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September 1999

On the cover: A fireplace blazes in a home by Maple Island Log Homes. Photo by Roger Wade, styled by Debra Grahl.

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Made to Order

Robert Wong doesn't go half-hearted into anything. But when it came time for Robert and his wife Sherri to build their "last home," he was somewhat hesitant.

"Robert wasn't sold on the idea of a log home at first," Sherri says. "I really felt that it would be a shame to build a conventional home on this lot."

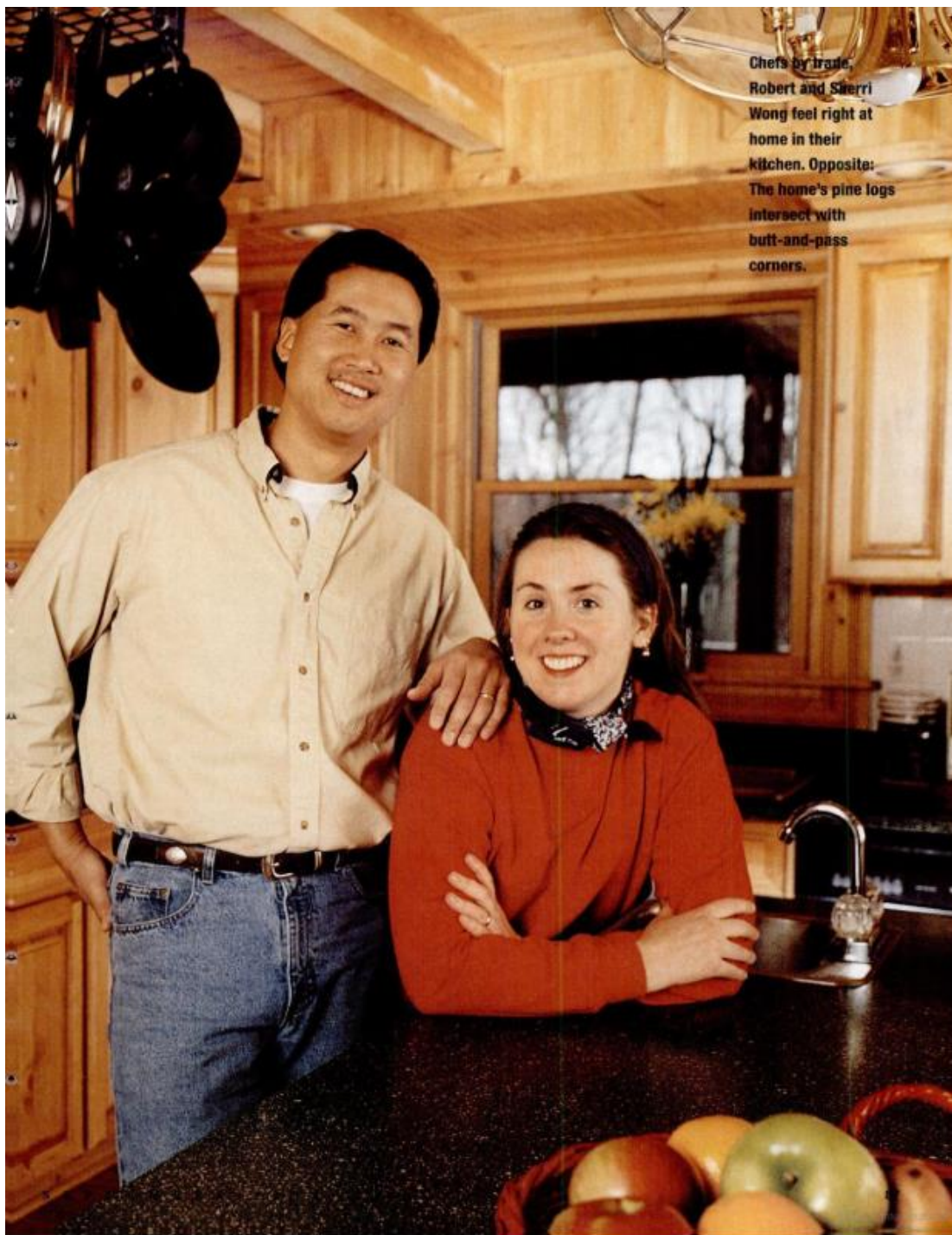
*Chef whips up
a custom home*



Appalachian Log Structures photos



By Peter Lobred



Chefs by trade, Robert and Sierrri Wong feel right at home in their kitchen. Opposite: The home's pine logs intersect with butt-and-pass corners.

The Wongs had found a piece of land high in the mountains outside of Lewisburg, West Virginia. Sherri and Robert hiked the property and found the perfect spot to build on; they were immediately drawn to the beautiful views and the serenity of such a high altitude.

Ultimately, Sherri—and the attributes of the previously uninhabited land—convinced Robert that a log home was the best option for the site. And, true to form, Robert soon embraced the notion, forming a lasting relationship with the home's producer and builder. Robert even contributed to land-clearing efforts at the couple's 3.8-acre site, removing 30 trees from the property in under a week. "I was one sore guy," he says.

Fortunately for Robert and Sherri, selecting a log home producer was a far less grueling process. After reviewing several companies' brochures and plansbooks, the Wongs decided on Appalachian Log Structures of Ripley, West Virginia. "They're in the state, and we liked that," Sherri says. "Plus, they have beautiful designs."

The Wongs selected the Greenbrier floorplan. Perhaps the decision was a subconscious one because, at the time, Robert was executive chef at the world-famous Greenbrier resort near White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. "That plan definitely had good karma," Robert says with a laugh.

Naturally, Robert had some ideas of his own for the home's exact layout. The couple approached Appalachian sales representative Vernon White with

some modifications to the Greenbrier design. The proposed changes included a second floor to the home's right wing, transforming the loft's two bedrooms into a single, larger bedroom, adding a den loft area to the master bedroom and increasing the width of the porch from 28 feet to 58 feet. The additions provided much-needed living space for Robert and Sherri, their sons Joe and Jeffrey and their dogs Henry, Barney and Lulu. (A log doghouse was later added under the Wongs' porch.) "He really knew exactly what he wanted," Vernon recalls of Robert's requested modifications.

The Wongs, in turn, say they got what they wanted because Vernon introduced them to Danny Harless, a Bolt, West Virginia, contractor whose company has built nearly 100 log homes since 1985. "Danny really made this happen for us," Robert says.

"The budget and the timeline were right on the money," Sherri adds. Particularly impressive was the ability of Danny's crew to meet the deadlines outlined by the Wongs. Harless Construction Inc. broke ground on Labor Day weekend in 1996 and finished on December 12. "Turn-key completion took less than 100 days," Robert says. "Everything went very smoothly."

About the only obstacle the Wongs encountered was appraising a log home to secure their loan. "The bank tried to compare it to a conventional home, and that made financing difficult," Robert says. "We had trouble trying to compare what we were planning to a similar home, and finally the bank had to find a log home in another state for comparison."

When it came time for construction, the Wongs say, Danny's crew was extremely meticulous about its job—both outside and inside the house. "The job site was always kept clean," Sherri says. "They never left a scrap of anything."

"Danny exceeded all expectations—every nook and cranny of the house's interior is utilized," Robert says of the 4,000-square-foot log home. Much of the home's wall space was devoted to custom-built shelves and closets that the Wongs requested for maximum storage space. "The inside of the house has a very attractive, old-fashioned look that reminds you of the 1800s, when everything was done by hand," Danny says. "We did a lot of extra shelves and included an old-fashioned, triple-bead molding."

Working on the home of a world-class chef—whose wife also has an impressive culinary background—the construction crew enjoyed a few extra perks and incentives during the building process. "Once a week, Robert brought us all free dinners from the Greenbrier," Danny says. "It was fantastic!"

Opposite: Shelves frame the dining room fireplace.
Below: The kitchen features commercial appliances and seating for guests who want to watch the Wongs work their culinary magic.





Below and right: The living room's wood-burning fireplace sits beneath the watchful eye of a mounted elk, shot in Wyoming by Sherri's father.




Sherri recalls feeling somewhat guilty that the crew worked such long, hard days without requesting so much as a warm meal during the cold weather months. "They brought a camper and got up so early in the mornings, and they lived off bologna sandwiches," she says. "Robert and I are both chefs by trade, and we wanted to give them hot meals."

For Danny, though, the true reward was not the gourmet meals but rather the fruits of his labors: Not only does he treasure the log home itself but also the relationships formed during the building process. "We all got along great, and that's a big part of it," Danny says. "You need to make sure everybody's happy."

By such a measuring stick, Danny's effort on the Wongs' log home was a success. Earlier this year, sparked in part by the love of his own log home, Robert Wong left his position at the Greenbrier to pursue his dream: franchising a series of log lodges

targeting trout fishermen and their families. With the help of Danny and Appalachian Log Structures, Robert is expanding his company's first venture—the Elk River Trout Ranch in Monterville, West Virginia—into a 10-cabin resort featuring a 10,680-square-foot lodge with a first-class dining area.

Back at the Wongs' log home, no room is used more than the kitchen. "By design, it's our favorite room," Sherri says. With so much time spent in the kitchen, whether at home or at work, one might wonder how the Wongs separate business and pleasure. According to Robert, their log home has an instant way of solving that problem. "This house really fits our lifestyle," Robert says. "I spend a lot of time on the road, and it makes coming home very comfortable—you really know you're home."

For all of Robert's travels and professional passions, clearly the family's log home is where his whole heart is. 

NOTEBOOK

Log package price: \$69,500 (complete package)

Square footage: 4,000

Log producer: Appalachian Log Structures

General contractor and masonry: Harless Construction Inc.

Cabinetry: Kraftmaid

Doors: Therma-Tru Corp.

Gas range: Vulcan-Hart Co.

Kitchen light fixtures: Minka Lighting

Refrigerator: Frigidaire Home Products

Roofing: Owens Corning

Stain: Continental Products Co.

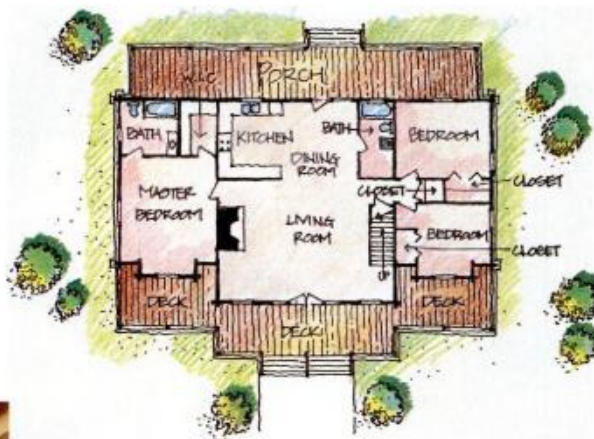
Windows: Andersen Windows

For contact information, see Resources.

Below: The Wongs' changes to the Greenbrier floorplan expanded the home's bedrooms.



Second Floorplan

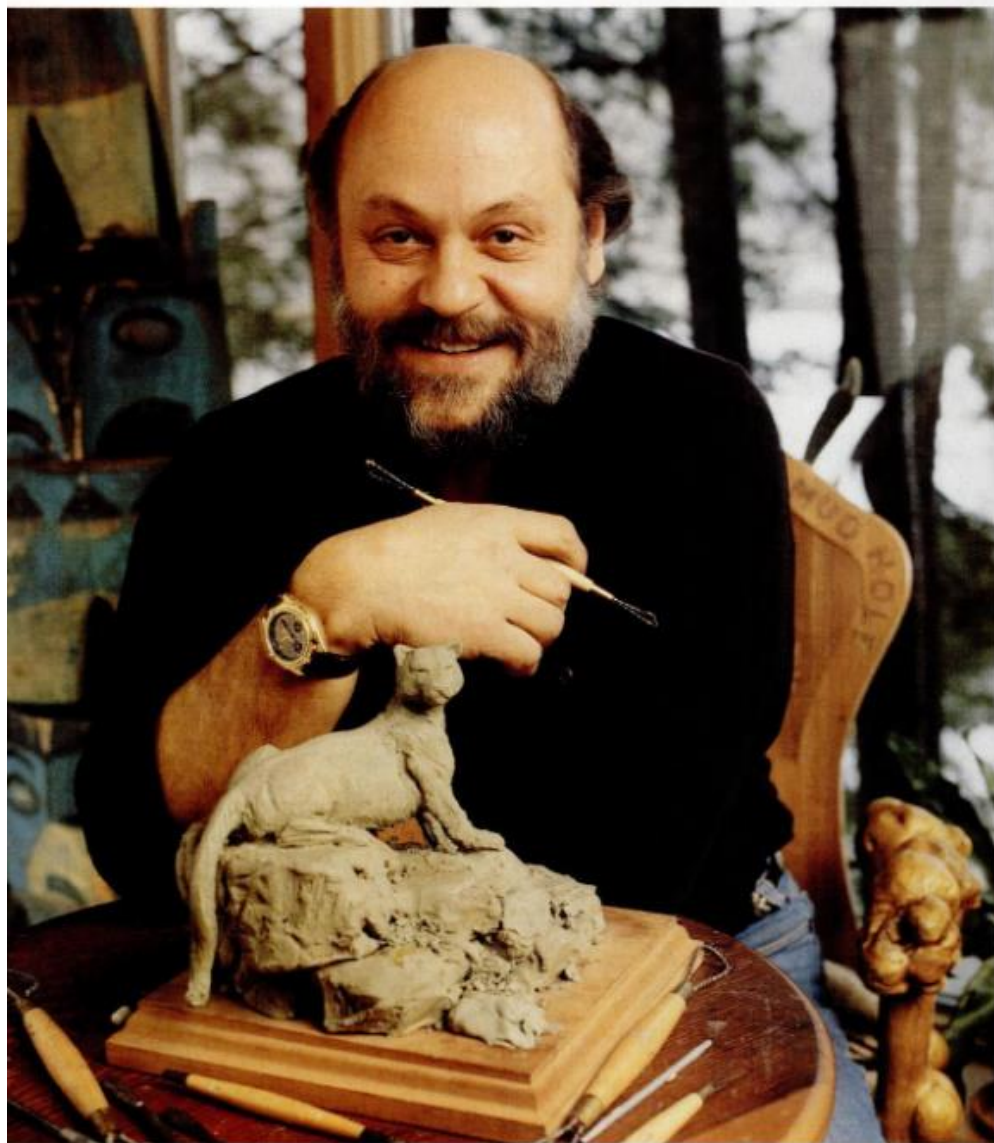


First Floorplan

"This house really fits our lifestyle. It makes coming home very comfortable."

— Robert Wong, home owner

Story by Linda Vaccariello ■ Photography by Joel Zarska



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DESIRE TO SETTLE.



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