A photograph of a half-log home with a pond and a gazebo. The home is a two-story structure with a dark green roof and light-colored siding. It features a prominent balcony with a wooden railing. The pond is in the foreground, reflecting the sky and the surrounding landscape. A gazebo with a dark green roof and wooden posts is situated on a grassy bank. The background shows a line of trees with some autumn foliage. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

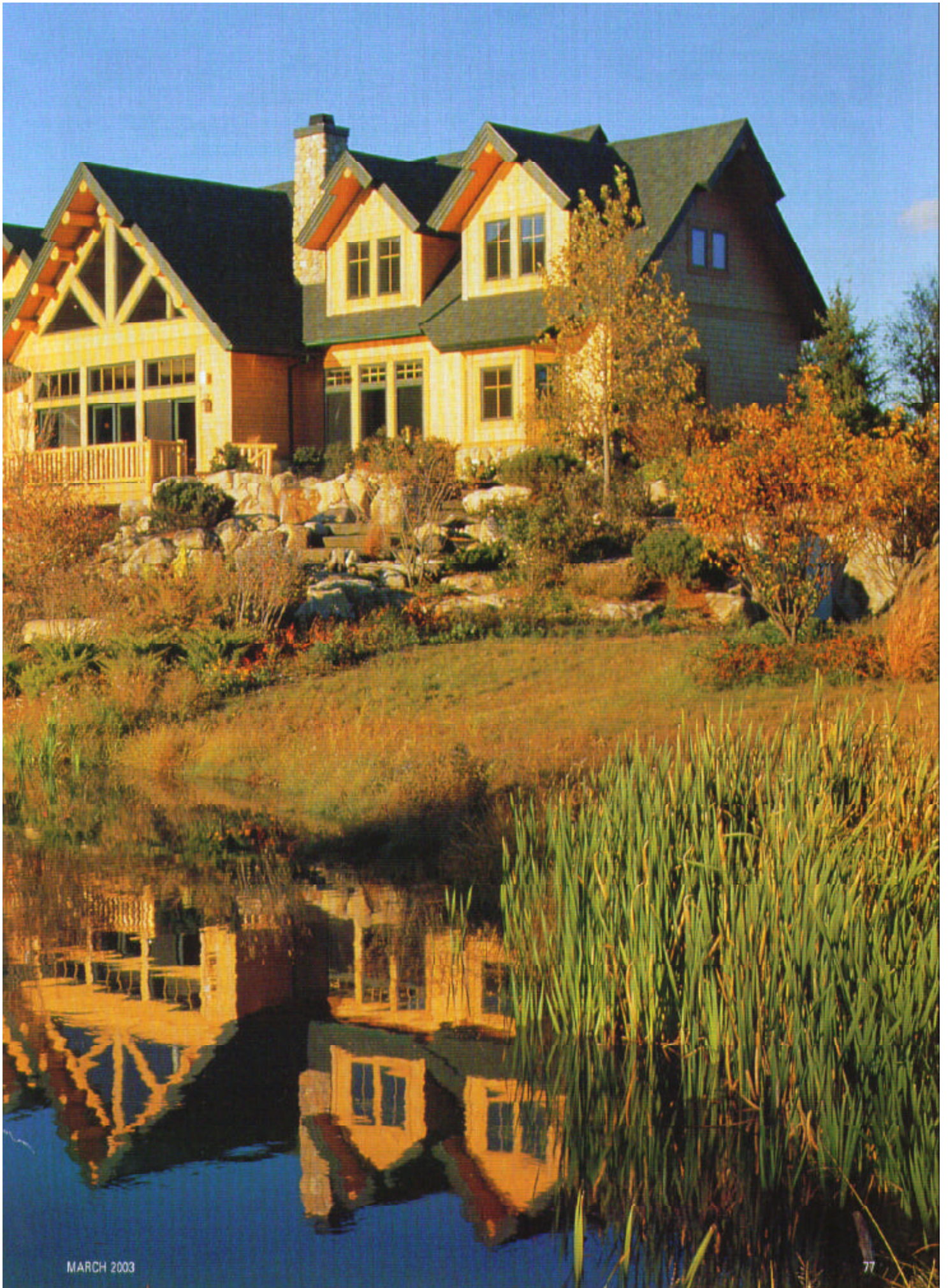
Landscaper Maureen Parker converted the original swampy area on the property to a pond, then landscaped it to complement the white cedar home. Dormers in the upper level and hand-scribed exterior trusses create a dramatic exterior.

State of the Art

A sophisticated half-log home graces its Indiana setting

When Wilbur and Sarah Bontrager bought 85 acres from a farmer in northern Indiana, Sarah admits that she was unable to imagine how it could ever become the setting for the home they intended to build. Located just 5 miles from the Michigan line, the property features a large sandy hill and a swampy area. But the couple assembled a team of talented collaborators to help them transform the site, and create and develop a finely crafted wood home that enhances the natural beauty of its surroundings.

Story by Teresa Wolff • Photos by Roger Wade • Styling by Debra Grahl





Maureen Parker, the owner of Common Ground Landscape in Boyne City, Michigan, and Drost Landscaping of Alanson, Michigan, tackled the task of sculpting the property. Instead of fighting with the existing water, they worked with it by digging a large pond and creating a stream, which runs down to the bridge and all around the house. They added more than 500 tons of rock and a variety of pine trees to the native deciduous species.

Having improved the setting, the Bontragers turned their attention to the home. They had previously owned a log home on a lake and wanted something as natural for their new place but with more sophistication. "Whenever we traveled to Michigan, we would tour through Town & Country Cedar Homes' showroom. We fell in love with their concept of a log home," Wilbur says. "We liked the

Water circulates from the pond around the house and on both sides of the white cedar bridge leading to the entrance. A combination of log and stone was used to create this dramatic art form.

way they combined the stick frame with half logs."

Half-log construction is a way of enhancing energy efficiency and minimizing settlement caused by logs' shrinkage. Essentially, logs are divided

lengthwise, then affixed to an insulated, conventional wood frame. Also known as super-insulated construction, this system is popular in—though by no means limited to—northern climates. It has the added distinction of allowing for a variety of interior and exterior wall applications, from a full-log look to interior drywall and, in the Bontragers' case, exterior shingles.

The Bontragers' home showcases white cedar in a combination of textures. It includes scribed trusses and flared posts in both the entry and gazebo, and heavy timber trims around the windows and doors. "The defining difference of

A tree-trunk post provides support for the hand-scribed trusses over the entryway. The waterfall is part of the stream, which begins at the pond and circulates around the residence. A twig love seat provides a comfortable spot to enjoy the serenity created by the moving water.





this home is the varying applications of white cedar and stone," says Town & Country's president, Steve Biggs, "This provides the lowest possible maintenance factor for this intensity of wood construction."

The 5,000-square-foot home also blends aesthetics and practicality. As this was to be their primary residence, the Bontragers wanted it to suit their lifestyle. Because they enjoyed company and entertaining, they especially favored an open floor plan, with outdoor areas flowing naturally from the interior. To achieve their goal, the home became a collaboration between Town & Country's design group, landscaping and lighting architects, and the interior designers, all working together with Wilbur and Sarah as the lead artists to create and develop this finely crafted natural wood home.

Early in the planning process, the Bontragers enlisted the Indesign team, headed by owner Tim Fisher. As a comprehensive design firm, Indesign was involved with lighting, space planning, surface materials, and kitchen, bath and audio-video design. "I wanted an informal kitchen as

Above: White cedar paneling, hand-scribed trusses, and stairway posts and railings in the entry preview the interior of this finely created wood home.

Opposite: Mammoth white cedar full-scribed trusses, posts and beams provide both structural support and dramatic artistic design in the great room. Sarah relates that combining leather with upholstered fabrics for the couches and lounge chairs makes them comfortable and visually soft.

The light green nubuck leather side chair was custom made to fit Wilbur's exact dimensions.

The coffee table is oversized with room for blanket storage.

we love to entertain," Sarah says. "Cheri Ford of Indesign and I worked together to plan the kitchen to include an area for younger family members and guests to have access to water and soft drinks, as well as a fairly tight work triangle. The bar area between the kitchen and dining room is perfect for family luncheon buffets."

An additional feature of the kitchen-dining area is the butler's pantry with adequate storage for small appliances and food, as well as a secondary prep area. A built-in hutch between the two areas allows for both display and storage of the family china.

Eric Bose of Penta Associates from Petoskey, Michigan, built all of the alderwood cabinets in the Bontragers' home. Sarah notes that he was very detail oriented and hand-carved the wood as was necessary to fit around the logs. The cabinets were painted a light yellow, glazed and distressed in a complex process, giving the home an Old-World look.

When planning the first-floor master suite, the







Stone from a local quarry was used in a variety of ways in and outside the home including the fireplace in the great room. Tibetan-style wool area rugs were custom made in India to fit the dimensions of various rooms. Sarah says the simple, tailored, champagne-colored drapes soften the wood and allow for privacy when needed without obstructing the view.



Bontegers decided to have the bedroom built smaller than the original plans specified to allow additional space for a larger walk-in closet with built-in furniture. The master bath is accessible from both the bedroom and closet.

The upper level provides for privacy for other family members. Its two bedrooms and adjacent baths are sepa-

rated by a glassed-in catwalk across the great room. An informal common sitting area on that level is a gathering place for family members. The space over the garage was finished as a playroom for younger guests. Skylights were added to increase the amount of natural light.

Two separate entertainment areas can be found on the



Sarah selected a sage tone for the walls and added dark taupe with a sage, gold and burgundy design in the dining room to complement the white cedar trusses and tongue-and-groove ceiling. Recessed and spot lighting in the ceiling can be programmed according to the desired ambience, whether the dining experience is formal or casual. The chandelier shown here is one of the home's many decorative wrought-iron lighting accessories. This one sports an oilcraft shade, while the fixture in the great room has a perforated metal shade.

furnished the home with custom-made leather, suede and upholstered furniture. Window treatments were simple and soften the log structure.

Though Everglade quartzite slate is the defining floor treatment in the common areas, carpet was installed in the bedrooms on both levels and in the theater room. Sarah selected tumbled marble for the showers and floors and granite for the counter tops in the baths.

When it came to lighting the home, Tim Fisher and Sara Blair helped the Bontragers develop a comprehensive lighting and audio-visual plan, taking into consideration the cabinetry elevations, use of space and placement of furnishings. The result was a combination of decorative, accent and ambient lighting in the form of chandeliers and sconces, monospots and cove lights.

Doug Buday of Sound Advice in Charlevoix, Michigan, installed the Lutron lighting system, which is controlled by a programmable panel. Each button on the panel can be set to illuminate various areas of the home to establish the desired mood. "An Elan System controls the entire sound system, including the home theater," Wilbur explains. "When either the phone or door bell rings, the stereo is muted. The front gate and camera are integrated into the system, giving the ability to switch to a certain TV channel and view whoever is awaiting admittance. We simply pick up any phone and press the designated key to open the gate."

The owners took as much care in planning the outdoor areas as they did the

lower level. Depending on their respective interests, family and guests can choose either the theater room or a recreation room with a pool table and an entertainment center complete with video games. A motorized curtain automatically lowers and darkens the theater when movies are shown.

Sarah worked closely with Sara Blair from Indesign to create a casual elegant atmosphere in the home. To warm and complement the wood and stone, she selected sage green paint for the walls and



Right: The center island was fashioned like a piece of old farm furniture, complete with turned legs. Custom-made ceramic tile creates the backsplash for the farm-style sink, made from the same costa scerolda granite as the countertops. All cabinets were handmade and painted and glazed in a complex process that contributes to a timeless Old-World beauty.

interiors. Major features include a gazebo with a stone fireplace and outdoor kitchen with sinks, undermounted cabinets, Viking grill and refrigerator. "Instead of just placing a conventional hot tub on the patio, the hot tub is carved into the stonework, likening it to a Japanese onsen," Steve notes.

Access to the outdoors was a prime concern. The slate flooring on the main level extends outside onto the patio and down to the gazebo, as well as from the lower level family room to the hot tub. "The floor looks like it just keeps going," Sarah says, giving a sense of uninterrupted flow between interior and exterior.

To meet the heating needs for both interior and exterior areas, the Bontragers installed two boilers. "One provides the heating needs of the home, including the radiant floor warming system on all interior levels," Wilbur says. "The other heats the hot tub and provides the melt system for all of the walks, porches, and decks."

Inside and out, the home is a worthy showplace. "What is truly spectacular is how the land, the landscaping, and the

home come together to become an absolutely magnificent art form," Steve says. "The home is pleasing to all of the senses from the beauty of the natural surroundings, to the touch of the stone, the sound of the running water, and the scent from the fireplaces and cedar-log structure."

The Bontragers agree. "The home is so well designed and built with all of the natural materials. The smell is so pleasing," Wilbur says. "It is extremely enjoyable and when we are home, we feel very relaxed." **LHI**

RESOURCES

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The slate flooring from the interior of the home extends onto the patio area surrounding the gazebo. This fireplace, fashioned from the same stone as found in the great room fireplace, expands the owners' outdoor entertaining options on cool evenings.

