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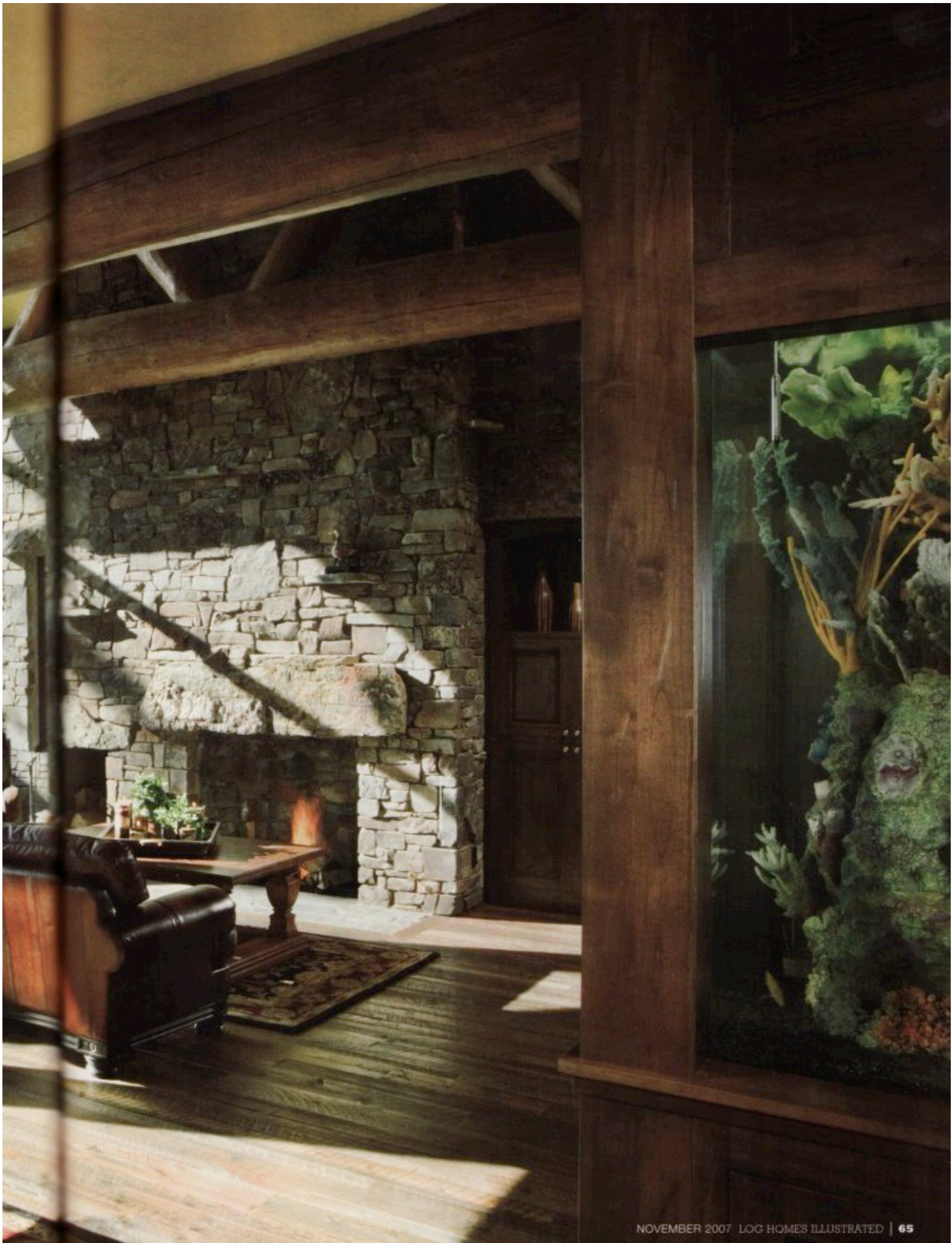
BIG-SKY LIVING

BUILDER AND DESIGNER BOND TO DELIVER A
BEAUTIFULLY DETAILED MONTANA HOME

STORY BY MAUREEN ALLEY

PHOTOS BY ROGER WADE

STYLING BY DEBRA GRAHL





ABOVE: The large-diameter cedar logs were individually chosen and cut below the ground line to preserve the natural flare at the base. This characteristic became a design element inside the home, where log posts provide both support and visual appeal. Oversized Loewen windows expose the view.

OPPOSITE: This log-and-glass custom home offers 6,126 square feet of living space in northwest Montana. The builder and designer put extra consideration into how the placement and design of the house would affect natural lighting. Ultimately, the house faces east to west, with the public space on the south side, and is angled away from direct sunlight.



Partnership between designer and builder is extremely important and valued in the world of design-build custom home construction. It is evident from this custom log home in Whitefish, Montana, that the builder and designer had not only worked together before, but also have a great working relationship.

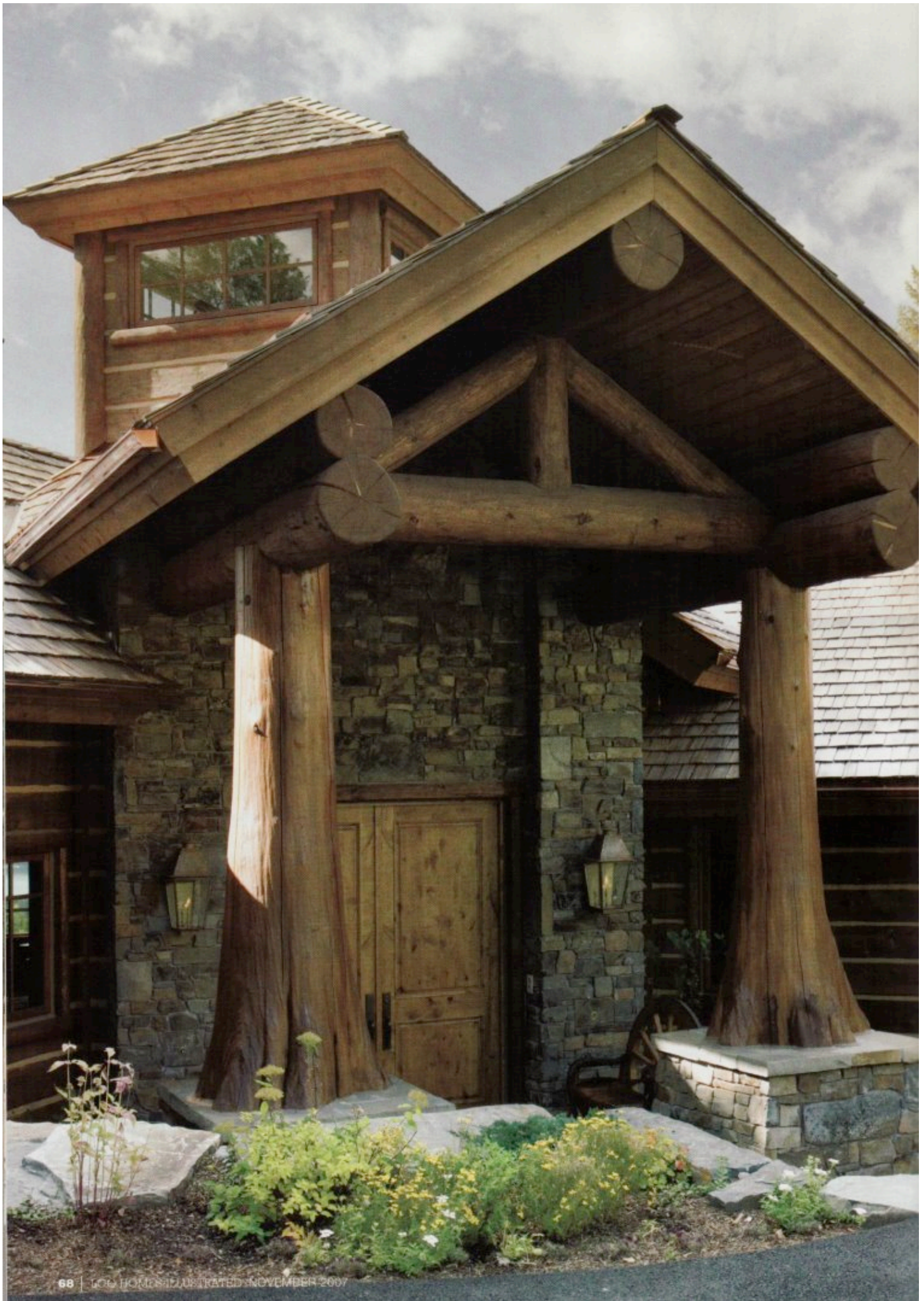
To evaluate the successes and challenges of this home, one must first start with the history between builder and designer. Randy Kaatz, president of Bend, Oregon-based Classic Log Designs, and Walt Landi, owner of Whitefish, Montana's High Country Builders, first began working together five years ago. Through networking, Randy found a partner for his design style, and Walt found a complement to his building style. The result is a great relationship, rapport and reputation surrounding these two highly talented men.

The conception of this home started with the homeowners' excitement over a past project. "The client saw a previous project by High Country Builders and wanted something similar but with a few different aspects," Randy adds.

From the beginning the homeowners laid out what they had in mind, including a saltwater fish tank as a divider between the kitchen, great room and foyer, and the huge cedar logs found as posts throughout the house. The past project by High Country Builders also included large cedar logs placed as support beams, and it was one of the characteristics the homeowners really liked. Every other aspect about the house was left up to the builder and designer to decide and execute.

"We did the design, construction management, interior design, interior decoration, furniture selections," Walt says. "We completely furnished the house right down to the bedspreads, dishes and silverware. The homeowners wanted us to make the decisions for them. We worked closely with them but they put all their trust in us."

Every aspect of the project required much thought and attention. "We spent a long time looking for the right logs for this project," Walt says. "I took my plane out, and we flew around looking for the right logs that would fit best in this project."





ABOVE: The saltwater fish tank, which serves as a divider between the kitchen, great room and foyer, is one of the few elements requested by the homeowner. "We completely furnished the house right down to the bedspreads, dishes and silverware," builder Walt Landi points out. "The homeowners wanted us to make the decisions for them."
OPPOSITE: Stone distinguishes the entry, whose sturdy tree-trunk columns set on pilasters support the interlocking roof logs, highlighted by a king-post truss. A 35-foot tower over the entry admits natural light inside.

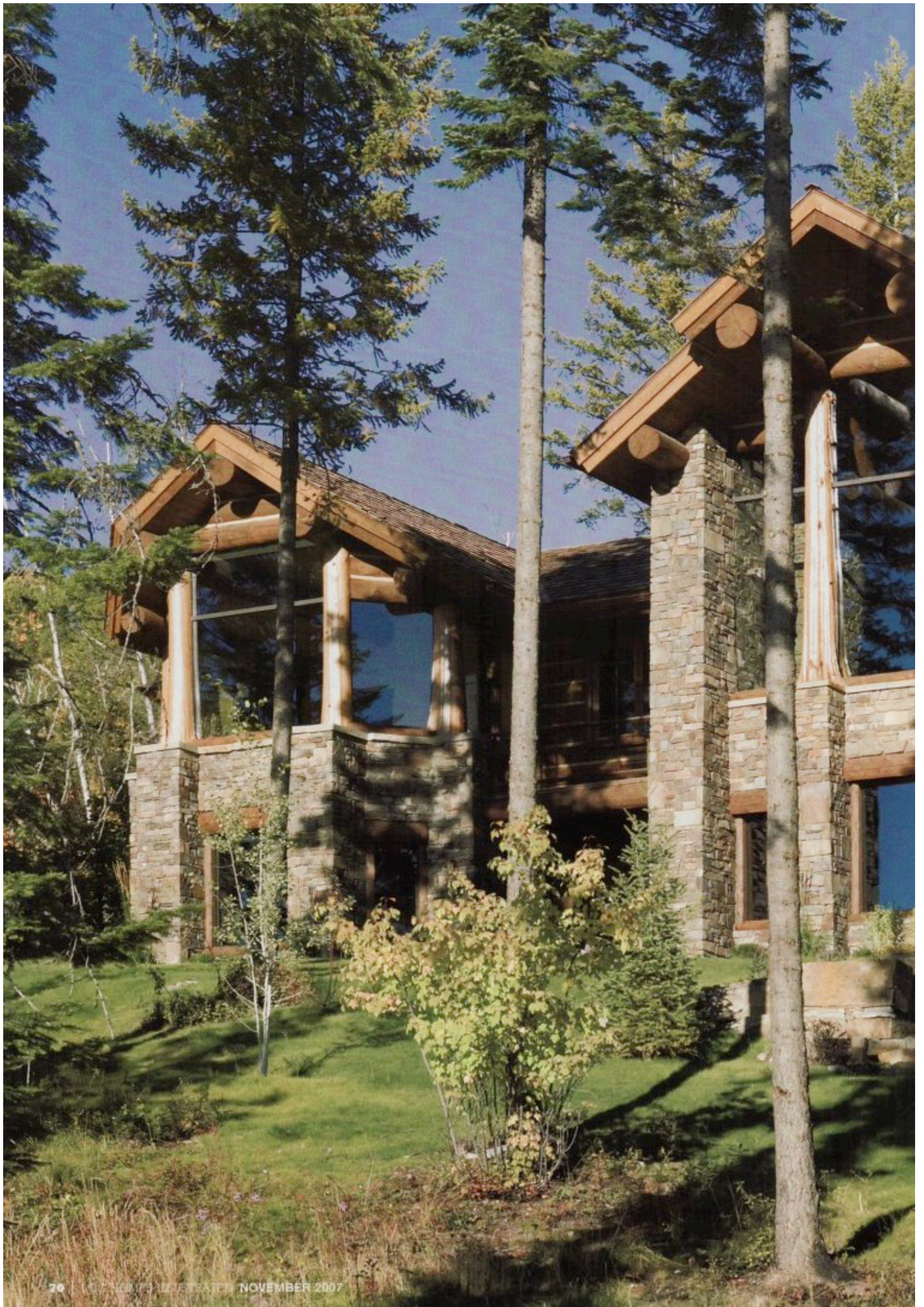
The logs were dug out of the ground below grade to harvest them complete with roots. The logs then were stripped of the outer layer of thick bark, making them very fragile. High Country Builders put extra attention into these logs, padding them during transportation and while stacking and installing them in the house. Walt adds that the large cedar logs emphasize the Montana-rustic style of the house.

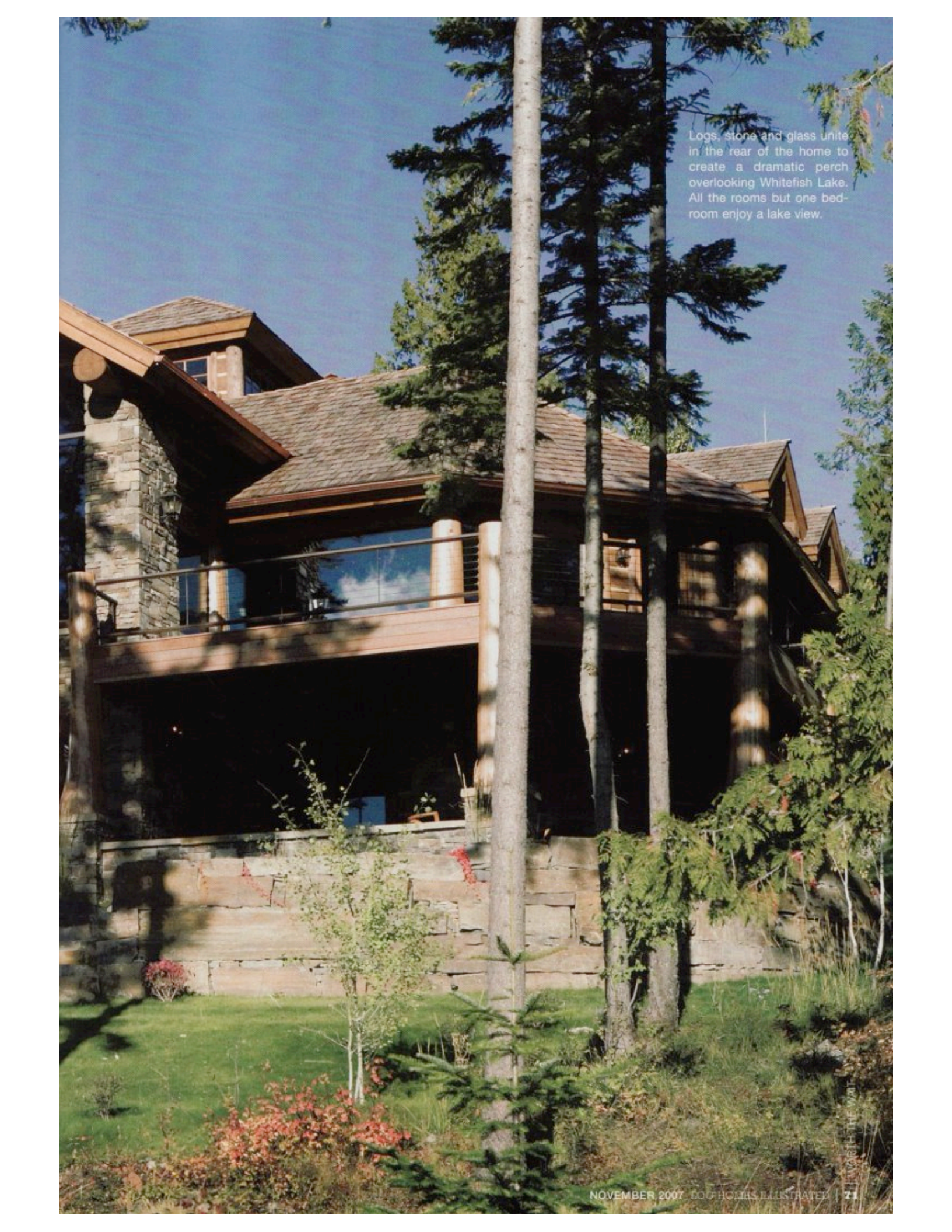
The fireplace in the recreation room is another carefully considered characteristic by both designer and builder. Because the fireplace placement is between a wood dumbwaiter on the left and a bookcase on the right, Walt wanted to place a massive fireplace in the center that would protrude out. The firebricks used in the fireplace also demanded Walt's and Randy's attention to detail. "The firebricks we chose were once used in a copper smelter in Anaconda, Montana. They are very old and have been subjected to a lot of intense heat and carry a lot of history," Walt says.

There are two fireplaces in this home—one in the recreation room and another in the great room. "The fireplaces are true wood-burning fireplaces but also include a gas log starter," Walt adds.

The foyer also is an eye-catching characteristic of the home. It includes a slate entry to resemble a rug, a 35-foot tower for added natural lighting and an amazing view of Whitefish Lake. "When you walk in the front doors, Whitefish Lake is framed by the windows in the great room, which are unique because the stops to the windows are the massive cedar logs," Randy says.

In building any custom home, challenges will always show their face, and this project was no exception. One of the main challenges was designing the two bedrooms in the lower level with the public





Logs, stone and glass unite in the rear of the home to create a dramatic perch overlooking Whitefish Lake. All the rooms but one bedroom enjoy a lake view.

space on the second floor. "The public space took higher priority in the beginning. We needed to have two bedrooms with children sharing bathrooms and work that into the floor plan," Randy adds. "We needed rooms that were not so big and not so small."

The solution to the bedroom challenge is an example of communication and teamwork between Randy and Walt. "Through drawings and conversations with Walt, we came up with a couple different ways to accomplish this," Randy says. "Walt came up with the idea of blasting and taking out dirt to make the rooms larger. Walt has past experience on making this work."

The house was constructed on a hill overlooking Whitefish Lake. The house doesn't actually include lake frontage, but most rooms include a view of the lake. "Almost every room overlooks the lake: the

BELOW: The fireplace is positioned between a wood dumbwaiter on the left and a bookcase on the right. To maintain the fireplace as a focal point of the room, it features a large design and protrudes farther into the room. The firebricks were once used in a copper smelter in Anaconda, Montana; as a result, they are very old and have been subjected to a lot of intense heat over a long period of history.



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ABOVE: The foyer includes a slate entry laid out to resemble a rug. A 35-foot tower adds natural light for the space and provides a breathtaking view of Whitefish Lake. Artisan Doors of Montana crafted the double doors.

kitchen, great room, master suite, dining room, theater room, lower family rooms and boys' bedroom," Walt says. "You can see the lake from anywhere in the house. There is only one bedroom that doesn't include a view of the lake."

The placement of the house was carefully considered. Walt and Randy agreed to position the house in a way that the view of the lake could be incorporated with the view of the mountain. "We were limited to where we could position the house, but we wanted to incorporate lake views and mountain views, taking into account the effect of the sun in the large windows," Walt adds. "We had to angle the house away from the sun slightly."

"We wanted a striking lot, but the building envelope was tight," Randy says. "We weren't given many options on where to put the house, and a challenge was where to put the house that fit in with what the homeowners wanted."

RIGHT: The master bath epitomizes the luxurious and attention to detail in this \$2.4 million home. It features Rohl and Grohe faucets and Kohler toilets and sinks.

BELOW: The massive cedar logs used as stops to the windows in the master bedroom and throughout the house not only frame impressive views of the lake and surrounding mountains, but also help blur the distinction between indoors and out.

OPPOSITE: The home theater provides comfortable seating and big-screen viewing that transform the room into a true bijou.






Walt and Randy put extra consideration into the way the placement and design of the home would affect natural lighting. “One of the challenges from the start was how to maximize the view while at the same time allowing for the best solar situation and bringing in the most light,” Randy says. “There was one house to the south and an empty lot to the north. We had no idea what to expect in the future from the north, and we didn’t want windows facing into the house to the south, but we wanted to take advantage of views that are southwest. Ultimately the house faces east to west, with the public space on the south side and the garage facing downhill.”

The house was modeled on the land before it was built, which eliminated some of the surprises that would have otherwise occurred. “The landscaping came out just as we anticipated due to 1-foot contours on the survey,” Randy adds.

Both Walt and Randy emphasize the importance of utilizing the design-build process in the creation of their projects. Both find that it eliminates many of the challenges—and surprises—when they have total control over designing and building. “As a builder, we can maximize the owner’s budget and the structure by being in charge of the design and making selection on what the lot needs and what the budget allows,” Walt says. “The fact that we can do many things in-house eliminates the middle man.”

Randy describes the design-build relationship as an unfolding process. “From conception of the project, Walt and I worked together on design elements. I provided ideas, he provided ideas, I made suggestions, and he made suggestions,” Randy says. “It’s not competitive but rather meeting the needs of the client. We (designers) see ourselves as an extension of the builder.” **LHI**

This article appeared first in Residential Design Build (rdbmagazine.com), which covers design trends, best practices and new products in the custom home market. Copyright 2006 by Cygnus Business Media and reprinted by permission.

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