

Shedhorn RANCH

A carefully planned log home does little to disturb the environment and allows the homeowners a private space to enjoy family and friends.

BY MARGARET A. HAAPOJA
PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN LOG HOMES



A massive wrought iron Hammerton chandelier illuminates the great room where guests can gather around a 100-year-old baby grand piano.

OPPOSITE: Cozy leather furniture invites guests to curl up in front of the see-through fireplace of Chief Joseph stone.



COWBOY POETRY
D. J. O'NEILL

D

an and Susan Metzger work together and play together, so it was only natural that they design their vacation home near

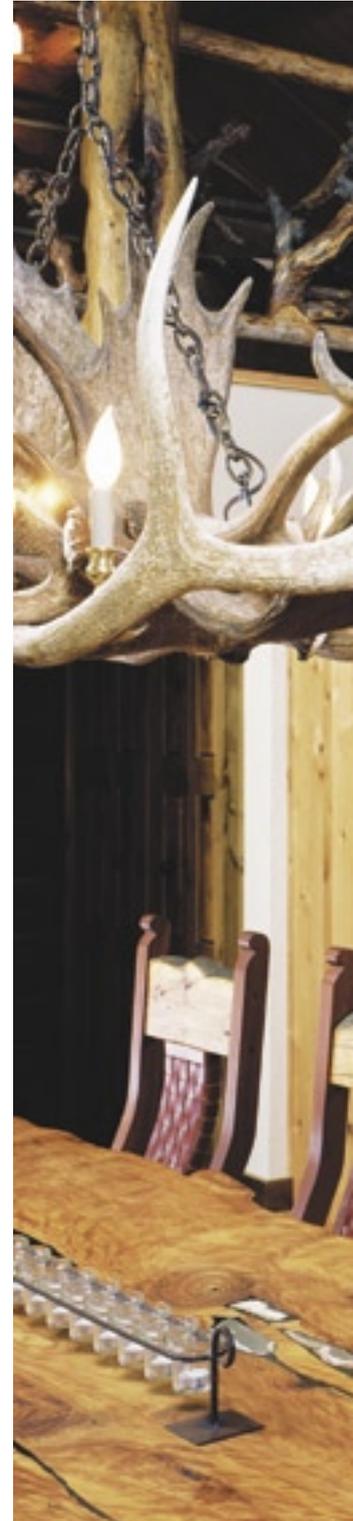
Big Sky, Montana, to accommodate their lifestyle as well as the executive retreats Dan hosts as a business strategy consultant. Susan, who recruits salespeople in high technology, shares Dan's passion for outdoor sports such as skiing, fly fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling.

For years Dan had a dream of having a log cabin in Montana near a trout stream and a ski hill. When he and Susan visited a log home trade show in their home town of Minneapolis, they met Rocky Mountain Log Homes sales manager Tommy Briscoe and decided to pursue that dream. "He invited Susan and me to come out to the Bitterroot Valley," says Dan, "and we took him up on that offer." While they were

in Hamilton, Montana, they visited The Stock Farm, and the clubhouse there gave them all kinds of ideas for their vacation home. Before long they began to work with Pioneer Log Homes, the handcrafted log home division of Rocky Mountain Log Homes, to plan their new home.

"Susan and I had a floorplan we had developed on the back of a napkin," says Dan, "so in conjunction with Pioneer in-house designer Gary Kuhfuss, we designed the home." Briscoe recommended Howard Mills, owner of Yellowstone Custom Country Homes in Alder, Montana, and a builder with 40 years of experience in the industry. The couple worked closely with Mills throughout the entire construction process. "We collaborated on everything even down to the furnishings," says Dan. "Everything we did lock-step together. It was an incredible labor of love."

When they began their search for the perfect site for their vacation home, the Metzgers sought something rural, something with wildlife, and something rather



remote. They found the ideal spot, a 100-acre parcel bordering Jack Creek on the back side of Big Sky, Montana. The property has resident herds of elk and deer, and Dan and Susan can watch mountain goats 200 yards away from their deck. To situate their home on the land, they found a bench that looked up the Jack Creek drainage toward the Spanish Peaks to the east and all the way across

the Madison Valley toward the Tobacco Root and Gravely Ranges in the west. "You can see 60 to 80 miles in one direction," says Howard Mills. "The views from their deck are just unparalleled."

Because the home is visible against the mountain backdrop from miles away, the Metzgers tried very hard to make it as inconspicuous as possible. "A lot of people were

BELOW: Granite countertops, wrought iron bar stools, and leaded glass windows with a twig pattern blend well with twiggly loft railings and Avalanche Ranch light fixtures.

OPPOSITE: A custom moose- and elk-horn chandelier from Antler Designs in Ennis, Montana, lights a table handcrafted by Andy Sanchez from 1,000-year-old juniper from the deserts of New Mexico.





Interesting log work in the ceiling seems to be suspended without any structural support in the spacious master bedroom.

afraid that it would ruin the view they were used to from the time of their grandfathers,” says Mills, “but it actually nestles right in there and it’s pretty hard to pick out except at night when the lights are on. That’s the look the Metzgers were after. They didn’t want it to be imposing and ruin what others were used to seeing. That’s representative of the whole project.”

Indeed, Dan and Susan so appreciated the fact that their neighbors all put their property into conservation easements that they did the same themselves. “Now what we see all around us will be that way in perpetuity,” explains Dan. They also built a low-profile home and avoided a metal roof to make the house less obtrusive. They used 90 tons of indigenous Chief Joseph stone on the home’s exterior and fireplaces so that it would better blend into its environment.

In planning the home, Dan and Susan took their casual lifestyle into consideration. “We’re very informal,” says Dan, “and one of the things Susan and I really appreciate is relationships, so we didn’t necessarily view this as a private

getaway for the two of us. We viewed it as a place where we would have lots of guests.” To accommodate these gatherings, they designed the house with a master bedroom wing at one end of the main floor and two guest suites above the garage at the other end. In between is a common area that includes a spacious great room with a see-through fireplace that divides it from the kitchen and dining area. Downstairs, a central gathering area with a home theater, pool table, and wine cellar separates bedrooms at either end.

“Outside, even the deck is another gathering place,” says Susan. “It has a big hot tub, an outdoor fireplace, and phenomenal views of the Spanish Peaks. So there’s enough privacy, but the common spaces are real gathering areas.”

Perched on a narrow bench that local people referred to as the “dog’s nose,” the 6,800-square-foot home is long and narrow. The property drops off within 25 feet of the structure on all sides. “We had to lower the area that the house was on by about 14 feet just to get enough space for it to sit there,” says Mills. “As you can see, the house just fits on that little bench.” Bringing more than a mile of road



LEFT: A generous walk-in shower has two shower heads, a higher one for 6'2" Dan and a lower one for 5'2" Susan, and their vanities are at different heights, too. Rob Mazza of Belgrade, Montana, crafted the rustic vanities of various woods with copper insets.

BELOW: Light-colored aspen log furniture is used in the two downstairs bedrooms, but Susan chose different color schemes for each.



into the site took some doing, according to Mills, but an even greater challenge was moving the main power lines to Big Sky about a hundred yards up the mountain because they went right through the home site.

The house is handcrafted of 10-inch on average, hand-hewn, standing dead lodgepole pine logs. "That's environmentally pleasing to our customers," says Briscoe of Rocky Mountain's policy of using only standing dead timber, "and we're cleaning up the forest instead

of cutting down live trees." Large purlins and beams are Engelmann spruce, and the logs are chinked to correspond to the Adirondack look the couple was trying to achieve. "The windows are clad and have multiple panes," says Dan, "so our home has the feel of an old Yellowstone lodge."

Dan and Susan worked with Mills to hand-pick many of the log accents that make the home's interior so unique. "In the great room and master bedroom ceilings there is

log work that seems to be suspended without any structural support," says Mills. "And in the dormers, the bottom cord of the log truss is curved upward to give it more eye appeal." Much of the interior trim is distressed alder, so the Metzgers chose Eagle windows because that company could provide alder interior window trim.

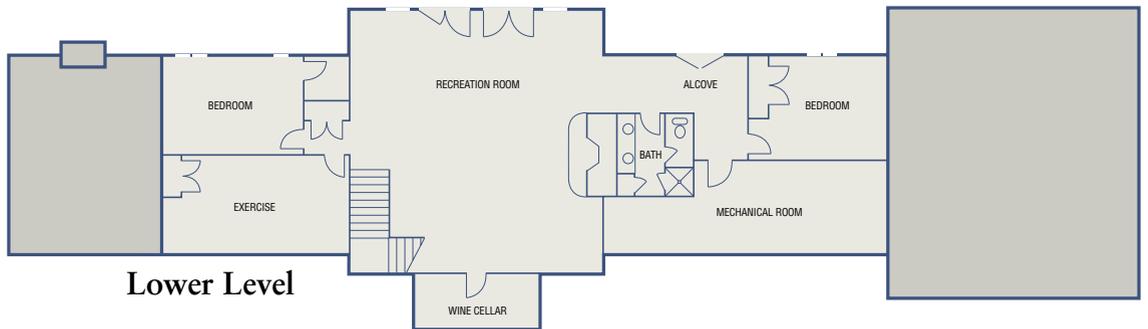
Because the home is located in an area that has experienced earthquakes, it is engineered to withstand significant tremors. And since it is more than 10 miles from a fire station, the Metzgers incorporated a sprinkler system, installed two 1,000-gallon cisterns, and used special fire-retardant roofing. "We found a product called Evershake," says Dan. "It is a synthetic that is almost identical to a cedar shake and is applied the same way. It will withstand all kinds of damage and never needs to be treated, so you can have the effect of cedar shakes without the disadvantages."

Mills credits Susan with attending to all the details that went into decorating the home. "She really put her heart into it and was very involved in that end of things," he says. "She did a very nice job." Briscoe agrees that the home is very comfortable and has all of the amenities you would expect to find in a custom home and more. "There is a wonderful wine cellar in the daylighted basement," he says, "and a stone fireplace in the master suite to warm up those cool Montana evenings. The AV room is ideal for the training sessions Dan provides for CEOs in addition to the normal entertainment it offers."

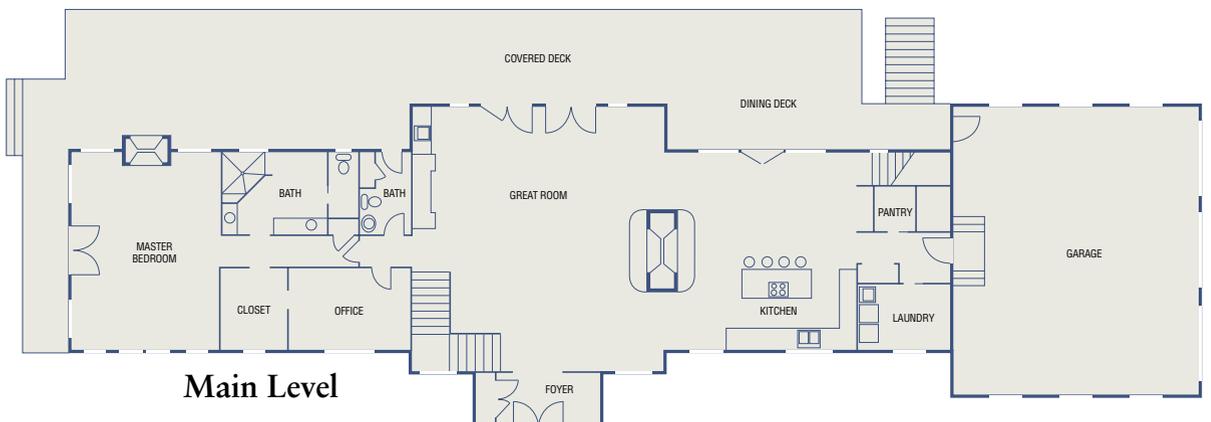
Dan worked with Poindexters in Bozeman to customize the housewide sound system that includes touch pads in every room, multiple sets of speakers, a home entertainment center with a 108-inch drop-down screen, rear projector, and SurroundSound. A home automation system allows Dan and Susan to control the heat, lighting, and security remotely via the Internet or phone. The entire house is



Ninety tons of indigenous Chief Joseph stone help the home blend into the mountainside.



Lower Level



Main Level



LEFT: Dan and Susan made sure their home would not ruin the view their neighbors had enjoyed for years by designing it with a low profile and deciding against a metal roof.

BELOW LEFT: A 140-foot-long deck that extends the length of the house and wraps around the master bedroom affords unparalleled views of the Spanish Peaks.



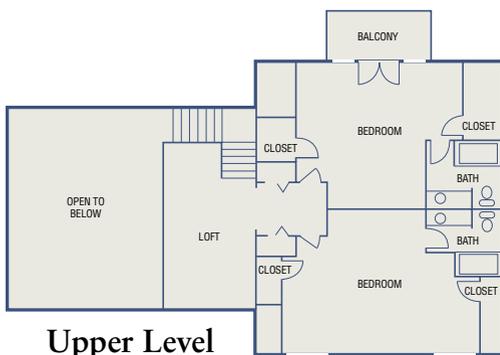
warmed with a radiant heating system.

Most of the light fixtures are from Hammerton Lighting, but Dan and Susan chose a unique handcrafted chandelier of moose and elk horns from Antler Designs in nearby Ennis, Montana. “We talked to Don Schaufler there,” says Susan, “and we told him we wanted something about five feet long and not very deep for over our dining room table. He said they were just experimenting with a new design, and it worked out beautifully.

“We tried to use local artisans as much as we could,” continues Susan. “The rustic vanities in the bathroom and powder room are wood and copper made by Rob Mazza in Belgrade. The kitchen cabinets were made by Tom’s Custom Woodworking in Ennis, and the leaded glass windows were done by David Fjeld of Big Sky Stained Glass Art in Bozeman.” The twig pattern of the windows echoes the twiggy railing in the loft above the kitchen.

Dan especially likes the quarter-sawn, rough-sawn, random-width Douglas fir flooring they used in most of the common areas on the main floor. “It’s a very unique material I would recommend to anyone,” he says. “Our dogs can run all over it, and you’ll never see scratches.” Many of the interior walls are plaster painted the same light color to contrast with the logs, which are finished with an Olympic semitransparent stain and a clear satin PPG product called Crystal Finish. The exterior logs are stained with a color that was custom mixed on site using Flood penetrating oil finish.

Dan and Susan get out to their Montana home at least once a month, and they hope to retire there before too long. They’ve had elk standing 10 feet from the door and mountain lions walking under their deck. “We’re out in the middle of nowhere,” says Dan. “We really have no neighbors per se, and it’s extremely quiet. We can hear Jack Creek as we sit out on the deck. What this is to us is a place where we can be with others and just shut out the rest of the world. We can live the life we choose to and share it with the people we care about.”



Upper Level

LOG HOME PRODUCER: Rocky Mountain Log Homes, Hamilton, Montana; BUILDER: Yellowstone Custom Country Homes, Alder, Montana.