

FLOOR PLANS FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES

LOG HOME LIVING[®]

**3 Owners
Share
Stories**

*How Their
Dreams
Came True*





Big-Sky Re-Do

A Florida family transforms a 20-year-old log B&B into their new Montana vacation home.

STORY BY DEBRA GRAHL | PHOTOS BY ROGER WADE | STYLING BY DEBRA GRAHL



Set on 300 acres beside Montana's Clearwater River, the spacious Emily A was built of hand-peeled and fitted larch logs in the 1990s. The new owners especially enjoy the rear deck (inset) overlooking their pond and the Mission Mountain Wilderness.



Enchanted by the pristine beauty and remoteness of western Montana's Swan Valley, Florida residents Bill and Patricia Cruz ended up purchasing land there that Bill's brother had considered buying but passed on. "We intended to build a home on the property," Patricia says. "While we knew that winter shortened the building season in Montana, we didn't fully realize the length of time it would require to build a home from the design stage through the entire construction process. We were eager to spend time in Montana, so our Realtor, Gary Kauffman, assisted us with buying the nearby Emily A property."

LEFT: Patricia changed out the flooring, cabinetry and appliances in the kitchen. The design for the alder cabinets, for example, was inspired by her bedroom furniture.

BELOW: Guests at the Emily A were served breakfast in this dining nook off a small kitchen, which the Cruzes substantially enlarged and upgraded.





ABOVE & LEFT: A hickory bed adds a rustic touch to a daughter's room, originally used by guests. It features a roomy window seat with a view.

RIGHT: The spacious loft, with pool table, is a favorite hangout for kids.

The 300 acres of scenic meadows, forests and wetlands take their name from a log bed-and-breakfast built there in the early 1990s and named after the previous owner's grandmother. Intending to use it merely as a place to stay while they built their new home, the family fell completely in love with the Emily A and decided to move in instead of building a home.

The 10,000-square-foot handcrafted log home, built by Lloyd Hahn of Mountain View

Log Homes, is made of larch logs, hand-peeled and chinked. It comprises three levels, with a total of eight bedrooms and 5½ baths. The lower level was designed as a family suite for B&B guests, and features two bedrooms, a full bathroom, a family room and full kitchen.

After acquiring the property, Bill and Patricia undertook an expeditious remodel. "The house was beautiful to start with, but everyone likes to add his or her own personal touch," she says.





"I really love to cook and entertain. For us, the kitchen is the nucleus of the home. So it was important to make the kitchen a really special place where the family gathers."

This was the most substantial change. The original kitchen was in the same vicinity as the new one, adjacent to the dining area where breakfast was served to guests. Swinging doors between the rooms belied the busy goings-on in the kitchen. "We also updated all of the bathrooms," Patricia relates, "as well as the kitchen in the family suite downstairs, but not much else."

Brand new furnishings and accessories for the Cruz family home was another in making the Emily A their very own.

"Patricia and I were there for much of the remodel, but we did the kitchens last, and one at a time, so that we wouldn't be without a place to cook," Bill recalls.

Brad Reedstrom and Andy Fisher of Bigfork Builders were the Cruz's general contractors on the project. "It is always a challenge remodeling an existing log home, especially an older house that has gone through the process of shifting and settling," Reedstrom notes. "One of the first things necessary to accomplish was resetting the shell to a more level, proper state before even beginning the interior changes."

Most of the leveling was confined to

the kitchen wing, but there were areas in the great room that also needed shoring up. "We were able to utilize some of the original installed screw jacks to level the house," says Reedstrom, "but many of these had already been extended to their limit, so we had to add wedges and shims."

Once the leveling was completed, the remodel was fairly straightforward, consisting primarily of removing existing finishes and replacing them with updated materials. Missoula-based Strensrud Cabinet Company crafted the custom cabinetry for both kitchens. "Glen Strensrud, as well as Brad and Andy, did a fantastic job," Bill says. "They are truly talented craftsmen



and artists, a real tribute to the level of quality that can be found in Montana."

What came next, and lasted much longer, were changes to the landscape surrounding the home. A pond had been created during the Emily A's initial construction by damming a section of the Clearwater River running through the property. The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks approached the Cruzes, hoping to remove the dam so fish could migrate upstream again. Bill and Patricia took advantage of the opportunity to create a beautiful, natural water feature near their house, permitting the fish migration to occur while adding to the ambiance of the home's surroundings.

ABOVE: A hand-painted hickory bed and comfortable leather chairs enhance the comfort of the master bedroom.

OPPOSITE: A freestanding cast-iron tub enjoys a tranquil view in the master bath.

The Cruz family visits their Swan Valley home as often as they can. "We spend our entire summer in Montana," says Patricia, "heading out as soon as the kids finish school, then migrating back to Miami about two days before the fall semester."

They enjoy visiting the Emily A in winter as well. "We love Montana's people, the natural beauty and the peaceful way of life," Patricia explains. "Miami has beauti-

ful weather, great beaches, and most of our family and friends live there. The reality is, we love both places, consider each our home, and are blessed to have them."

As positive an experience as buying an existing log home and tackling a remodeling project was, the Cruzes started a new chapter in their lives after Bill learned that property had come on the market near where his brother ultimately bought land and built his home. "I felt completely content with the home we had made at the Emily A," Patricia says, "and I didn't want to invest a lot of time and energy pursuing a different direction for our family. But to Bill, being nearer to his brother was im-



home details

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 10,000

ORIGINAL LOG PROVIDER: Mountain View Log Homes

REMODELING CONTRACTOR: Bigfork Builders

Because the Emily A was designed as a bed-and-breakfast, it features ample sleeping space for guests when the Cruzes are in residence.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE RESOURCES ON PAGE 56.

portant, as our entire family is very close.”

The Cruzes bought the land and contracted Bigfork Builders to build their new home. Excited at the prospect of designing and building it, they agree the change is bittersweet. “Here we are,” Bill says, “after all these years, doing what we originally planned to do. We are living at the Emily A while building our new house. She has served us well and for much longer than we had first anticipated.”

“I can only hope,” Patricia adds, “that whoever purchases the Emily A from us will love, appreciate and enjoy her every bit as much as we have.”

LEFT & BELOW: Patricia bought new great room furniture, starting with a double-sided tufted-leather sofa to create two distinct seating areas, one facing mountains, the other the fireplace. She did buy the former owner’s piano.

