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PAGE 42

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12 >

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY HEIDI LONG

HOME BY HIGH COUNTRY BUILDERS

northern star

A Florida couple builds their own luxury lodge in the heart of Big Sky Country.

SPRINGS ETERNAL. Behind the house, nearly a dozen natural warm springs wind through the meadow, attracting wildlife even on snowy winter days. In summer, the bed of Shooting Star wildflowers that inspired the name of the McGuires' ranch grows in the moist areas of the springs.

WARM AND COZY. A web of dark log trusses above the great room brings the eye down from the high ceiling (it peaks at 28 feet) to create a more intimate feel. The two-sided fieldstone fireplace acts as a room divider; the other side is in the media room, where a plasma TV is built into the stone above the fireplace mantel.



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Step foot onto Dennis McGuire's Montana ranch and you'll soon happen upon a number of natural warm springs winding through the meadows, creating boggy beds for moss-covered stones and drinking holes for local wildlife. As it turns out, another tiny treasure thrives there, too.

Poised to begin construction of his new log home in the summer of 2004, Dennis and a workman took a walk down by the springs, and came back with the name of Dennis' ranch.

"The man reached down and picked this beautiful, little purple flower," explains Dennis, founder and CEO of a Florida environmental company. "He said, 'This is my favorite flower. It's very rare because it only grows where it's moist.' When I asked what it was called, he told me it was a Shooting Star wildflower, and then he picked a few and handed them to me." Delighted with the tiny blossoms, Dennis brought them to his wife Jackie who quickly agreed that Shooting Star Ranch would be the perfect name for their new home.

It's fitting that the ranch is named for a small flower tucked among its 100 acres, since the McGuires' hand-crafted home also provides delight in its details. Not to mention the couple's Big Sky property offers nightly shows of astronomical shooting stars, making a statement as bold as the striking house they built there.

Glass Act

When the McGuires first started thinking about building their new home, Dennis knew he loved the log home lifestyle, but he wasn't partial to the smaller windows and rooms often associated with log construction. Once he learned about the innovative Glass Forest concept created by Whitefish-based designer Walt Landi of High Country Builders, Dennis was sold.

Walt's Glass Forest technique features huge expanses of window glass, sandwiched between floor-to-ceiling log posts. The logs include not just the select round middles, but also the gnarled, stump bottoms, giving the appearance that the tree is growing right out of the floor. "It makes you feel like you're still outside, since the glass between the trees seems to disappear," Walt notes. "It captures the incredible mountain views and everything else in between."

Walt incorporated Glass Forest window walls in the McGuires' great room and in the master and primary guest bedrooms. The cedar "trees," stripped of their bark but left in their natural taper, are about 14 inches wide at



COMPLEMENTS TO THE CHEF.
The kitchen's plaster ceiling features a criss-cross pattern of dark-stained logs, which complement the alder cabinetry, including a built-in desk for Jackie's laptop computer. Edges of the natural granite countertops are bull-nosed, except for the island, which has a chiseled edge. The diamond pattern of the backsplash is a Walt Landi signature design.



ENTREE LEVEL. A tree-columned hallway leads from the living room to the master bedroom and, at the end of the hall, a custom made alder fly-fishing cabinet with etched glass doors. The home is kept toasty with electric radiant heat underfoot.



their tops and larger at the bottoms. They also are used as columns for interior spaces such as the hallway from the great room to the master suite and the entrance to the master-bath shower.

"The first thing you think when you walk in is 'Wow! Look at these trees!'" Dennis says. "There's the rustic, natural feeling of log construction, but with a unique twist."

Lodge Look

Once visitors get past the initial "wow" factor of the virtual forest growing inside Dennis and Jackie's home, they start to take in the overall feel of the lodge-inspired setting. Rich, dark wood and natural stone dominate the 27-by-28-foot great room. Look up and you'll see the vaulted ceiling is a girder-truss system of spruce and lodge-pole pine logs, some up to 40 feet long with 18-inch diameters. A two-sided stone fireplace opens to a cozy seating section of the great

MOUNTAIN VIEW (below left). The etched glass in the transom and side panels around the McGuire's front door depicts elk in a mountain setting. The glass panels were crafted at Ringquist Signs in Columbia Falls, Montana.



BEAR NECESSITY (above middle). The bronze knocker on the McGuire's front door is a to-scale replica of a grizzly bear paw that Jackie purchased from the Eric Thorsen Gallery in Bigfork, Montana. The massive 4-by-9-foot front door made of 4-inch thick alder was distressed to look old.

GATHER 'ROUND (above right). A wooden bench on one side and a leather banquette on the other flank the custom-made alder dining table, which easily transforms from casual dining to formal elegance. The meadow view from the Glass Forest window is unobstructed. In fact, none of the home's windows are covered.

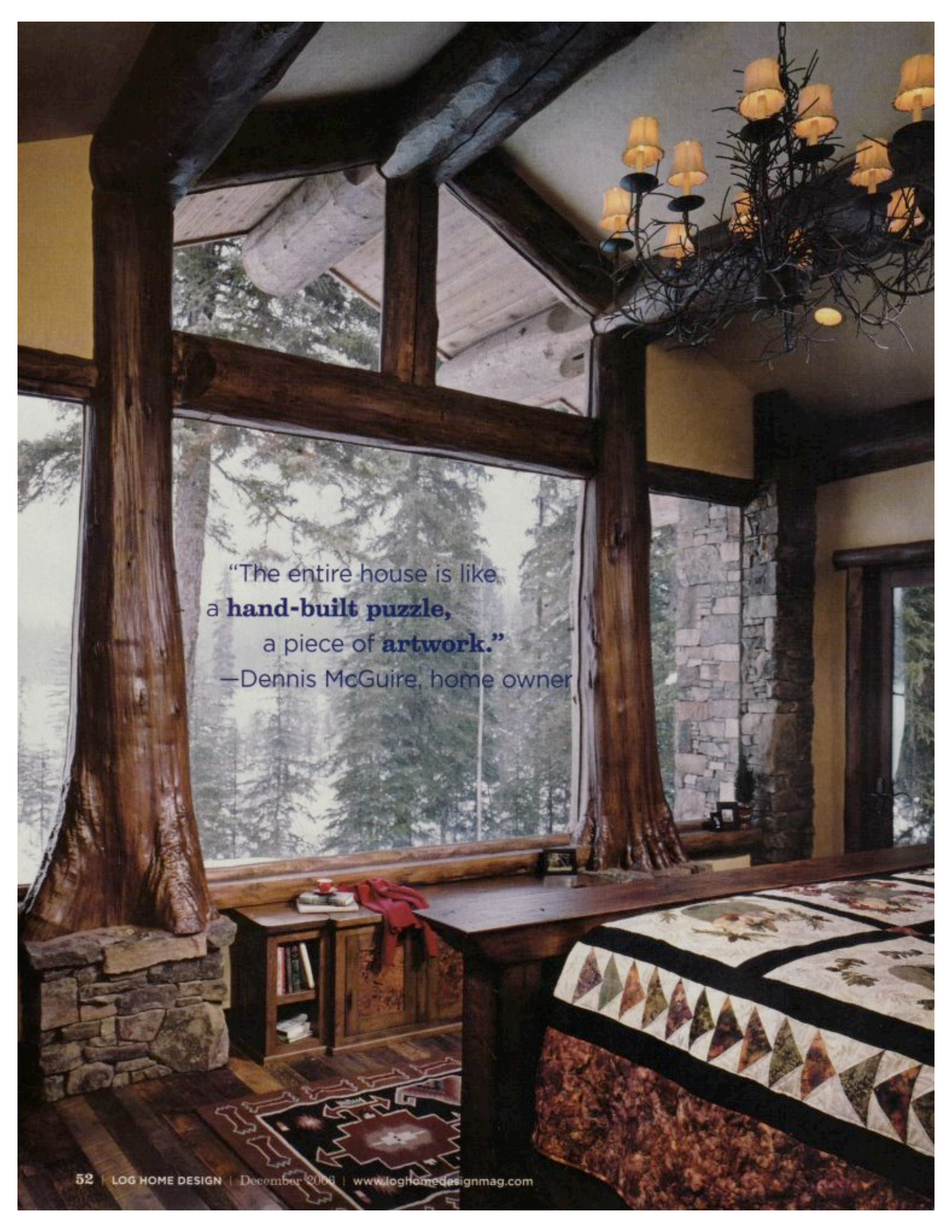
room and to the adjoining media room.

The home's textured plaster walls are painted sienna yellow. Dennis notes, "The bright wall color and dark stain on the logs make it look like a European ski lodge, like something you might see in the Swiss Alps where Jackie and I visited when we were dating."

Sleeping Beauties

The master bedroom, like the nearly identical guest bedroom, has a 16-foot vaulted ceiling and a Glass Forest window offering panoramic mountain views. Between the two tree trunks, a built-in cabinet conceals a plasma television that rises from the cabinet for viewing.

The third bedroom is a 28-by-28-foot bunkroom, complete with eight custom bunks and a rustic table for trying your luck at Texas Holdem. The old-style ranch character continues throughout the room thanks to the multi-hued, reclaimed-wood floors and tall wainscoting. The bunkroom bath includes two showers and a three-faucet, trough-style sink for authentic communal living.



“The entire house is like
a **hand-built puzzle**,
a piece of **artwork.**”
—Dennis McGuire, home owner



HIDDEN PLEASURE (opposite). The master bedroom includes a cabinet built between two Glass Forest "trees" that conceals a 42-inch plasma television, which rises up from the cabinet for viewing. The custom cabinet features a willow and hammered-copper twig design on its panels. The master bedroom set was custom built by Renaissance West of Columbia Falls, Montana. The handmade quilt is from MooseTracks in Whitefish, Montana.

BUNKHOUSE LIVING (above). The bunkroom includes eight custom made bunks, each wired for Internet access and sporting its own electrical outlet, shelves, drawer—even a curtain, in traditional Pullman-train sleeper-car style. Each blanket has a different Pendleton pattern. The McGuire's sons and their friends often play Texas Holdem poker at the bunkroom table.

COME TOGETHER (left). The bunkrooms' guest bath includes two separate showers and a triple faucet, trough-style sink of hand hammered copper.



LAP OF LUXURY. The McGuires' spa-like master bath includes a two-person, jetted overflow soaking tub by Kohler placed to maximize mountain views through the room's enormous, 6-by-12-foot window. His and her vanities are on either side of the tub. When asked whether he likes his mini-spa bath, Dennis was quick to reply, "That's an understatement."





NIGHT LIGHT. Through the Glass Forest window of the great room, the log web pattern in the girder truss system is a striking example of the home's unique wood features. The rear view

from the window includes the meadow and warm natural springs that draw wildlife such as elk and bear. In the distance is the Big Mountain ski area, about ten minutes away by car.

Perfect Touches

"You know that old proverb 'The devil's in the details?'" Dennis asks. "Well, that's the story with this house. We paid close attention to the small stuff."

Those details run from artist-rendered etched glass panels around the front door to willow-twig accents that carry from the kitchen cabinets to the master suite's television cabinet and chandelier. "The entire house is like a hand-built puzzle, a piece of artwork," Dennis says. Take, for example, the stonework in the great room fireplace where every stone was hand fitted, chipped and chiseled to fit perfectly.

And, to accommodate Dennis and Jackie's love of the outdoors, Walt created thousands of feet of open-

air living space. Stone terraces lead from the back of the house to a casual fire pit and an enclosed outdoor kitchen. There's also a backyard barbecue pavilion with a walk-in fireplace—modeled after one at Montana's Glacier National Park—that is so large an adult can stand in its opening. It's one of Dennis' favorite features.

True Love

For now, Shooting Star Ranch is the McGuire's vacation home, but they are contemplating lifestyle changes so they can spend more time there. "Walt exceeded all our expectations for this house," Dennis says. "We are just in love with it." ■

HOMESPECS

Square footage:
4,200 square feet

Log provider:
Sherman Creek Log Works
406-889-3657
www.sclgworks.com

Builder & designer:
Walt Landi
High Country Builders
406-863-9511
www.waltlandi.com

