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Coming Home to the Country

STORY BY Amy Laughinghouse • PHOTOGRAPHY BY O'Neal Arnold

YOU CAN TAKE THE CITY OUT OF THE GIRL WHEN IT MEANS
BUILDING A LOG HOME ON A KENTUCKY HORSE FARM.



"There's no place else I would rather be," Claudia Lauber says. When she's not at work, her days are filled with caring for her horses and canning the bounty from her vegetable gardens. "I tell everybody I'm living my dream," she says.



Thirteen years ago, Claudia Lauber never could have pictured herself settling down in a log home. “I was a subdivision-living, must-have-my-facial, must-have-my-nails-done kind of woman,” she says with a laugh. “I used to be such a priss-pot before I met Marc.”

Marc is Claudia’s husband of nine years, and, in a sense, Professor Henry Higgins to her Eliza Doolittle. Only, instead of taking an endearingly smudge-faced street urchin and turning her into a perfect lady—a la Audrey Hepburn in “My Fair Lady”—he took a perfect lady and turned her into an endearingly smudge-faced country gal with her own manure spreader, tool belt and 3,000-square-foot pine log home in Spencer County, Kentucky.

“Marc just loves to be outdoors,” says Claudia of her husband, a chiropractor who put himself through school by working construction. “He taught me how to play basketball, how to play football and how to use tools.” When he presented her with her first horse on her 45th birthday, she finally gave up on the manicures and other city-girl trappings once and for all. “As far as I’m concerned, nothing is too dirty or gross that has to do with a horse,” explains Claudia, who now cares for three “babies,” a half-Arab/half-paint, an Appaloosa and a draft horse gentle enough for her grandchildren to ride.

TOP LEFT: “Marc went down to the creek with his tractor and got one rock at a time to lay out our walkway and our little garden area,” Claudia says. (They also used stones from their property for their fireplace.) “We spent a year just landscaping.”

BOTTOM LEFT: The Lauber’s home is built from 6-inch V-notch eastern white pine logs with authentic dovetail corners. Narrow wood channels between the logs could be filled with chinking, but the couple preferred to forgo it.



Claudia and Marc Lauber furnished their home with pieces collected on their travels around the Southwest, as well as from their favorite shops in Kentucky. The bureau of shallow drawers to the left of the fireplace is an antique surveyor's chest. Beside the armchair, a milking stool serves as the perfect spot to rest a cup of steaming coffee.



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She's a Country Girl

"The more I got into nature, the more I wanted to live in the country," says Claudia. So she and Marc bought a farm an hour outside town, thinking they would eventually build their retirement home there. "Then we decided we didn't want to wait until we retired to live our dreams," she explains. That's when the couple started looking for land closer to Marc's office and the country store where Claudia plies her public relations and marketing skills.

In 2001, a newspaper advertisement led Marc to a 20-acre parcel 15 minutes from town. "I came out here and saw the woods and the open ground, and it was the best of both worlds," he recalls. "I like the woods, but we needed open ground for the horses. There was a place to dig a pond and a creek running through it. I couldn't improve on it if I wanted."

Once they found this pristine property, the idea of building a log home there seemed the obvious choice. "It's so natural and fits in with the environment," Claudia says. "It was unique, and we could design exactly what we wanted."

Marc and Claudia were impressed with the log packages that Appalachian Log Structures, based in Ripley, West Virginia, had provided in their area, and they liked the company's willingness to alter its standard blueprints. "They were just really wonderful to work with," says Marc, who added multiple windows, a covered porch, additional fireplaces and square footage to the "Richmond" plan.

While the company's drafting department labored over those changes, Marc and Claudia spent their weekends

LEFT: Marc designed and built the kitchen cabinets, which Claudia then painted a cheerful green to contrast with the pine log walls. The mismatched trio of Tiffany lamps over the island and the whimsical backsplash behind the six-burner stove, featuring Mexican tiles painted with farm animals, conveys the home's lighthearted, easy-going personality.

camping on the farm. “Marc brought his tractor out, and we had a blast with my oldest daughter and her husband building a barn,” Claudia says. “When construction on the house started, wherever there was a piece of flooring, that’s where we would camp that weekend. When they put our plumbing fixtures in, Marc and I hauled water up and threw it in the bathtub and took a bath,” she recalls.

Even before the home was complete, the farm hosted some rollicking celebrations. “One night, Marc’s son had a party out here with big bonfires, and one October, we had a birthday party for a whole bunch of family members. Everybody brought instruments they could play—or not,” quips Claudia, who accompanied the rag-tag band with her knee cymbals.

Making a House a Home

A year after breaking ground, the couple made the log home their permanent residence. “We think the house really reflects our personalities,” says Claudia, who decorated it herself in a style she flippantly describes as “Cowboy meets Mission at the Ski Lodge.” Amber light glows from Tiffany lamps and mica lampshades. Oriental and Native American carpets in rich jewel tones warm the wide-planked tongue-and-groove pine floors, which Marc and Claudia laid with the help of dedicated friends. Antiques are mixed with comfortable leather armchairs and the simple, soothing lines of Stickley furniture made of quarter-sawn oak, which Marc loves for the striking pattern of the grain.

Ask him what his favorite feature of the home is, and without missing a beat, Marc replies, “My wife.” But he also loves

RIGHT: “Our bedroom actually looks like a tree house,” says Claudia, who furnished the balcony with a wicker chaise that beckons on lazy afternoons. Inside, furnishings blend with the golden tones of the pine, which the Laubers covered with clear stain.







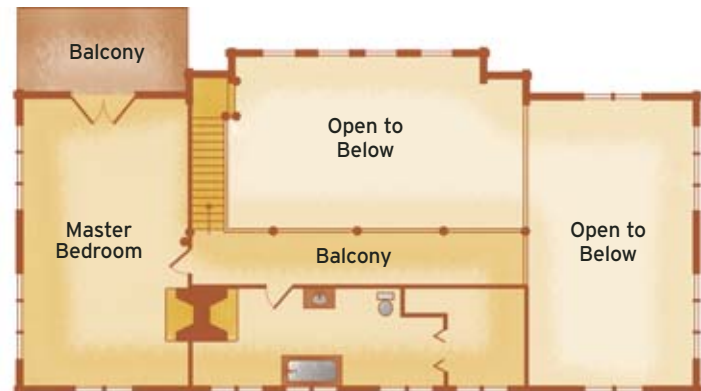
The master bath is a luxurious retreat complete with wall-mounted faucets that drain water into sleek copper vessel sinks and an enormous soaking tub for relaxing baths. A fireplace warms the room on cold nights.

HOME DETAILS

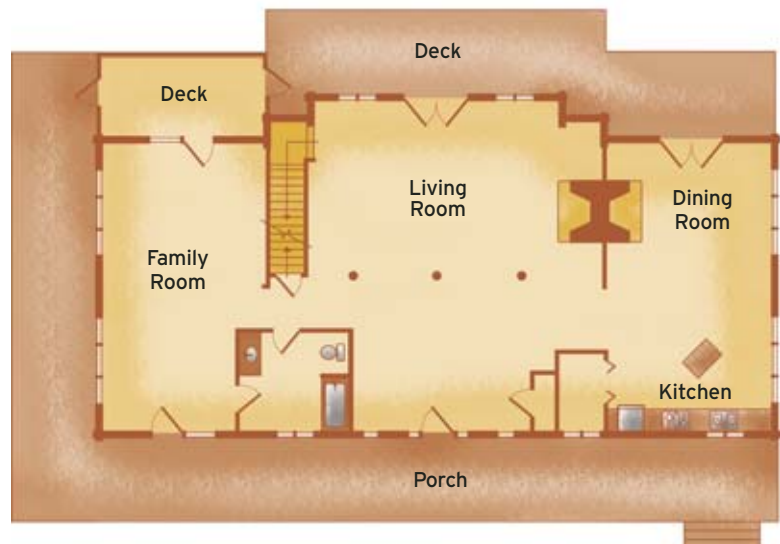
- **Square footage:** 3,000
(not including basement)
- **Package price:** \$150,000
- **Log producer:** Appalachian Log Structures

the kitchen. “It has 25-foot-tall ceilings and doors that open to the deck and look out toward the pond and the horses. It’s just a bright, beautiful space,” explains Marc, who custom-built all the cabinetry himself, with the help of his friend, trim carpenter Gavin Caster. “It was a good excuse for him to buy every tool known to man,” Claudia jokes.

Marc also built the splendidly detailed mantel for the see-through fireplace shared by the master bedroom and bath—the one amenity that Claudia says she couldn’t live without. “When it’s a cold and dreary Saturday morning, we turn on the fireplace, fill that tub up and get in with our coffee, and it’s just the best,” she sighs, adding that she has a newfound appreciation for the simple pleasures in life. “I used to get jewelry for presents,” she says. “Now I get power tools. I really have changed my views on the things I think are important.” And judging by the sound of her laughter, that’s just fine. ■



Upper Level



Main Level

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