

HOME ON THE RANCH

story and photography by SIMONE PADDOCK

A unique Western art collection dominates the Baker family's log home near Sunriver

When you step into Kathryn and Curtis Baker's [cq small caps] expansive log home, the first thing you'll notice is the huge, rawhide-and-bronze tepee-like chandelier that hangs from the entryway ceiling. Next, you'll walk into the living room, where an unobstructed view of Mount Bachelor and its accompanying Cascades will take your breath away. You're not done yet: Raise your eyes and a "Wow!" will escape your lips as you look up at the magnificently curved fir beams in the 27-foot-tall timber-framed ceiling.

There are a lot of things in and about this 8,500-square-foot home—on the Vandeventer Ranch south of Sunriver—that illicit a "Wow!" The Bakers are collectors who have decorated their one-of-a-kind home with an assortment of unique pieces of functional and decorative Western art. A white Crystal Farm bovine-fur chair invites lounging in the living room. Original goldtone prints of Native Americans, taken by famed photographer Edward S. Curtis, hang on the walls next to 100-year-old, pastel-hued mountain scenes by Portland painter W.S. Par-



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rott. One wing of the house is dedicated to Thomas Molesworth furniture, reproduced in rich sanguine leathers and dark chocolate-colored Douglas fir by Marc Taggart & Co. Sprinkled throughout the home are antique Pendleton blankets, cowboy boots in all sizes and colors, and exquisitely beaded Native American hand bags, dresses and leggings. All of these elements complete the impression that the home's inhabitants harbor a deep love of Oregon and the West.

"Some of my early ancestors came to the West during the Great Migration [of the 1830s and 1840s]," explains Kathryn. "Others

were early Oregon settlers, homesteading near Dufur. Although I was born on a cattle ranch in Nebraska, my family moved back to The Dalles when I was four.

"Curtis and I grew up six blocks apart from each other. Curtis' father built the first jet boats on the Deschutes River, and Curtis really grew up cradled in the bow of a boat on the river. Oregon is so much a part of who we are, and what we love, that we could never imagine ourselves living anywhere else now."

KINDLING A PASSION

Yet long before they settled in Central Oregon, Curtis' work for Merrill Lynch took the couple and their three sons all over the world. "When you live abroad you create this enormous passion around home," recalls Kathryn. "No matter where we lived,

whether it was Chicago, New York or Tokyo, our heart was always here in Oregon. We actually started planning this house while we were still living in Tokyo.”

The Bakers bought the three-acre property in 1994. Their families had come to Sunriver for vacations for more than 25 years, so they knew the area. On one of those visits Curtis, who was wandering Sunriver at 5 a.m. in search of a cup of coffee, saw an advertisement for Vandeventer Ranch. The couple had seriously considered buying a working ranch of their own in Central Oregon, but once they visited Vandeventer and saw the lot, they fell instantly in love with it.

“The Vandeventer Ranch offered us the perfect combination of



not being tied down with the work, and yet still be able to live in a place that is a ranch,” Kathryn says. “It’s also sort of like a village.”

Designing and building the house was a challenge, however. The design process alone took two years; construction required three more. From start to finish, Kathryn worked closely with architect Kent Duffy of SRG Partnership in Portland.

Much of what inspired the couple came from magazines and movies, because they were living in Tokyo at the start of the process. “Every week, I would go to this newsstand, browse through the new magazines, and if I saw something I loved, I’d buy the magazine” says Kathryn. “And when I saw a particular fireplace pattern in the movie *Wolf* with Jack Nicholson, I had my architect freeze-frame the scene with the fireplace and replicate that look.”



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AN ARTFUL HOME

Initially the Bakers toyed with the idea of building a rock-and-timber home of materials native to Oregon. It was only after they learned that rock was no longer quarried in The Dalles area that they considered a log home.

Because of their collections, they wanted a house that was visually clean. Everything had to be oversized and chunky to create a strong, quiet, neutral palette. Warned that log homes could be dark, heavy and lineal, with extensive crisscrossing timberwork and support in the ceilings, they opted to build curves wherever they could to soften the lines. This resulted in an eyebrow window at the front of the home, heavily rounded French doors in the master



bedroom, and large, winding roof arches in the living room.

“Lots of log homes these days are timber-framed with log siding,” says Kathryn. “What we particularly liked about the full-scribe style of building was that you can see the ends of the logs. We found them to be like works of art in themselves.”

The Bakers considered it important to use Oregon contractors and materials whenever they could. “We knew from the first that this house was going to be a long and difficult project,” says Kathryn, “and we didn’t want a company to build it. It was a house that a true craftsman and artist needed to build.” They found two: Bend general contractor Brad Davis, who had built a neighbor’s home, and log contractor Ed Adams of Handcrafted Log Homes in Sisters.

For the Bakers, overseeing such a project while living in Japan

and then Chicago was a slow and difficult undertaking. “And yet the beauty of the elongated building process was that we weren’t forced to make decisions,” admits Kathryn. “We could take our time to find the finer craftsmen and use them.”

One such craftsman—Joe Mross of Archive Designs in Eugene—was responsible for the home’s entire selection of exquisite iron and copper work, which lends an air of artfulness to the house. Arrow-embellished iron chandeliers in the living room reinforce the Cowboys-and-Indians theme, as does every fireplace screen, towel rack and even toilet-paper holder in the entire residence.

STEAM AND SERENITY

In one area, however, the Bakers strayed from the Western theme: They built an onsen, a Japanese hot spring. Kathryn talks fondly of spending time at an onsen in the mountains of Japan: “It was so beautiful, with big boulders and planted with flowers, that we decided to replicate it here, on a much smaller scale, of course,” she explains. “An onsen is a very quiet place, not like a hot tub with jets. We bought a huge cement utility box and a swimming-pool heater and put everything underground, so there is no noise from the pumps.”

Again, they used Oregon contractors for the task: Landscape architect David Vala of Portland created the setting; Ken Sherman of Bend fielded the rock from a huge outcropping he had saved for a purpose such as this.

Those five years of planning and building motivated the Baker family to return to Oregon to stay in 2003. These days, with their two older boys in college and their youngest son at school in Bend, Curtis and Kathryn divide their time between this home, a bungalow in The Dalles and an apartment in Portland. They also own 5,000 acres of timberland near Pendleton, an undeveloped ranch that has been rehabilitated into habitat for elk and other wildlife. Its restoration is one of the ways in which the Bakers feel they can give back to the land they love so much.

Kathryn also spearheaded this year’s Sagebrush Rendezvous auction for the High Desert Museum. Held this past August, the event netted \$250,000 for the museum and drew praise from all sides. “It was about making it fun, and integrating the personality and culture of the West back into the Bend community,” she says. “That is really important to me.”

Plus, Kathryn admits, it gave her an excuse to go out and hunt for collectibles. “I consider collecting [to be] a treasure hunt,” she says. “The value doesn’t really matter to me. I can do a collection of paintings, but will get an equal amount of joy from collecting these little copper give-away horses from the carnival.

“But as much as I love my collections, I’m not a clinger. I want so much to share, and have other people have this interest in the heart and history of Western art, that it’s not hard for me to pass collections on. Of course, this way, I don’t have to quit collecting!”



Building a Log House

Building a full-scribe log house, such as the Bakers’ home, is unlike any other type of construction; it offers a unique set of challenges. Everything must be meticulously preplanned—from getting the perfect logs, to creating special joints around door and window openings, to properly placing every single light switch.

Ed Adams of Handcrafted Log Homes describes the process.

“Once you cut a tree, you need to peel it and store it for two years so it’s dry enough,” explains Adams. “The 300 logs we used for the Baker home were actually horse-logged from up around Cultus Lake. I requested that no room be wider than 30 feet so I could use single logs that span the entire length of the home, greatly improving its overall strength and stability.”

Full-scribe log homes are pre-built in the contractor’s yard, where each log is custom-fit (“scribed”) to the next one, color-tagged and numbered. Then an electrician does a walk-through with the homeowner to determine the placement of every outlet and switch. The same procedure is followed for plumbing and gas lines. The log contractor then pre-drills the spaces for the lines from the top down.

Once prepared, the home is disassembled, loaded onto a truck, then reassembled at the home site. The logs are held together with huge rods of threaded steel, like giant screws 10 to 12 feet long and up to an inch in diameter. These “screws” are inserted through the logs in pre-drilled holes and secured with large washers and nuts at the top and bottom.

Another particular challenge of log homes is the settling that takes place during the first four years following construction. Settling is triggered by the sheer weight of the logs and the shrinkage of the wood. “We had to put slip joints over the windows, doors and other openings in the house to prevent them from being crushed by the settling logs,” says Brad Davis, the project’s general contractor.

“We are all very proud of the work we did on that unique house,” adds Davis. “It took a long time, but it was well worth it.”