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Planning a retirement masterpiece

A few years ago, Chicagoans Jon and Patti Weitzel decided, like many Americans, to retire to a warmer climate. On the way to a golf trip in Myrtle Beach, they stopped in North Carolina and fell in love with the beauty and history of the area, the Blue Ridge Mountains, higher elevations, and cooler temperatures.

One particular mountain offered all they wanted: a quiet community, seasonal colors, hiking, and golf. The development on Grandfather Mountain, near Banner Elk, was thick with rhododendrons and several rivers running through many of the 55 lots. "It wasn't a hard decision to make," Jon says.

The next decision was a bit harder. "We love the look of exposed structural beams and wood and wanted a home that gave us that rustic feeling," says Jon. "We started out wanting a timber frame home and did a lot of reading and visiting home shows to gain more knowledge on this building style."

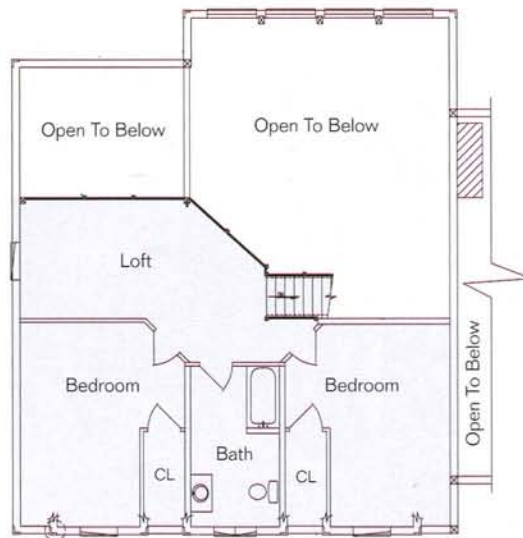
"We discovered we wanted the beams, plus all the wood, and a timber frame home had more drywall than wood," explains Patti. "But as we turned our sights to log homes, the number of companies to choose from increased and so did our confusion. There were many wood choices

The great room looks even larger with the extended roofline that reaches beyond the glass wall: A 12-foot extension with a king truss, ideal for a deck overhang.





The Weitzels' North Carolina retirement home features a story-and-a-half style arrangement with additional living space over the garage.





The 12-foot-deep deck with a 24-foot-tall cathedral overhang has the feeling of another room. Family can hang out and converse while listening to the nearby Watauga River.



RIGHT: The open dining room is surrounded by glass. The structural beams serve a second purpose, to hold decorative antiques and accents and give the room a hint of the past. BELOW: An open loft with a computer area is just outside a guest bedroom.

and styles and we hadn't even talked about the design."

Several months later, and after many trips to local model homes, the Weitzels' research paid off. They selected Kuhns Bros. Log Homes — the combination of kiln-dried logs for better construction and one-stop shopping for all components made the Weitzels feel at ease. "The service they provided from start to finish was what impressed us the most," says Jon.

They selected the 8-inch-by-8-inch eastern white pine D-log that gave the exterior of the home an authentic look, while the interior had the flat side of the log for easy decorating.

With the producer and materials in place, the floor plan design phase was next and was the most exciting stage for the couple. Their goal was to create a functional home with classic lines, but make a notable first impression when you pulled in the driveway.

The story-and-a-half style they choose is a timeless look that provides for a full-length front porch and lots of options on the inside. The top priority for Jon and Patti was an open first floor with space for the whole family at one time — four children, seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. "We wanted space above and below for our family and wanted our master suite and laundry room located on the main level," Patti says.

They also requested an oversized garage for easy entry into their cars. The 26-by-24-foot space allows for lots of accessible shelving for woodworking and gardening tools. It also provided ample raftering for a bonus room above the garage, which is



now an area exercise equipment and TV space for the grandkids.

When you look around the home, you really notice the wood: king trusses above the great room and extended porch, warm full-length walls, reclaimed wood floors polished to a glowing luster.

For Jon and Patti, the serenity of the wood inside and the woosy setting outside is an ideal place to retire. "We really love the results of everyone's hard work and help along the way," says Jon.

And looking back at the Weitzels' log-home building experience, it was as if they were following the log home building manual to a T. From buying the land, to researching home options, to then finally decorating the home, Jon and Patti were on track almost every step of the way. With the right guidance and planning, your retirement log home could go as well as it did for the Weitzels.

Weitzel Log Home Model – Banner Elk, NC

Jon & Patti Weitzel

Square footage: 3,700 plus lower level walk-out

bedrooms: 3

bathrooms: 3.5

Producer: Kuhns Bros. Log Homes. For free information on this plan, circle 094 on the Reader Service Card or visit www.loghomesinfo.net/RS.

Construction: E & K Construction

Flooring: Reclaimed heartwood pine



ABOVE: Most of the floors are reclaimed antique pine from the Schmidt Brewery, Philadelphia, and Kodak Plant, Rochester, NY.



With rustic wood walls found in every room of the house, the Weitzels have their ideal retirement retreat.

Planning ahead

Think about access, activities, and affordability when designing a log home for eventual retirement

by Sharon Arkoff

It takes appropriate design for your retirement log home to accommodate a lifetime's worth of habits and hobbies, and look beautiful doing it. "For most people, this will be their final and best home," says Mike Loy, design manager for Southland Log Homes. The key to a retirement log home is to remember access, activities, and affordability.

1. Access. Access generally means one-floor living. A tried-and-true design features a basic rectangular or T-shaped footprint, with the master bedroom and bath at one end of the home, the middle embracing an open kitchen/ great room/ dining area, and the far end comprising a guest bedroom or two. Single-floor open plans help minimize tight spots, which could prove a problem for wheelchairs or other equipment down the road. "A standard doorway is 32 inches wide; in a retirement home, you might increase that to 36 inches at least for the master bedroom, master bathroom, and entrance from the garage," says Brian Delwiche, design manager for Wisconsin Log Homes.

A one-story home also can offer advantages in maintenance. For instance, shorter ladders and less scaffolding are required to maintain the upper logs. Gutters and windows are less risky to clean when they're 10 or 12 feet (versus 30 feet or more) off the nearest solid footing.

Of course, one-floor living doesn't mean your home can't be designed to offer additional spaces above or below to help you host overnight guests. "Most of our log home designs are one-and-a-half story with a loft," says Appalachian Log Homes' Joey

Bogess. "The grandkids won't have problems with stairs or lack of headroom, and a loft is a fun place for the kids to have for themselves."

A basement is a convenient way to add space for guests. "We encourage full-height basements," says Nathan McKenna of Hilltop Log Homes. "On a 1,300- to 1,500-square-foot house, a basement gives you extra room for recreation, another bedroom or two, and a mudroom. You can use the downstairs for overflow guests and for activities that don't belong in your living room."

2. Activities. What lifestyle will you pursue during your retirement? Retirees are more physically active and busy with hobbies or second careers than ever. Lifestyle features designed into log homes can be as remarkable as space for a private plane built into the garage or as prosaic as an office. What activities will fill your day once you're in your log home? Will you need space for an ongoing collection or hobby? How much entertaining will you do? How often will family visit?

If you plan on entertaining large groups, it's design — rather than size — that matters most. For instance, says McKenna, "You can increase your capacity with a larger deck with more points of access from the interior."

"You want rooms that are cozy for two people watching TV, but when you need to host the whole clan, you need areas that can transition to holding more people and more activities," says Southland's Mike Loy.

3. Affordability. Finally, it's important to design a home you can afford. "A lot of times, people come in with a preliminary sketch and don't realize how much they'd be overbuilding and at what price," says McKenna. "Their last house may have been the place they raised three kids for 30 years. The downsizing mentality doesn't come easily."

Guest bedrooms are a common area of overdoing it. Although it would be generous to offer guests another version of the master suite, money is probably better spent somewhere else in the house that gets daily use.

Professional designers also caution against rooms that fulfill only one function. It's less expensive to make your master bedroom big enough to include a small reading area than to make a separate reading room. In the summer, porches or balconies are popular "camping out" spots. Other potential budget-busters are customized features such as octagonal breakfast nooks or designs that call for a complicated foundation or more finishing and roofing materials. 🐾



A cathedral ceiling and open loft above give the great room a sense of added volume and space in the Weitzel home.



The Weitzels planned for their master suite to have additional reading space inside and out, rather than adding an extra room.