

The Road Home

After years of motorcycling through the Blue Ridge Mountains, a Florida couple decides to stay in these hills for good—and build one unforgettable home.

story by Margaret Foster

photography by Rick Lee

A chandelier hanging from the roof of this mountain home's porte cochere lends theatrical flair to the front porch. Thanks to the overhead coverage, homeowners Debbie and Jimmy Keys can enjoy their outdoor living space even during rainstorms.



Debbie turned to Dee Marksbury of Gage Martin Interiors in Tampa for the home's interior decorating. "I wanted it to be laid-back," Debbie says. Dee, following Debbie's lead, chose understated pieces and bold accents. "The great room has extremely welcoming, luxurious, casual furniture," says Dee.



Just as the West has its Route 66, the East Coast has its own mother road: The Blue Ridge Parkway. It was that 465-mile-long road and its vistas of the Great Smoky Mountains that convinced Floridians Debbie and Jimmy Keys—who've taken in the gorgeous scenery from the backs of their Harleys over the years—to build a house in North Carolina.

It would have been tough to keep Jimmy away. He grew up visiting his grandparents' home in the Carolina mountains, and his parents live in nearby Waynesville.

For Debbie, the allure is all about the autumn foliage and its vibrant transition.

"They have four seasons, which we don't have at all in Florida," she says.

And she has always wanted to live in a log home. So they bought one.

Located an hour from Asheville in Maggie Valley, surrounded by, literally, a million acres of forest land, the 5,880-square-foot abode is one of more than 100 log homes in the Smoky Mountain Retreat community.

The Keys came on in the middle of the construction process, teaming up with Gary Cochran of Appalachian Log Structures, a 30-year-old log home manufacturer based in Ripley, West Virginia. Gary designed the house by adapting one of Appalachians' popular floor plans, the Richmond. "We took some of the elements from that and went

The cabinets, a mélange of knotty alder, chestnut and maple, give the kitchen a French feel. "The kitchen was the most important room to me," says Debbie.

considerably further. It just blossomed," Gary says.

With three decades of construction experience—the last exclusively in log-home building—Gary let the site dictate the design of the house. "It's basically built around the view," Gary says. "All the bedrooms face that side of the house. You wake up, and you're looking down at the view."

Local artisans added unique touches throughout the house: the powder room's log-pedestal sink, the main staircase wrought-iron handrail with a twig motif, and



a stained-glass window of a mountain scene in the master bath.

For a personal touch, Debbie turned to long-time decorator Dee Marksbury, owner of Gage Martin Interiors in Tampa. “When they bought this house, she called me and said she wanted to do it in a way that was unique,” Dee says. “I knew that side of Debbie’s personality and how to express it.”

In just nine months, the Keys had the log home they’d always dreamed of just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, now their retirement playground. “We spend our days riding Harleys or whitewater kayaking—typical summer mountain things that we never had enough time to do before Jimmy retired,” Debbie says. And the retreat is a big hit with the Keys’ three grown children and their friends.

“We call it our log cabin,” Debbie says, “but all our friends who come here say, ‘That’s not a log cabin. That’s a lodge.’” 🏠

TOP: The dining area, with its stacked-stone fireplace and table to fit the whole family, makes supper an event. “We’ve had 14 people around that big table,” Debbie says.

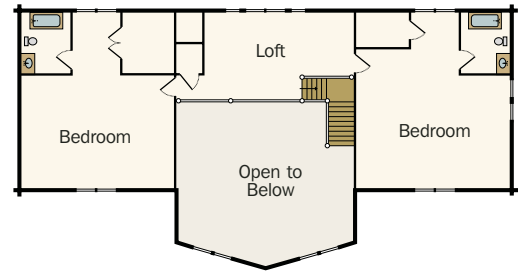
LEFT: A custom-made pedestal sink adds character to one of the home’s five bathrooms. A local carpenter, Daryl Mathis of Pines Customs Cabinets, created the sink as well as the kitchen and bathroom cabinets, which are a blend of knotty alder, chestnut and maple.



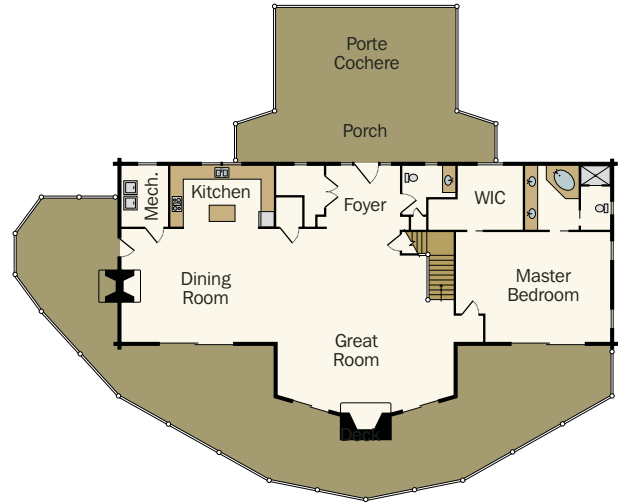
ABOVE: The basement game room sports a tin ceiling, wet bar and pool table. “We spend a lot of time in the game room,” Debbie says. “We’ll all get pillows and blankets on the floor and watch TV. We hang out down there a lot.”



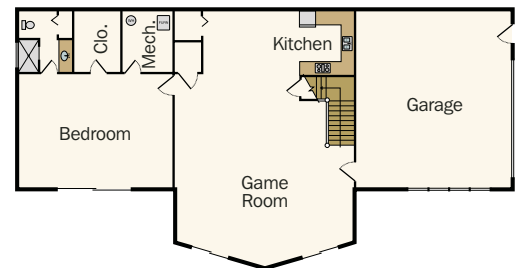
LEFT: Sleeping in is almost a requirement when you’re retired—and this plush master bedroom is one you can definitely sink into and laze around, especially with the gorgeous forested view.



Upper Level



Main Level



Lower Level



home details

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 5,880

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:
COCHRAN ENTERPRISES**

**LOG COMPANY:
APPALACHIAN LOG STRUCTURES**

TOP: An outdoor fireplace warms the deck in cooler weather. Located just off the kitchen, it's the family's most popular gathering place. "If we're outside, we're in the round sitting area," says Debbie.

ABOVE: The 5,880-square-foot abode is one of more than 100 in the community known as Smoky Mountain Retreat, which abuts a country club and 1 million acres of forest.

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