

6 UNDISCOVERED PLACES TO LIVE

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High-end appliances and smart design make this open kitchen a joy to use. Although logs aren't used for the walls, they make their presence felt and coordinate with other materials.

INSET: The home offers a number of charming and surprising features, such as "Benjamin Beaver," carved by an associate of log provider Pioneer Log Homes of British Columbia.



Attention to Details

A Midwest couple's hands-on approach creates a Rocky Mountain ski cabin.

STORY BY DANIELLE TAYLOR

PHOTOS BY KAY BEATON



The dining room table was handmade for the owners out of reclaimed barnwood and can seat 12 people with both leaves in place.

Although Doug and Lynn Dahl had been planning their log home for years, it took serendipity to start turning their dreams into reality. While visiting Colorado for a wedding in 2007, the Kansas couple took a side trip through Breckenridge. They loved the look of the town and, on a whim, spoke with a real estate agent, who showed them some land that appealed to them.

“It was wintertime, and everything had about three feet of snow on the ground,” Doug recalls.

“We literally had to put on snowshoes to walk around the property!” Lynn says. “It was quite an adventure.”

“But we loved the look and the view of the mountains,” Doug says, “so we put down a deposit on the contingency of seeing it in the spring.”

The secluded property, which is virtually surrounded by National Forest land, sits at the end of a gravel road just three miles from downtown Breckenridge. It offers the feeling of remoteness the Dahls sought, without any of the inconveniences associated with isolation.

Having land, the couple began their search for a builder. Over the next year, as they traveled back and forth from Kansas, they noticed a pattern of features they liked about certain homes: large, hand-crafted logs, well-thought-out design and

superior craftsmanship. After touring several homes that exhibited these traits, the Dahls learned that the common factor was builder Brian Wray.

Wray’s company, Mountain Log Homes of Colorado, builds for Pioneer Log Homes of British Columbia, a Canadian hand crafter. The Dahls worked with Pioneer designer Donna Fitzel to develop their custom floor plan. They knew some of the features they wanted in their dream getaway — four bedrooms to house their grown children and their spouses, a bunkroom for future grandchildren and a game room — but it took nearly a year of back-and-forth emails with Fitzel to iron out all of the details.



Each of the home’s four fireplaces features different stone, with natural Colorado moss rock gracing the great room’s hearth. To find some of their home’s character logs, like the massive one to the right of the chimney, the Dahls slogged through knee-deep mud in a lumberyard and gathered a number of unusual specimens.



ABOVE: Each bed in the lower-level bunk room was designed to feel like a private fort, perfect for future grandchildren. Luxurious Pendleton blankets line the bunks.

CENTER: Each of the home's four main bedrooms features a handcrafted log bed made of a different wood species. In the master suite, a hickory bed with matching nightstands enhances the rustic atmosphere created by the log walls.

LEFT: In the game room, a gas fireplace keeps the homeowners and their guests warm. Many of the home's mantels were made from beetle-killed trees.

To get a feel for how the floor plan would live, Lynn would visualize their yet-to-be-built home. “Every night when we went to bed, with my eyes closed and in the dark and quiet, I walked through every entrance of the house and every single room and envisioned it,” she explains. “It helped me decide things like: Instead of the doorway going out, can we put it at the end of the hall? Do we want the kitchen on the right side or the left side? At least once a week, Doug and I would sit down with our refurbished plans, and I would have him walk through, too.” Lynn credits this technique for helping the couple get a true sense for what living in the home would actually be like.

Because their building site was on a sloping lot, it required a significant amount of excavation before construction crews could start building the home. They broke ground in September 2009 and began stacking the logs that December. “Those were three days of our lives we will never forget,” Lynn remembers. “Brian had a crane lifting these 2,000- or 3,000-pound logs over 70 feet of trees before dropping them down.” Wray’s crew finished the main structural elements and had the roof on by the second week of January.

Despite living 750 miles away, the Dahls strived to be fully involved in every aspect of their home’s creation. From

groundbreaking to finishing the home in early September 2010, they visited Breckenridge about 15 times, staying several days each trip for the important decision-making. Because each of the handcrafted logs had its own distinctive character, the couple wanted to ensure that the ones they particularly liked would be featured in prominent locations.

What’s more, despite all of their planning, actually walking through their home as it was being completed allowed them to make last-minute adjustments. “The crew had already put up the wallboard in one of the bathrooms, but Lynn and I decided we wanted a

window,” Doug says. “So Brian took a big hammer and whacked a hole in the wall so they would know not to finish out the wall just yet.” Indeed, the home features gorgeous views of its surrounding mountain scenery from nearly every vantage point within the home — even from inside the shower.

To furnish the home, Lynn worked extensively with Karen Wray of Mountain Log Homes of Colorado. About 10 years before she started working on her home, Lynn began collecting clippings from magazines, information about log companies, details about maintenance and more. She devoted an entire binder to interior design, so by the time she was ready to

outfit her home, she had an arsenal of ideas ready for Wray.

“Early on, we had a comparable image of what the house was going to look like,” Wray says, adding that as she found items and ideas that she thought the Dahls would like, “we sent easily thousands of emails back and forth. I doubt there was a single day in the last three months where we didn’t email each other.”

One prominent feature came into the picture shortly after the couple bought their land. While visiting a fine art gallery in Breckenridge, they found a carved bear and squirrel sculpture that Lynn fell in love with. As a surprise, Doug bought it for her two years before their home was

complete, and the gallery owners held it until it was ready to move.

Proud of the result of thousands of hours of collaborative effort, the Dahls and Wrays entered the home in the 2010 Summit County Parade of Homes. It attracted attention and remains a popular attraction in the area, inspiring others to follow in the Dahls’ footsteps.

The couple’s reward is a one-of-a-kind home to enjoy whenever they find time to visit, either by themselves or with family. Having created the perfect home with their attention to detail, the Dahls look back on their experience as the adventure of a lifetime. “I would love to do this,” Lynn says, “every single year.” ▶

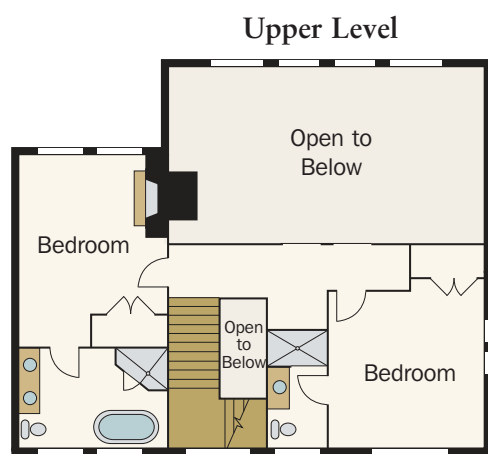


Main Level

home details

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 3,794

LOG PROVIDER: Pioneer Log Homes of British Columbia



FAR RIGHT: The home's expansive but inviting deck offers breathtaking views of the surrounding ranges.

INSET: Building on a steeply sloping lot presented a challenge for builder Brian Wray, but significant excavation and a home design that factored in the contours of the site made it possible. The 1.5-acre lot features natural landscaping and a number of terraces that provide options for outdoor entertainment and relaxation.

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