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# starting over

Fire destroyed the first vacation home the Daratony family built near a Lake Michigan cove. Almost a decade later, they finally have the log retreat they always wanted.

BY PETER LINDBLAD



The catwalk that leads to the home's covered porch entrance (opposite) was constructed so the dunes on the Daratony's Lake Michigan property wouldn't be disturbed during construction. Darlyn designed the covered porch, with its large peaked roof, after seeing lodges out west on a family trip.

PHOTOS BY ROGER WADE  
STYLING BY DEBRA GRAHL



At night, special directional lighting shines up into the entryway ceiling to highlight the tongue & groove character of purlins that provide the roof extra support.



Facing east, the front entrance is warmed by the early morning sun. The Daratonys often begin their day sitting in rocking chairs on the porch, which extends 10 feet to 14 feet out from the home. "It's one of our favorite places to sit," Jim says.

At times, Jim and Darlyn Daratony's Lake Michigan vacation home seems more like a five-star beachside motel than a private family retreat. Turquoise waters and sandy beaches are just a short walk from the house which comfortably sleeps 20 to 30 people.

"Very rarely do we go up there by ourselves," Jim says. "Our kids are always bringing their friends along."

Once, an entire girls soccer team stayed at the home while playing in a tournament in nearby Traverse City, Michigan. "They spread out into every nook and cranny," jokes Darlyn, whose husband coaches their daughters, Jenny, Katie and Shantal.

"We enjoy having people up here," Jim says. "We feel blessed to have this place and we want to share it." There was a time, though, when the Daratonys didn't feel so fortunate.

## Disaster Strikes

About 10 years ago, the couple's first log retreat burned down two weeks before completion. Making matters worse, the fire spread next door to a house owned by Darlyn's sister and her husband, Chris and Bob Mayer. Ensuing court battles with the builder, who didn't have builder's risk insurance, cost the Daratonys money they could have used to rebuild.

"Our original dream was to have the home when our children were small so they'd have memories of summers at the cottage," Darlyn says. "By the time we rebuilt, our son J.J. was in college."

Bob and Chris were able to rebuild right away. The Daratonys, on the other hand, had to wait seven years for another opportunity. In 1999, they were finally able to try again. Construction took a little over a year, but by Christmas



To give the great room a spacious feel, Town & Country built a cathedral ceiling that left the Daratonys almost speechless. "When they had the ceiling up, we saw it and said, 'Wow,'" Jim says. "It's a lot taller and more open than our first home."



Lake Michigan can be seen through a 16-foot wide wall of glass in the great room. A set of 8-foot sliding doors between the log posts provides access to the home's expansive rear decks. Triangle windows on top highlight the home's intricate roof system and allow light to stream into the loft.

of 2000, the couple's log getaway was finished. It was worth the wait.

"It's one of my proudest accomplishments," says Town & Country Cedar Homes builder Doug Hall.

## A Little Piece Of Paradise

Featuring northern white cedar logs, the home sits on a half acre of prime lakefront property in Leland, a quaint little town in the northern part of lower Michigan. Jim and Darlyn frequently camped in the area when they were first married.

"We went up there to go camping about 12 times a year," Jim says, "and after a while, we decided to look for a small piece of property to build on." But it was Bob and Chris who found what the Daratonys were looking for.

"They went up there on a weekend excursion to look for land," Jim explains. "We were actually looking for something a little south of Leland, close to Ludington."

Bob and Chris called Jim and Darlyn all excited about two pieces of property right next to each other.

"It's in a little cove," Darlyn says. "It's like a tropical beach setting. There's aqua blue water, white sand beaches

and a wide low bluff."

When he and Darlyn saw the property, the first thing Jim noticed was the beautiful old white pines surrounding the land. Many were lost in the fire years later, but when they rebuilt on the same site, they planted more.

## Second Time Around

For the most part, the Daratonys' second vacation home mirrors the first. There are some differences, however. For one thing, it's bigger. To accommodate family and friends, the 4,700 square foot, lodge-style house has, among other things, a bunk room in the lower level.



The Cultured Stone fireplace (above left) is the great room's focal point. Carpeting flows throughout the main level and the 20' x 30' foot loft. Town & Country made all of the home's custom doors, including the one made to fit the arched doorway that opens from the master bedroom onto the loft (above right).

"We had six bunk beds built into the wall," Darlyn explains. "I told the builder from the get-go that it was important for the home to sleep as many as possible." There's another bedroom downstairs, opposite the bunk room.

On the main level is a boys' bedroom with two sets of log bunk beds. There's also a guest bedroom reserved for grandparents. If those areas are full, there's always the upstairs loft.

The logs are also different. The first home was built with full pine logs. For this home, the Daratonys chose northern white cedar from Town & Country Cedar Homes, going with the company's split log construction to eliminate shrinkage and movement.

"We wanted less maintenance," Jim says. And larger logs: The second home features logs 12" to 14" in diameter, "the largest northern white cedar we can access," says Arden Schlueter, design manager for Town & Country.

Another advantage of half-log construction: more windows. "After the fire, we realized that we wanted more of them," Darlyn says. "With the first house, the downward pressure of the full logs affected the size of the windows

we could use and their location [in the design]. Now that we have more windows, we have bigger views of the lake."

It's mostly the same floor plan, but the layout was reversed while siting the home to take advantage of the lake views, especially the sunset.

"We cocked it a little bit," Hall says. "One of the concerns originally was that it was staring right at Darlyn's sister's house. So we turned it a little to the north to open it up and get as much lake view as we could."

A neighbor, Realtor Gale Fox, helped site the house just right. "He had it all on a piece of paper — where the sun sets and rises, where it is at different times of the day," Jim says. "He had all the angles."

Another consideration: opening up the home's interior. The original plan called for two bedrooms and a loft on the second floor. The loft and the master bedroom remained; one bedroom was removed. "What's there now is a cathedral ceiling and the whole area just opened up," Darlyn says. The spacious feel was created by Town & Country's structural roof system.

"This one was more of a challenge

because we were opening up such a large span," Schlueter says. To carry heavier loads, Town & Country's post-and-beam support is reinforced with steel that runs from the basement footings to the bottom of the ridge beam that supports the loft truss.

The main level's open layout gives the loft a better vantage point. Now it overlooks the main floor kitchen, dining area and great room, with its Cultured Stone fireplace set against one wall. However, the 1,900 square foot finished basement, with its sizeable recreation room, big-screen television, kitchenette and two of the home's five baths, is the hub of activity.

"There's a coziness in that basement," Darlyn says. "It has a large seating arrangement that includes a couch and when we get a movie, everybody heads down there."

## The Great Outdoors

The Daratony family loves the great outdoors. Their vacation home helps them enjoy outdoor spaces with a 442 square foot deck facing the lake, a covered porch at the front entrance and a



Jim and Darlyn wanted views of the sunset over Lake Michigan from inside the home, so they angled the layout of the main level kitchen, family room and dining area according to a neighbor's calculations. Town & Country made the cedar table and benches.





cantilevered balcony off the second-floor master bedroom.

"One summer there was an awesome storm going across the water," Darlyn says. "We took the girls and got their sleeping bags and went up to the balcony to watch. The lake put on a show you could never reproduce."

One of the family's favorite places to sit is the covered front porch. Darlyn worked with Town & Country to create the design, which was inspired by lodges the family visited on vacations out west. It has a peaked roof and three steps about 15 feet wide. Though Jim and Town & Country tried to steer her away from it, everyone liked how it turned out.

"You walk up a catwalk and all of a sudden you're at this huge entrance," Darlyn says.

Going down the lakeside deck stairs, there's a log catwalk that leads to the beach. It was built so the dunes between the lake and the house wouldn't be disturbed. "I kind of wanted it to be like those in the Tarzan movies with the ropes, but that idea got shot down," Jim says with a laugh.

## Peaceful, Easy Feeling

For Jim, the home's most important characteristic is the serenity it offers. "I look forward to going up there to get rejuvenated with my life and my faith," he says. In time, the family is going to need the peace and quiet more than ever.

"The surprise is we have a new baby on the way, so we hope to be able to share the place with five kids," Jim says. And whoever else comes along for the ride. 🐾

See page 108 for the Daratony home floor plan and resources.



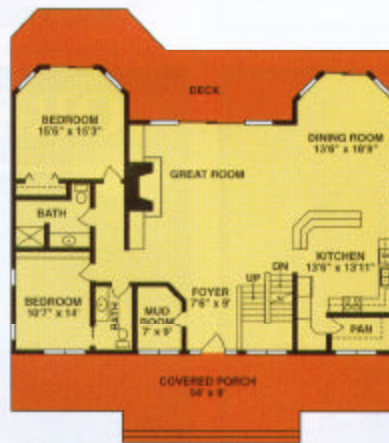
Darlyn designed the Cultured Stone enclave that frames the kitchen stove (top) based on one she saw in a magazine. The main level powder room (above) features an unusual granite sink carved by Dixie Cut Stone of Bridgeport, Michigan. A Town & Country employee fashioned the pedestal out of a hollowed out cedar stump and added the shelves on either side. Town & Country gave the sink, designed by Darlyn, to the couple as a gift.



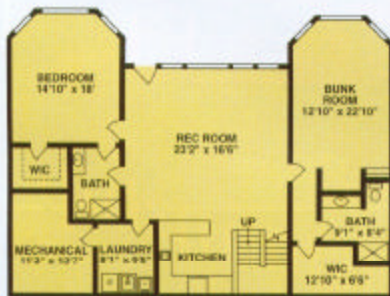
The 30-foot cedar log foot bridge runs from the back of the house to the Lake Michigan beach.

## The Daratony Residence Floor Plan

Courtesy Town & Country Cedar Homes



FIRST FLOOR



BASEMENT



SECOND FLOOR

## Bridging the Gap

In Michigan, the “critical dunes” of Lake Michigan are almost sacred. Some dunes receive the classification from the state to protect them from development. “With a critical dune, you can’t disturb its vegetation or alter its grade,” says Doug Hall, a builder with Town & Country Cedar Homes.

Hall worked on the Daratony vacation home. The building site was surrounded by critical dunes. “I’ve run into similar situations with wetlands,” Hall says. “This was my first time dealing with a critical dune. You can’t build on most areas that have that classification.”

To get materials to the site, Town & Country used a little creativity to get around a ravine.

“Part of the process involves getting a special permit from the DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) and building a temporary construction road for access,” says Arden Schlueter, design manager for Town & Country. “When it was done, we needed to return the area to its natural state.”

Town & Country constructed a custom 30-foot log pedestrian bridge that extends from the back of the house to a picnic area by the lake. “We have a lot of critical dune property sites in this area,” Schlueter says, “but we had never built a bridge like that.”

Town & Country also modified the deck off the back of the house so the trees and soils would not be disturbed. “The stair system is unique,” Hall says. “We had to bring it down and turn it. The main consideration was making it tie into the traffic pattern to the picnic area.”



Just as the deck (above) was about to be built, the Daratony's decided to support it with sturdy cedar posts. "It was a little more money than the usual 4x6s, but we like the look of true logs," Jim says. The walkout basement has a bunkroom and a family room with a big-screen television and kitchenette. Like the great room, the dining room at the far end of the house has sliding glass doors that open onto the 442 square foot rear deck (right).

#### SOURCES:

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