



the retreat that love built

One family's cabin legacy is over 250 years old

**STORY BY FRAN SIGURDSSON
PHOTOS BY ALLEN MOWERY**



Personal photos courtesy the cabin owner

MAIN: This 1,331-square-foot getaway in central Pennsylvania makes a big statement. The owner customized a plan from Timberhaven Log & Timber Homes, adding front and side porches plus a stone veneer to exposed foundation walls and supporting pillars. A custom patio with fireplace, built-in hot tub and waterfall extends living space.

INSET: Priscilla Bierman, the cabin owner's mother. The owner with pet Maltese dogs, Bert and Ernie.



Engineered Logs

This cabin is built with kiln-dried engineered logs – a Timberhaven specialty. “They’re stronger than a solid log,” says Brad Mercer, regional sales manager of Timberhaven Log & Timber Homes. “The laminated log is truer, straighter and has virtually no checking.” (Checks are small cracks that occur naturally in logs.) Basically, the process involves running white pine logs through a saw mill, then drying them in a kiln to an average of 9% moisture content. The lumber is then planed for uniform thickness, glued and hardened. The plies are bonded side-by-side rather than stacked, notes Mercer, and the end product must be able to withstand industry standards: 1,300 pounds per-square-inch of force. Almost 70% of Timberhaven’s clients choose engineered, says Mercer, which is offered at the same price as solid.



Clearly, a lot of love went into building George Bierman's new log cabin in central Pennsylvania. There was a love of the outdoors and natural elements: white pine, mountain stone, flowing water. There was a love of craftsmanship. And there was a Love of family (yes, the capital "L" is intentional).

Robert Love, George's ancestor, purchased the hillside property on Pine Mountain where the cabin stands in 1769. The land borders Susquehanna River's West Branch near Williamsport and has been in the family ever since. "My mother and her parents bought it from relatives," George explains. "It was going up for tax sale."

As a boy, George spent idyllic summers at the chinked log cabin his grandparents built on the 72-acre site in 1939. He recalls picking beans along the river and hunting for Native American artifacts. "I've got buckets of arrowheads," he laughs.

George's mother, Priscilla Bierman, re-did the one-room cabin in 1943 and added

a porch. By 2013, though, the structure had deteriorated badly due to a persistent leak. The builders George consulted deemed it beyond repair.

A demanding career back home in Williamsport (he's a wealth manager at Merrill Lynch) plus a passion for the martial arts (this six-time world title holder teaches karate in the U.S. and abroad) left George hankering for a weekend retreat where he could "kick back" – as in relax. An avid sportsman, he wanted to spend precious leisure time hunting and fishing, not doing maintenance. "I remember when I went up with Grandpa," he says, "I had to push a mower. With my dad, it took us both eight hours. Now, I don't mow anywhere near as much."

That summer, he started cutting roads and clearing land in preparation for building new. Excavation on a site about 500 yards beyond the old cabin began in October. George was about to order a no-frills Amish cabin when his sister intervened. The late Marguerite Bierman pointed-

FACING PAGE: A floor-to-ceiling Eldorado Bluffstone fireplace is the focal point of the great room. Most of the antique furnishings throughout the cabin were purchased at auction. The muzzleloader above the fireplace is an homage to the cabin owner's ancestor Robert Love who was part of the local militia around the time of the American Revolution. (The family's history in the U.S. dates back to 1725.)

ABOVE: The kitchen sizzles with Kichler pendant lights, granite countertops and Hagerstown hickory cabinets. A collection of vintage beer mugs tops the cabinets.

out that Mom – now in her 90s – would need running water and indoor plumbing when she visited.

So instead, George met with Brad Mercer, regional sales manager of Timberhaven Log & Timber Homes in nearby Middleburg. After reviewing log home plans, George decided to customize Timberhaven's two-story Valley View design.

He opted for 6-inch x 8-inch D-shaped (flat interior, rounded exterior) engineered logs. (See sidebar: Engineered

BUILDING YOUR OWN DREAM GETAWAY?

THE MORE LOVE you put in at the design stage, the better. Here's some helpful advice from Timberhaven Log Home's Brad Mercer, who's been in the log home industry for nearly 20 years:

Plan vs. Property. One of the biggest mistakes people make, says Mercer, is getting locked into a design before they have a site. "They fall in love with a plan, but it doesn't work with their property."

Orientation to views, topography and setbacks, and solar path are factors to consider. On a hillside, look for a site that's between the ridge and the valley, like at this cabin. Instead of grading the slope flat, use it to your advantage to create different floor levels and a walk-out basement.

Size. Mercer uses a discovery process with potential clients to determine how much space they actually need. "It's helpful to compare the cabin to your current home. But bear in mind that you're at the cabin to spend time with friends and family. Bedrooms don't always take on the importance they have in a primary residence," he notes. In general, "you want fewer spaces, but larger open spaces," he says. At this small cabin, a dormitory-style bedroom was added over the garage for the owner's hunting buddies. Sleeping lofts also allow the accommodation of more guests when space is tight.

Furniture. Often, clients don't think through furniture placement, notes Mercer. "I say 'You've got a bedroom, but where are we going to place a bed without blocking the window?' A lot of people have never purchased a new home, so they're used to making an existing one work." If you have antiques or collections like the owner of this cabin, make sure your design has adequate wall space to display them properly.

Future needs. Do you foresee adding on to a small cabin at some point? A lot of Mercer's clients plan to retire at the cabin and want a first floor master. This cabin doesn't have one, so George and Mercer started talking about a possible addition on the opposite side from the patio when the cabin was built. "We designed with expandability in mind," says Mercer. "We made accommodations to make a passage through. The goal is to make it look preplanned."

Inside out. Outdoor rooms, like the stunning patio at this cabin, extend interior space – a bonus for small cabins. They also blend the cabin into the landscape. Touches like applying the cultured stone used on the fireplace surround to the cabin exterior and substituting logs and root bases for the property for posts blur the distinction between inside and out.





George's ancestor, Robert Love, was one of Pennsylvania's famous Fair Play men – so called because these early settlers of the West Branch Susquehanna River valley established a "Fair Play" system of self-government. As history has it, the Fair Play men wrote their own declaration of independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776, beneath a mighty elm on the banks of Pine Creek.

Today, a roadside sign near the town of Jersey Shore marks the site of the "Tiadaghton Elm." ("Tiadaghton" was the Native American name for Pine Creek.) Each July Fourth, Jersey Shore holds a ceremony to commemorate the event.

Logs, p. 58.) The pre-cut, numbered and marked log package arrived in December. Art Reitz of A. Reitz Construction in Mifflinville, Penn., brought his expertise as a longtime log home builder and general contractor to the project.

Open & airy

It was important to George that the small (1,331-square-foot) cabin be open. "I didn't want any walls or a door at the top of the steps. When you enter, you can see through the cabin, and it looks bigger."

To the right of the entry is a vaulted great room with a massive stone fireplace built by Keith Kline Masonry of Winfield, Penn. Heavy beam accents and a king post truss add to the room's wow factor. An elk mount, antique rifles and masculine furniture set the tone for this rustic-chic hunting lodge.

The great room flows into a compact kitchen at the rear of the cabin, equipped with hickory cabinets, sleek black appliances and granite countertops.

Clear-coated pine ceilings and walls offset by slate tile floors in the great room, kitchen and hallways set a warm, natural tone.

Across from the kitchen are a guest room and bath. The original design

featured two first floor bedrooms; turning the front one into a combination dining and rec room yields more space for entertaining, as well as enhancing the open floor plan.

A central stairway leads to a second level master bedroom with a Karastan carpet. Adding a shed dormer allowed more head room and usable square footage, along with a full en suite bath.

The man cave

A walkout basement brings the cabin's living space to about 2,000 square feet. "Originally, we were going to build the cabin on a crawl space with an electric baseboard," notes Reitz. But Mercer advised George that finishing the basement could double the cabin's usable space, given the small footprint. "The basement is going to be the most economical square footage available," Mercer told his client.

Photos of wine cellars with stone columns and arches George found on the Internet served as inspiration. A referral led to masons Ron Bair and sons Ronnie and Jeremy in nearby Mill Hall, Penn. Initially, George requested they build a stone wall behind the bar and woodstove. "In the end, we did the entire basement," says Ronnie. Instead of the pine tongue and

groove used upstairs, the dropped ceiling and walls are reclaimed barn wood with iron-strapped beams for rustic appeal.

The pièce de résistance is a small-scale rendition of a beaver dam, complete with waterfall and arched bridge over a stream. Momma beaver is caught in the act of gnawing the handrail, while her offspring looks on from the stick lodge. A plunger pump re-circulates water for the fall and stream, ingeniously moving the wings of a grouse mounted on the piston. "Ron's an artist," praises George.

The artistry continues outside, where waterfalls cascade alongside and below a stone patio. A massive fireplace multitasks as a retaining wall to keep the curving gravel driveway in place. An 8x8-foot hot tub from PDA Spas in Williamsport is embedded in the flagstone. (In fact, PDA was so taken with the design that they photographed it for their brochure, says George.)

The garbin

Initially, George wanted a 16x16-foot shed to store the patio furniture. "I said, 'Why don't we do a garage,'" recalls Mercer. So Timberhaven manufactured and shipped a two-car garage package and then another two-car garage package in May 2014 when George wanted more



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The rustic redwood coffee and side tables in the great room were hand-made by Cedar-Stuff in Lewiston, Mich. The stairs lead to a loft with master bedroom suite. ■ In the master bedroom, a shed dormer was added to the original plan, increasing headroom and usable square footage. ■ The porch floor is TimberTech's TwinFinish decking, a slip-resistant, wood composite. Railing is TimberTech's RadianceRail with aluminum infill. ■ The 4-car, log-sided garage has room to store patio furniture as well as ATVs. ■ The same flagstone was used on this patio and in the basement.

VISITING THIS NECK OF THE WOODS?

Check out the Pine Creek Rail Trail (PCRT), a 60-plus mile haven for hikers, cyclists and cross-country skiers. Following an old Native American trail, the PCRT starts north of Wellsboro, Penn., and travels south along Pine Creek, the largest tributary of the Susquehanna's West Branch. There are multiple access points for fishing, kayaking and canoeing. The trail runs through Pine Creek Gorge, aka the "Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania," before ending in Jersey Shore.

FOR INFO & TRAIL MAP, VISIT: visittiogapa.com/railtrail.html



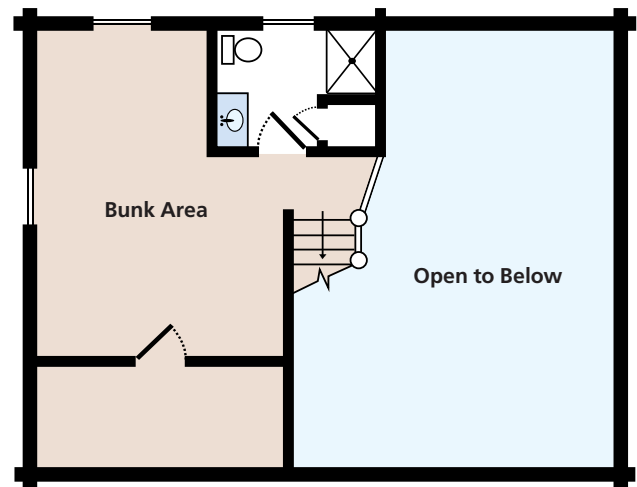
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space. The resulting four-car garage is 48-feet deep by 24-feet wide, with a covered carport for the tractor.

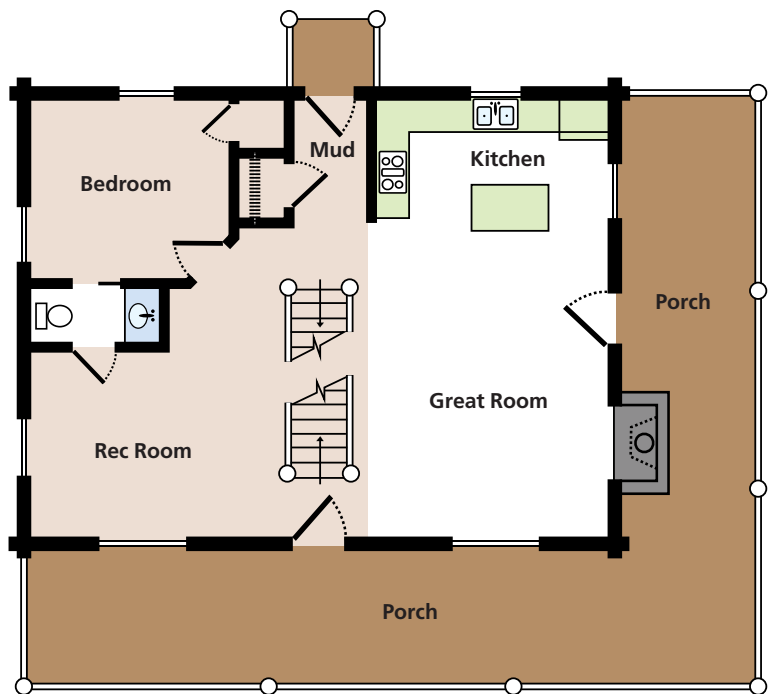
A big wood-burning stove makes a nice spot for hunters to gather at the end of the day and recount their experiences, notes Mercer. An external staircase leads to a bunkroom for George's hunting buddies.

George uses the cabin year-round, as often as possible. "I like the change of seasons," he says. His mom also enjoys visiting the new retreat, close by the one she helped her folks build. And speaking of the vintage cabin, that also has a happy ending: Mercer put George in touch with a craftsman who will restore it for posterity. **cl**

When Fran Sigurdsson is not writing about cabins, she likes to visit historic ones.



UPPER LEVEL



MAIN LEVEL

cabin stats

Built: 2014

Location: Central Pennsylvania

Square footage: 1,331 (around 2,000 including finished basement)

Bedrooms: 2

Baths: 2