken and Betsy Roering live in St. Paul, Minnesota. Their daughter lives in Boston. Their son is working on his Ph.D. in California. When the far-flung family finally gets the opportunity to spend some time together, they flock to their favorite place: their vacation log home in Montana. Drawn by the rugged land and brilliant sky, they quickly settle in.

The bedecked house peeks out among the sagebrush, wild grass and tall pines that surround it. Nearby, to the southeast, are the Porcupine Mountains. The Big Sky countryside often seems a world away from the Twin Cities,

Sagebrush, wild grass and tall pines surround the house, whose owners call it "the fulfillment of a dream." They first fell in love with this part of Montana some 30 years ago. The 20-acre lot also features a pond and a sensational view of the Porcupine Mountains to the southeast and open sky all around.







where Ken is a university professor and Betsy teaches in the public schools.

The couple fell in love with the area 32 years ago, right after they were married. They were driving from Minnesota to Seattle and passed through Montana. "It was just an immediate reaction," Betsy recalls. "Someday we knew we wanted a log house in the mountains of Montana. And that's always been in the back of our minds, that someday we were going to try this."



The wide open great room is the heart of the layout. The volume of the area easily accommodates the oversized fireplace, which contractor Mark Hackbarth designed and built using indigenous stone. The mantel is part of a huge log that was cut into three parts and used here, as well as for fireplaces in the master bedroom and the loft study. The furniture is a mix of styles, chosen for comfort.

Ken agrees, calling their log home "the fulfillment of a dream. It wasn't feasible financially for quite a long time, but fortunately we were able to do it while we're still young enough to enjoy it."

The Roerings took the plunge four years ago. After visiting the mountains for many years to ski and hike, they bought a heavily wooded 20-acre lot with a pond and a sensational view. "We didn't want to change the setting but be part of it," Ken says.

They had intended waiting several years to build, but once they had the land they became impatient to see their house on it. "We'd come out and visit friends and drive by the place and know we just couldn't wait," Betsy says.

Some friends who lived in log homes referred the Roerings to builder Mark



LEFT: Mark Hackbarth also built the sturdy wood dining table. When it was being assembled, the workers turned the log legs so the dark spot was on the inside. Betsy considered such markings part of the wood's character, however, and insisted that they be visible. **RIGHT:** A large island in the open kitchen provides extra counter and storage space and plenty of room for informal meals. The pine cabinets add even more wood to the ambiance.

Hackbarth, who had built homes from Bear Creek Log Homes of Gallatin Gateway, Montana. They looked at that company and decided it was right for them.

By now, the Roerings had seen enough log homes to have some definite ideas what they wanted. Instead of hiring an architect, Betsy and her friend Barb Bourbon, who is an interior designer, sat down and made some sketches. They sent them to Bear Creek, which made sure their ideas would work structurally, then drafted their plans. "It was an economical arrangement," Betsy notes, "and we got what we wanted."

The cornerstone of the design is a wide-open great room, oriented toward the southeast which views the mountains and their pond. "I don't like a real high ceiling," Betsy says, "but I did want the openness."

The result was a 4,000-square-foot home with a finished basement and a guest room over the garage. The 9-inch diameter lodgepole pine logs are milled full round with a Swedish cope profile and saddle-notch cor-

ners. Lodgepole pine was also used for the truss work. The combination truss and purlin roof system was fairly complex to build because of the use of dormers and gables and rooflines coming together.

Construction took six months. While it was under way, the Roerings visited the site once a month to review work. Otherwise, they coordinated with Mark by phone. There were surprisingly few glitches, although one day they got a call: "Ken, there's a problem with your study. It's too small." Because the roof pitch isn't too steep, the roof sloped down where the study was, cutting off valuable headroom. Fortunately, they quickly arrived at a solution: scrap a bedroom, enlarge the study and reduce the bedroom to a storage closet. Down to one bedroom in the loft, the Roerings simply decided to go ahead and finish the guest quarters over the garage with access through the loft.

"We actually can sleep about a dozen, which is great for us because we like to have people come up to ski and hike," Ken says.







RIGHT: The loft provides access to the guest quarters over the garage.

LEFT: The cozy loft bedroom offers warmth and comfort, not to mention its own private deck with a mountain view. A second bedroom planned for the loft was reduced to a storage closet to provide room for Ken's study.

BELOW: Looking southeast from the expansive deck gives a view of the Porcupine Mountains.



Their master bedroom is on the main floor, giving them privacy and assuring that climbing stairs won't be a problem as the years pass.

The furnishing reflects an eclectic style, mixing wood and fabric to create what Ken calls "high comfort and hominess." Betsy's passion for a rustic style led her to want the character of wood exposed. She notes, "Mark said a lot of the guys working would turn what they thought were the bad areas on a log so nobody would see them, and he'd go, 'No, no, no, you don't know Betsy, she wants to see that stuff.'"

The Roerings visit the house as often as they can, spending a total of about four months a year. Ken thinks that's about the right amount for him, but Betsy says, "I'm a nester, and I could just stay here all the time and enjoy it."

To help them more fully appreciate their surroundings, they situated the house right in the middle of a sagebrush meadow with open sky all around. "So when we sit in the hot tub," Betsy says, "we can see the stars."

It's a sight, they say, that reminds them how truly removed from civilization they are. And how invigorating that remoteness can be.

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Builder: Hackbarth Construction, Gallatin Gateway MT; (406) 763-4890.

Log Producer: Bear Creek Log Homes, 1660 Little Bear Road, Gallatin Gateway MT 59730; (406) 763-4709.