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Owner-Built Home**

# Happy Trails

*Horse-loving homeowners build a wood-filled cabin in the North Carolina mountains.*

STORY BY ROLAND SWEET | PHOTOS BY RICH FRUTCHEY

**Y**earning for a scenic spot to ride their horses, Lawrence and Esther Smith found themselves drawn to the mountains of western North Carolina. They bought a 1.5-acre wooded lot, located a two-hour drive from their Georgia home, and recognized at once that such a spot just naturally called for a log home.



“I wanted a place I could build myself, not so much to save money, although we did, but more for the experience and satisfaction,” says Lawrence, a builder and carpenter by trade. “I’d never built a log home before, so I went to some of the log-home shows to learn about them. I only got confused. Then I talked to Landmark Log Homes, and their way made sense.”

**OPPOSITE:** Homeowner Lawrence Smith built the living-room fireplace, combining manufactured and natural stone. He also fashioned the staircase spindles from wrought iron after failing to find the laurel twigs he’d hoped to use.

**ABOVE:** The hybrid home mixes log and timber elements. Lawrence designed this timber detail, to which the tie rod is attached on the front porch.





The Kentucky company makes hybrid homes, which are conventionally built with studs, insulation, drywall, hand-finished log siding and timber roof components. People who choose hybrid homes often do so to downplay the logs, preferring drywall for most of their interior. Not so the Smiths. Wood pervades their cabin.

Lawrence admits he would have preferred a home using “those big handcrafted logs from British Columbia,” but they were way beyond his budget. “I didn’t like the

idea of stacking logs, but the cabin had to look exactly like a log home, with flat logs and full dovetail corners,” he explains. “The eastern white pine wall logs are 1 inch thick by 12 inches tall. They came in long pieces that we cut to fit. Everything is tongue-and-groove, so they went together easily. It was actually fun to do, as well as affordable and manageable.”

Needing only a simple weekend place, Lawrence drew on his construction experience to come up with a compact yet effi-

**OPPOSITE:** Eastern white pine siding gives the home a handcrafted look, down to the dovetail corners. There’s even a chinking groove, which Lawrence didn’t fill in, preferring to show more wood instead.

**ABOVE:** A long sofa makes for a cozy fireplace setting and avoids the need for chairs to allow a free flow from the front door.

cient design. “I wanted the smallest house possible that would still be comfortable,” he says.

The resulting plan is a cozy 1,315 square feet, configured as a simple rect-

**RIGHT:** A stone-veneer breakfast bar divides the dining and kitchen space. Lawrence trimmed the door to the porch, as well as all the home's windows, with rough-sawn cypress. He also built the knotty alder cabinets and installed the honed granite countertops.

angle, with porches expanding living space into the tranquil outdoors. The 415-square-foot loft serves as the couple's master suite, which enjoys a sitting area outside the bedroom that overlooks the great room. "It's a weekend place, so it doesn't need a lot of storage space," Lawrence points out. "And if I built it for someone else, I'd put the master bedroom on the main level, especially for a retired couple, to save them going up and down stairs. But this works fine for us."

Midway through construction, Landmark invited Lawrence to represent the company as a builder-dealer. Believing in the company's way of building and realizing his cabin would serve as the ideal show model, he teamed up with fellow builder Daniel Sims to form Landmark Log Homes of Western North Carolina. Since finishing his own place, he and Sims have sold and built four Landmark homes.

Lawrence not only built the home himself, but also finished it, showcasing his carpentry skill and love of wood. He built the cabinets and doors from knotty alder, used 4-by-12-inch cedar treads for the stairs, installed Brazilian cherry flooring and trimmed the windows with rough-sawn cypress.

Not everything is wood, however. "I wanted to use twigs for the stair and loft railings, so I started looking around the mountains for mountain laurel, but I got frustrated and decided to make something myself," he recalls. He already had a metal shop, so he hand-forged some wrought





iron spindles. They turned out so well that he formed another business, The Iron Twig.

The kitchen countertops are honed granite, which he also made. Finally, there's the stonework, prominent in the breakfast bar and the fireplace.

Lawrence fashioned the fireplace hearth and mantel from limestone, then chose mostly manufactured stone for the chimney he built. He wanted to save money but notes, "Cultured stone has really improved over the years. Plus, I mixed in some

real stone, so it's virtually impossible to tell that it isn't all real."

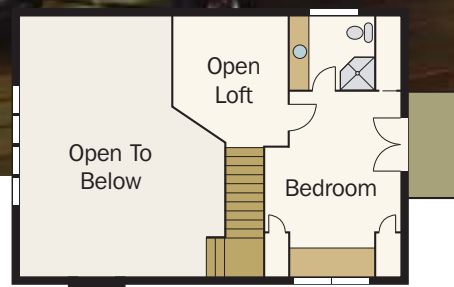
Besides the satisfaction of building the entire home himself, when he'd finished, Lawrence discovered an additional benefit: energy efficiency. "It's a tight house," he notes, pointing out its R-40 walls, R-60 ceiling and R-50 insulated concrete foundation.

The Smiths head for their cabin every weekend they're able, about once a month, and spend their time in the mountains rid-

**OPPOSITE:** The Smiths chose not to put a tub in the master bath, preferring a walk-in shower.

**ABOVE:** A barnwood bed in the master bedroom fits perfectly with the hand-finished wood walls and ceiling. A small closet provides adequate storage for a weekend home.

ing their horses and relaxing at the cabin, especially on their roomy back porch overlooking the surrounding woods. "I was fortunate to be able to build it myself," Lawrence says, "and by doing so, I was able to make sure there's plenty of wood." ▶



Upper Level



Main Level

**ABOVE:** A roomy porch is a favorite place for the Smiths to take full advantage of the home's wooded setting at the foot of a mountain.

**OPPOSITE:** Double doors open wide to make the upper-level balcony seem like part of the master bedroom. The room mixes log-sided walls, ceiling timbers and drywall to fully express its hybrid nature.

### *home details*

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 1,315

**LOG PROVIDER:** Landmark Log Homes

Drawing on his 30 years in home construction, Lawrence Smith designed a compact yet efficient home. The highlight of the plan is the 415-square-foot loft, which Lawrence and Esther use as their master suite. It features a small balcony and a comfy sitting space that overlooks the living room. The main level enjoys an open layout, but has room for a second bedroom behind the kitchen. Front and side porches extend the home's living space outdoors.

