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# Montana *Lights*

MIAMI IS A WORLD AWAY FROM THE SPLENDOR OF BIG SKY COUNTRY, AND THESE FLORIDA RESIDENTS COULDN'T BE HAPPIER—ESPECIALLY IN A RENOVATED GETAWAY HOMESTEAD.

STORY BY Michele C. Hollow • PHOTOGRAPHY BY Heidi Long

For Michael Vidro, it was love at first sight. It took a bit more convincing for his wife, Anne. After all, the 1890s Montana cabin was at the opposite end of the country from their lives in Miami, Florida. The rumors of a bear roaming the homestead didn't help the situation; Anne was concerned about the safety of their three children.

Those fears were abated after a trip to the property, with its breathtaking views of the Swan Mountain Range. The 1,800-square-foot cabin and its 53

With Kalispell, Montana, nearby, the Vidros benefit from both the allure of a small Western town and the pleasures of rural living, surrounded by the Swan Mountain Range.

Thanks to the weathered look of the stones, the home's space-saving corner fireplace looks as though it has been around as long as the house itself.

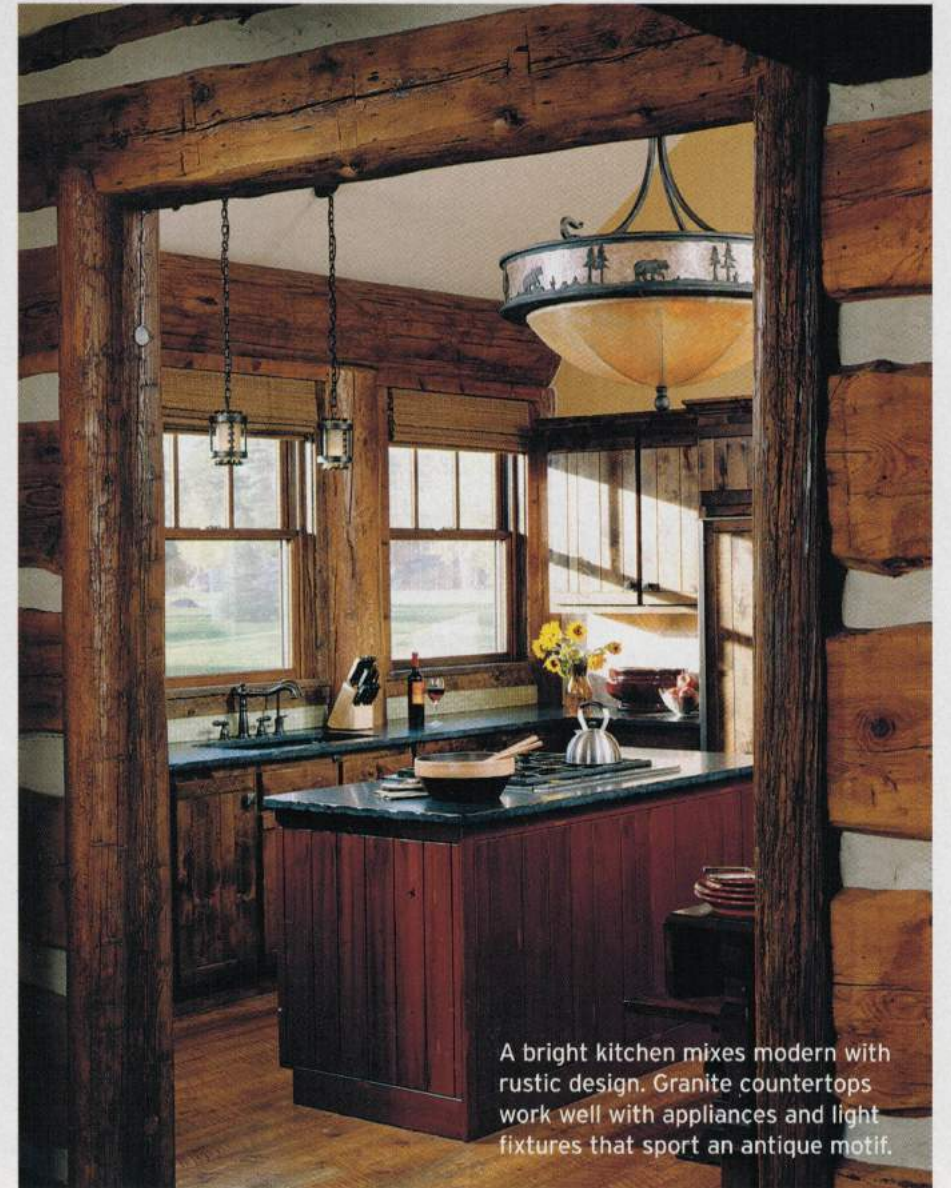


**ABOVE:** Lodgepole pine frames the narrow staircase that leads to an office, master bedroom and bathroom. The original movie poster from the film "It Happened Out West" graces the stairway, adding to the rustic appeal of the home.

acres could have been plucked from an old cowboy Western. These factors, along with abundant opportunities for skiing, hiking and fishing, attracted the Vidro family to the property and the town of Kalispell, Montana.

"Visiting the home did the trick," says Michael, who always fantasized about living out west in a log home. "Once I showed it to my wife, she fell in love with the place. We're happy with our lives in Miami, but we're outdoors people and enjoy the quiet of Montana. Kalispell is the largest city in northwest Montana, so we get the benefits of a rural setting with the amenities of an urban area just a few miles away."

The area was a major draw, and the getaway cabin and property sealed the deal. Upon further inspection of the cabin, Anne, like Michael, saw the homestead's charm and many possibilities despite years of neglect and water damage throughout the first floor. Fortunately, the entire shell of the cabin was salvaged.



A bright kitchen mixes modern with rustic design. Granite countertops work well with appliances and light fixtures that sport an antique motif.

## MODERN RUSTIC

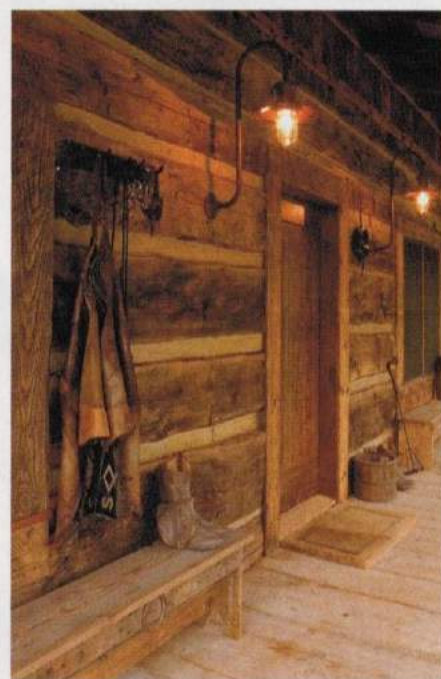
**J**ust because a home is classically rustic doesn't mean you have to adopt a cowboy motif for your home's interior decor. Indeed, from the outside of the Vidro home, it's tough to find hints of modernity. But take a peek inside, and you'll quickly see contemporary touches mixing wonderfully with the warmth of rustic design. "It's a melding of two different styles," says Hunter Dominick, Allied ASID member, of the interior design firm Hunter & Company. "The Vidro family loves Western style. However, Anne has more of a contemporary taste."

In the living room, a fashionable area rug complements the rustic decor. Contemporary light fixtures throughout most of the house also blend in with the Western design. But it's the kitchen decor that provides the most marked merging of the two styles. Here, function rules. The granite countertops and modern appliances make preparing and cooking meals a delight. Everything is within reach, and, while the larger appliances are new, they borrow their design from the past, thanks to paneling that lends a time-honored look.

—M.C.H.

The original wraparound porch was in fairly good shape, and parts of it were restored to add to the cabin's classic charm.

**BELOW:** Contemporary fixtures with an old-time feel illuminate the porch at night, providing plenty of light for long evenings of spirited conversation.



"We all agreed that we should keep the exterior of the home intact and totally upgrade the interior," says Michael.

### Reclaiming the Past

"The cabin only had six logs stacked from floor to ceiling on the first floor, but those six logs are huge," says Brad Reedstrom, vice president of Bigfork Builders, a leading general contractor in Montana. "Many new log homes have walls composed of 15 to 20 stacked logs. This home used old-growth fir and larch trees. Even the dovetail corners are between 10 and 12 inches in diameter. The entire house is made from the type of old-growth timber that you just don't see anymore."

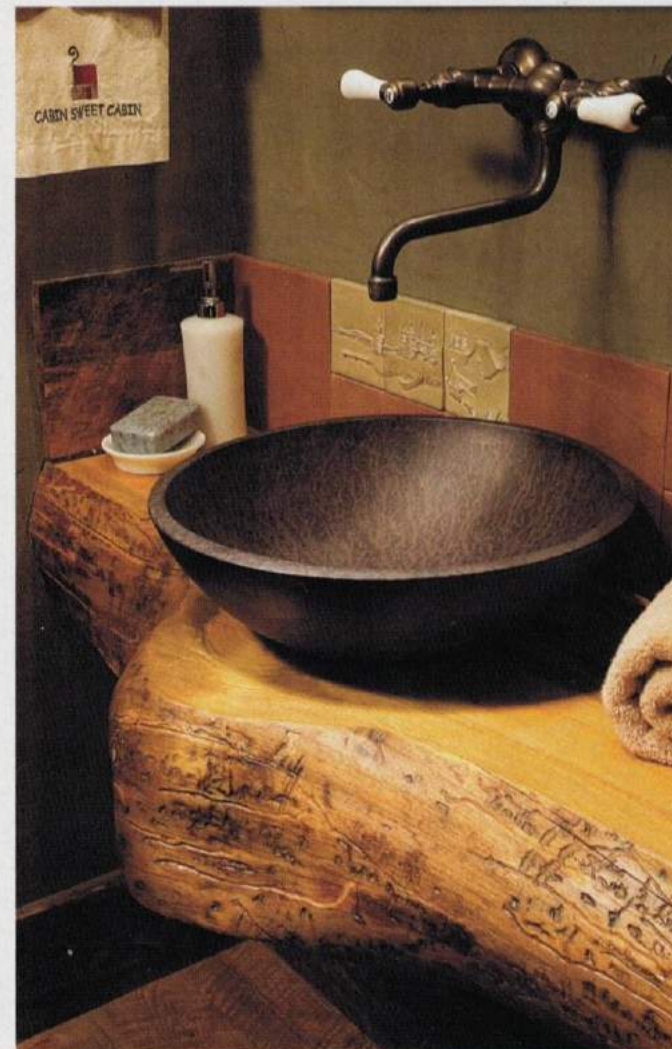
Additional wood came from salvaged

barns in the northwestern part of the state. "We try to use lots of reclaimed materials whenever we can," says Brad. "In this area, it's not hard to find. We drive by an old barn or building, which ranchers see as an eyesore. The timber we used around the new windows and doors in the Vidro home is reclaimed."

Even the floors were recycled. The builders found wood from a nearby barn and stained it to give it an old-fashioned rustic look. "The floorboards are incredibly durable, and they look better with age," says Brad.

### Interior Changes

Although the Vidros agreed to keep the look and shape of the cabin's exterior, the



**ABOVE:** Modern meets Old West in the powder room, thanks to the leather backsplash, canoe-themed tiles and copper bowl sink. Reclaimed wood, stained and polished, frames the sink and serves as a reminder that the best of the past often serves us well in the present.

**TOP RIGHT:** Local landscapers created a subtle flora sanctuary that complements the home's simplicity and the gorgeous mountain setting.

**RIGHT:** Bunk beds make the most of limited space in the children's bedrooms.

space inside just didn't work for Michael and Anne. Their intent was to use the home as a family getaway and invite relatives and close friends to vacation here.

A staircase, close to the home's entryway, took up too much square footage. It was rebuilt and relocated, opening up and making better use of the space. The Vidros also downsized—by half—a first-floor bathroom and hallway. The payoff? New rooms. Now, instead of a living room and one bedroom and bath, the reworked space houses a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms and two bathrooms. Upstairs is an office, master bedroom, bathroom and plenty of storage space.



Sitting on the edge of Bear Creek, the cabin boasts newly planted trees and low-maintenance landscaping.



Michael and Anne also thought the home didn't take advantage of natural light and, perhaps most important, the gorgeous views of the Swan Mountain Range. The solution: replace most of the doors and windows throughout the home. But like most renovations, the couple had to be creative and strategic about window and door choices. For example, the windows above the newly installed kitchen counter were widened considerably, according to Rich Graves, senior design partner at Kibo Group Architecture PC. The company also swapped in a glass door that leads to a deck.

### Lasting Memories

One thing the Vidros wanted above all else was the quintessential log-home centerpiece: a massive hearth. The couple's building team had to start from scratch on a fireplace because the old home didn't have one. Bigfork Builders used locally mined stones—dotted with ancient lichen—to craft a beauty. The markings give the fireplace a timeless look, especially with reclaimed local timber gracing the mantel.

"This house was such a treat to work on," adds Rich. "It's filled with history, thanks to the recycled materials we used."

And now, as the seasons and visits roll on, the old place will be filled with memories. ■

## HOME DETAILS

- **Square footage:** 1,800
- **Designer:** Rich Graves, Kibo Group Architecture PC
- **General contractor:** Bigfork Builders

For more information see Resources on page 166.

