

where the **WILD THINGS** are



Two **nature lovers** build a log home to accommodate their new lifestyle—and a collection of **wildlife artwork**.

BY LISA MARQUIS JACKSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER WADE



A character-log column and twig chandelier add a rustic touch to an otherwise sleek foyer.



The heart of this modern great room is its massive hearth crafted from Montana moss rock with knotted-cherry doors that hide a flat-screen TV.

Building a custom log home requires getting personal. It means designing a space that's lifestyle-friendly and reflects your true personality. That's why Victoria and Don Belk took a walk on the wild side—designing a log home to accommodate their passion for wildlife and art.

Although the Belks' primary residence was in Colorado, their heart had long been in Wyoming, where they'd vacationed for many years. In the early '90s, the couple purchased a log cabin in Jackson and hired local architect Eliot Goss to remodel and expand it. "The resulting cabin was a little jewel," says Victoria.

The new retreat was a perfect vacation getaway. But a few years later when the couple decided to make Wyoming their full-time home, they realized that their erstwhile vacation spot wouldn't quite fit the bill as a primary residence. Instead they bought new property and brought Eliot back to design a



Above: Black-stained cherry gives the balcony railing a metallic look—just one of many surprising turns in the home.



A white marble polar bear sits front and center in this open floorplan, where white oak floors in the great room lead to sandstone tiles in the kitchen and dining area.



“I loved designing this home with a major art collection in mind,” says architect Eliot Goss.

whole new log home.

“As far as Jackson Hole goes, that new lot had it all,” says Eliot. The 5-acre property offers an unobstructed view of the Teton Mountain Range to the north and west. The terrain, ripe with natural mountain grasses, follows a natural incline that drops off to hay meadows and pastures connected to the Snake River. Creeks wind throughout the development—and in the distance you can see a working ranch with cattle and horses.

“I wanted to capitalize on both the gorgeous mountain and water views in our design,” says Eliot, who developed a single-story residence (due to development restrictions) with a whopping 6,000 square feet of primary living space, including a basement and loft area.



Left: A specialist from the Natural Museum of Wildlife Art consulted on the home’s track lighting. **Above:** An antique Jacobs Brothers Deteco-Gram scale adds character to the sleek foyer. **Above right:** The couple designed two ponds with connecting streams to take advantage of the property’s incline.

Custom Creation

Eliot identified the rooms that were most important to the couple, then set about designing a floorplan with unique shapes and angles. “Most log structures follow a basic shape,” says Eliot. “This home is not a rectilinear plan.”

This creative design translated into a complex roof system, so it was critical for the architect to work closely with the builder throughout the planning stages. That was easy, since Teton Heritage Builders superintendent Dan Clancy had worked with Eliot many times before.

“When you have an irregular plan with curves and stepping planes, it’s difficult to build and fabricate the roof structures in another state,” says Eliot. As a result, the duo hired a trusted local company, Lost River Log Specialists, to complete the fabrication on-site.

Spotlight on Nature

The final design pays homage to the couple’s interests, including Don’s fascination with home technology. In this “smart” home, the sound, security, HVAC and lighting systems are all integrat-



A specially designed rising footboard houses a 24-inch flat-screen TV—making sure the couple's view of the Teton Mountains remains unobstructed.

ed. "There are no conventional light switches," says Eliot. "Instead, there are little faceplates with buttons."

The extensive lighting system plays another key role in the home—highlighting 80-plus pieces of wildlife art. The couple hired a specialist from the Natural Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson, Wyoming, to filter, tune and aim the flexible, low-voltage track lighting to create fantastic displays.

"I loved designing the house with a major art collection in mind," says Eliot. "We really thought about the size of the pieces and how to showcase them on any available wall space."

Design That Works

The great room is, indeed, great thanks to its massive stone fireplace crafted of Montana moss rock, exposed log beams and four 22-inch-diameter log columns. The warm white oak floor leads to sandstone tile that ties together the open design of the kitchen, dining and breakfast room.

As for sleeping quarters, the home has three bedrooms: the master, which is somewhat central to the living space, and a private guest wing with two complete suites.

The master suite is flanked by personalized his-and-hers offices. Don's office, which includes a sitting area with a fireplace, is the perfect spot for consulting and doing project work. (So much for retirement, eh?) Victoria's—separated by a sliding door—serves as the home base for her graphic design business. An open loft with book storage looks down into the sitting space.

"I just love the way the his-and-hers spaces came together," remarks Eliot. "They're functional and beautiful at the same time."

Entertainment Tonight

The Belks' basement houses an elaborate home theater, where they love to show off the thousands of wildlife slides they've taken on trips to Antarctica and the Canadian Arctic.

Speaking of wildlife, there's a "dog room" nestled between the garage and the living areas. This twist on the popular mudroom includes an elevated tub where the couple can bathe their beloved spaniels Watson and Elementary, My Dear (Ella for short) after nature hikes.

This area also boasts a fully equipped pottery studio where Victoria nurtures her innter artist. The finishing touch: a hand-sculpted bronze polar bear, standing proudly in front of the home. ■

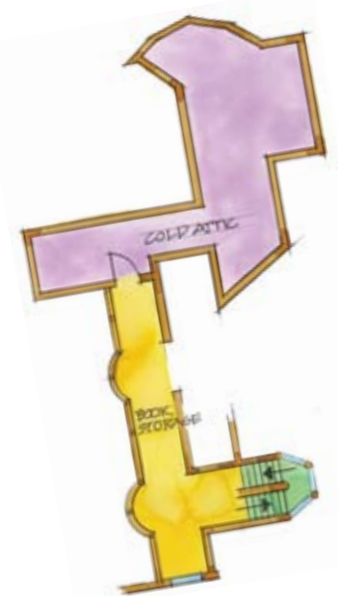


Main level

HOMESPECS
Square Footage: 7,500
Log Provider: Lost River Log Specialists Inc.
General Contractor: Teton Heritage Builders



Basement level



Attic level

The home's unique angles required a complex roof system—and ongoing collaboration between the architect and builder.

