

A post-and-beam pavilion provides shelter for the home's outdoor barbecue area, while a few steps away, guests can stay toasty warm with the help of a wood-burning fire pit. Further along, down a heated walkway on a point overlooking the Jack Creek Valley, a hot tub awaits anyone brave enough to make the trek through the chilly Montana air.



## Natural Wonder

A stone-and-timber retreat blends in with its wild surroundings

Story by Colleen Morrissey • Photos by Roger Wade • Styling by Debra Grahl

TIMBER HOMES ILLUSTRATED



**L**ocated on a point overlooking Jack Creek Valley, John Sullivan's Montana vacation home borders a vast, pristine wilderness. Dense forests, abundant wildlife and few human inhabitants make John's home a place to really get away from it all. "I built this place to escape the heat of south Florida, where I live year-round," John says, "and to have a place to enjoy the wilderness as well as all of the area's winter activities, such as downhill and cross-country skiing, hiking and fishing."

Located in Big Sky, in a gated community called Moonlight Basin Ranch, the home sits on 20 acres. Almost all of the land lies undeveloped, with only a caretaker's cottage and the main house visible. The home is well camouflaged within its surroundings, due in part to the natural-looking materials used on its exterior and its neutral coloring, which blends in perfectly with the site's stones and trees.

The home was designed to emulate the square-cut dovetail log homes that can be found in the foothills of the surrounding countryside. To meet the community's architec-

**Above:** On the exterior, rough-sawn Douglas fir boards with chinking in between were designed to emulate the look of square-cut dovetail logs. A simulated slate roof was installed as a precautionary measure to help defend the home against wildfires. All of the dry-stacked, ledger-rock stonework on the exterior is manufactured stone.

tural standards, the foundation is hidden behind dry-stacked ledge stone, and what seems to be slate shingles cover the roof.

All is not as it appears, however. The logs are actually rough-sawn boards with chinking in between. The stonework on the foundation is manufactured. In addition, instead of real slate, simulated slate was installed on the roof to help defend the home in the event of a wildfire.

Snow and ice damage is also a threat due to the high altitude of the home (roughly 8,500 feet) and the climate. Snow loads of up to 185 pounds are common. To compensate, John's architect, Van Bryan, of Apogee Architects in Big Sky, designed the home with a cold roof system. "Because the temperature can swing 60 degrees in one day, snow will fall at night and



The oversized windows in the great room were designed with minimal framing to bring as much of the outdoors inside the home as possible. Quarter-sawn Douglas fir floor boards with their mill marks intact top the floors throughout most of the rooms on the main level.



The great room was positioned to face Montana's Lost Mountain and Big Sky Ski Resort. The Douglas fir hammer-beam trusses are not only beautiful, but also provide support for the home's roof, which must sometimes cope with 185-pound snow loads.



then melt during the day. This can cause ice damming," Van says. "The cold roof helps the home deal with these unstable conditions."

"It's a very functional design," says Pat Whorrall, a superintendent with Craig Reichstetter Construction, the firm in Big Sky that built and finished the home.

**The dining room, with its antler chandelier, features a built-in sideboard with plenty of cupboards for storage, a glass-enclosed refrigerated wine rack and a countertop that makes serving meals a breeze.**

"Between the two roofs, there is an air cavity that draws cold air in from the eave line and then exhausts the air out of the roof through convection. It's this flow of cold air that prevents ice from forming on the roof."

While the purpose of some of the home's exterior features isn't always obvious to a casual observer, it's

plain what the back of the home is for: having fun. The home has an outdoor post-and-beam topped barbecue area (with a wet bar) and a wood-burning fire pit. "It's a great place for building a roaring bonfire and having people sit around to look at the sunset or enjoy some conversation," John says.

Further along the path a hot tub awaits anyone brave enough to make the trek through the chilly Montana air. "The path that leads out to the hot tub is heated, so you don't have to run quite as fast from the house," Van says. Located on a point 200 feet from the home, the tub boasts spectacular views of the valley and mountains beyond. "When the cover is up on the hot tub," John says, "it blocks out the view of the house, so you feel like you're all alone out in the wilderness."

**In the kitchen, fir was used in the posts that support the breakfast bar and marble countertop, as well as in the paneling in the ceiling above. Cabinets, pickled white, keep the kitchen light and airy.**

When the weather is too cold or rainy to ski, hike or fish, there's no hardship in being forced to spend time indoors. That's because the home was designed with guests and their comfort in mind. "I wanted the home to be accessible, warm and intimate," John says. "And at the same time, if we had family and friends over, I wanted it to be open and easy to converse from the various areas on the main level." The central location of the great room, which faces the dining room and kitchen with few walls in between, makes his wish possible.

The 3,400-square-foot home, which was originally envisioned as a guest cottage, was designed with four large bedroom suites. "Having four bedrooms," Van says, "space in the home is at a premium, so we looked at the floor plan as if it were a ship and tried to figure out how we





**Above:** The fabrics, furnishings and finishes throughout the home, like this pair of leaf-patterned armchairs in the master bedroom, employ neutral colors to blend in with the home's rustic natural surroundings.

**Right:** In the master bath, terra-cotta-style tile was used to surround the tub and a medallion takes center stage in the floor. Local craftsmen in Big Sky supplied many of the home's accents, such as the custom-made twig-motif sconces in this bathroom.

could use each inch of space. We decided that built-ins were the most efficient use of the space."

Built-ins can be found in almost every room, especially in the bunkroom outfitted in high cowboy style for John's grandkids. Six bunks are built into three walls of the room. Each has its own reading lamp, shelf and storage drawer. On a fourth wall, visible from each bed, is an entertainment



center with a stereo, TV and video games—everything a kid could want when cooped up inside.

Almost all of the wood featured in the home—the floors, tongue-and-groove-paneled ceilings, window casings and wall paneling—is made from Douglas fir. The hammerbeam trusses are a combination of recycled and glue-laminated fir beams.

To keep the home as light looking as possible, Van chose lighter colored timbers and sealed them with a clear finish. Some of the unusual red and yellow patches found on the timbers, especially on the posts in the bunkroom, are caused by striations in the grain. "With that quality of fir, you get a wide variety of graining," Van says.

The great room, with its 26-foot-high ceiling, is the one room that John really wanted to reflect his home's rugged mountain character. "We wanted the home to blend in with the surrounding forests, so there's a lot of the same stone and timber on both the interior and exterior," John says.

One concern of Van's, however, was not letting the stone and timber overwhelm the space. "I

**The six-bed bunkroom is the ideal place for grandchildren to set up camp while visiting. Each bunk has its own light, shelf and drawer for overnight storage, and all the bunks face an entertainment center.**

wanted to make sure that it was in proportion to human scale," he says. To compensate for the volume in the room, Van positioned the hammerbeam trusses and kneebraces so that they appear to hang off the stone columns (constructed out of manufactured ledger stone) at a slightly lower than usual height.

John's desire to bring the outdoors in was echoed in the choices that interior decorator Sarah Hall of Devant Hall in Big Sky made when furnishing the great room and the other rooms in the home. "John was looking for rustic elegance," Sarah says. "Since the home is located in the middle of the wilderness, we tried to choose homey furnishings and lots of rugs in soft neutral colors. Those colors blend in real well and give us that feeling."

John is very pleased with the look of his home. Counting the number of times his children and grandchildren come up on their own, they seem to love it, too.

With all that John's mountain retreat offers, it isn't surprising that his kids frequently borrow the keys and steal up north for a quick adventure in the wilds of Montana. **THI**

