

Landlords' LAIR



WHEN A BUSINESS DECISION HINGED ON THE LOVE OF LOGS, THE RESULT WAS SPECTACULAR.

Self-made success stories usually share certain traits, most prominently vision and passion. In a crowded business world full of hard-working people, carving a special niche takes extraordinary amounts of those qualities. No one knows that better than the Cox brothers of North Carolina.

Ron, Gary, and Brad began with a landscaping business, but their considerable energies have also branched out to rental properties. What has set them apart from the competition has been their deep-seated interest in each venture, yet their efforts are tempered with caution and attention to detail as they find their own special places.

All of the Cox rental properties reflect an appreciation for gracious style. It comes as no surprise, then, that when their real estate holdings were expanding from beachfront property to the beautiful Smoky Mountain range, it took nearly 2½ years of careful research to make it happen. Brad explains, "Our plan was to build

high-end housing to be used as rental property, but with the expectation of being able to use it ourselves when it wasn't rented. So we approached the initial project with a different viewpoint from the usual landlord interest of just a fiscal investment."

They began by locating the ideal property, land in the Maggie Valley area just outside the Smoky Mountain National Park. In fact, to be sure that it was exactly right, Brad literally climbed a tree to ensure the view from the house would be every bit as spectacular as he hoped. Even though the 40-degree pitch of the lot would mean special challenges during construction, there was never any question about whether he had found just the right spot.

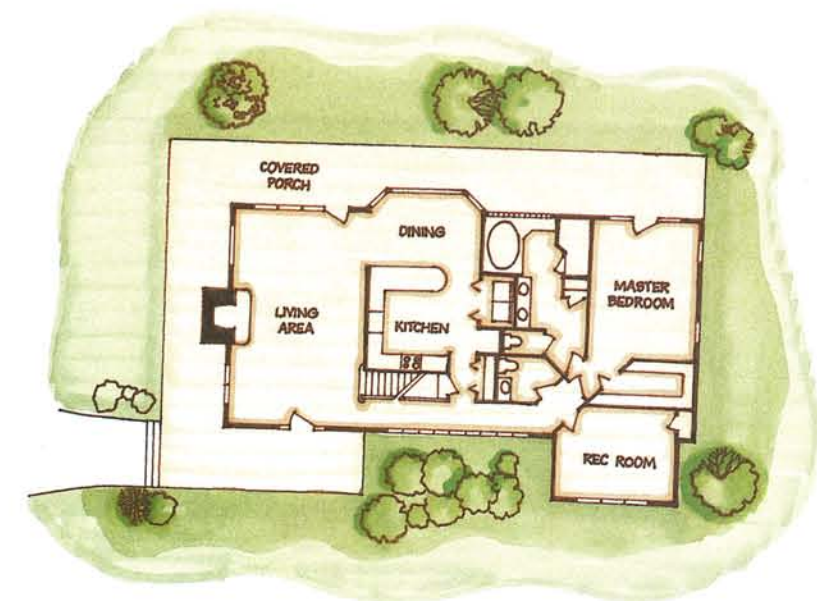
Equal care was expended in planning for the house. "Logs seemed so fitting for the mountains," Brad explains. "It really seemed the only way to go."

While gathering ideas from log home magazines, the

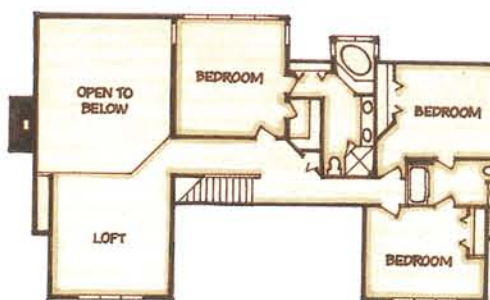
BY JOYCE STANDRIDGE
PHOTOS BY PAUL JEREMIAS



The soaring fireplace featuring local stone can be enjoyed as much from the loft as the great room thanks to the comfortable furniture on both levels. OPPOSITE: Appreciation for ancestral Appalachian log homes ensured that the Cox home would look long-established. The pine was stained to blend harmoniously with the surroundings.



LEFT: Everyone fights to sit on the side of the table with the view off the deck. But end up on the other side and you still have a lovely kitchen and great room as an outstanding consolation prize. BELOW: Custom hickory cabinets and a boxwood-beam ceiling add an old-time feeling to the modern appliances and countertop in the kitchen.



Cox brothers also began looking for the right building contractor. Although most log home owners begin by locating a log producer, experience with their other projects had convinced the Coxes that the right general contractor could lead them to the right log home company.

Driving around the area and watching various construction projects under way, Brad came across Scott Campbell and his crew. Although they immediately hit it off personally, the professional relationship took longer. Quite a bit longer.

"For 2½ years, we would look up and there

would be Brad, walking through whatever project we happened to be on. He would carefully examine every facet of the job, being sure that we were doing a quality job on every phase," says Scott. "No one could say he rushed into this!"

"We talked to a lot of builders during that period, actually," adds Brad. "Along with the other research we were doing, we had a hefty bill before we ever broke ground. But you need to understand that it wasn't just a business decision. We put a lot of love into this project. We designed it to enjoy it and live in it while also sharing our dream with other people who wanted to have the log home

experience, even if just for a weekend or a vacation."

The care paid off, Brad feels, when they decided on Campbell Construction. "Scott had experience building with log, particularly the dovetail ends that seemed so appropriate to this area," he says.

"We began by contacting Dan Connors at Top Notch Log Homes," says Scott. "Brad brought great ideas to the table, but also a budget. Believe it or not, even a large, high-end home may have limits. In this case, the family wanted a luxury home but one that made financial sense in terms of income potential."

White and yellow pine logs from a five-state

area were machined to specific dimensions approximately 6 inches by 11 inches. Then the logs were hand-hewn for character and appeal.

"I watched the guy hew the logs," enthuses Brad. "He would stand over the logs and take three passes up each side, taking off about lateral three inches with each hit. I could tell he was really experienced because not only was the job he did really excellent, but his right arm is about three times larger than his left."

"The only way houses like this get built right is to use local craftsmen," adds Scott. "What you see in these houses takes everybody involved having a vision for it and a love



LEFT: A stone fireplace and a balcony with a view of the mountains helps visitors find relaxation in the bedroom.

BELOW: Granite countertops in the baths and kitchen are a beautiful contrast to the plentiful wood. Common sense dictated the 12-inch tiles on the bathroom floor that lead to the whirlpool with a view.



for doing the work."

Although there were concessions to a budget, it was a generous budget that ensured quality throughout, particularly in the use of wood. Hickory, boxwood, and mountain laurel also found their way into the interior of the home in custom floors, ceilings, cabinetry, trim, and doors.

"Brad had seen a mesquite-lumber front door he especially liked," Scott says. "To reproduce it exactly as it was would have cost \$12,000. However, by allowing me to use local craftspeople and wood species, we built the door for \$3,400—and it's every bit as beautiful."

The exterior of the house was stained to appear weathered, as though it has been in place for many years. "Blending in with the mountains was important to the Coxes," Scott notes. "We also used the old-style half-round gutters and a 50-year-shingle composite roof with a dark color to complement the surroundings. Local stone for the three fireplaces and the retaining wall in the driveway and parking area also shows a real appreciation for the area."

Building a 5,300-square-foot two-story home on a nearly vertical lot offered plenty of challenges for Scott's company, but they took it in stride. "That's what you run into if you're

going to build in these mountains," he shrugs.

"It was fascinating to watch," Brad adds, and he should know because he drove up from the Charlotte area at least once a week to observe during the five-month construction period.

The basement walls are concrete columns and poured concrete hugging tightly to the mountainside. Beautiful wrap-around decks run from the front of the house to the back to take advantage of a 180-degree, breathtaking view across the valley with its country club below and sunsets in the distance. But it's not necessary to leave the house to enjoy

Mother Nature's bounty. There is beauty in every direction and the large custom windows ensure that residents never miss out.

Inside, the home is furnished with hand-selected items gathered primarily from local sources in North Carolina. "If it was going to be used only by family members, we might have personalized the color schemes a bit more," Brad explains. "But even though this is being rented at times, we still chose stronger colors than the usual bland rental unit. We wanted to make a statement that we put a lot of caring into this house."

The extra efforts paid off. "We have a sign-in guest book that we use at the house to get

feedback," Brad continues. "All of the comments have been very positive—many are downright enthusiastic and it's clear that there are a lot of people who share our love of the warmth of logs, even if they don't own their own log home."

The Cox brothers are so enamored, in fact, that they are about to build a second log home on an adjacent property. "It will have its own features and unique character, but there was never any doubt that we had a hit with the first log home. So the new one Scott is going to build for us will mirror the dovetail corners and the weathered stain and will look as appropriate as the first one."

"I'm looking forward to it," adds Scott. "We brought the first house in under budget and on time—and there was not one cross word between us. Having a vision and knowing what you really want is a big help to a builder. Being flexible if there are structural issues is also important. But when you're done and you have a really beautiful work of art, it's the best feeling there is."

LOG PRODUCER: Top Notch Log Homes, Waynesville, North Carolina; **BUILDER:** Campbell Construction Co., Inc., Clyde, North Carolina; **RENTAL INFORMATION:** Smoky Mountain Retreat at Eagles Nest, Maple Leaf Lodge, (800) 769-1177.