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What Lies Beneath

story by
Stacy Durr Albert
photography courtesy of
Peak Photography, Big Sky

The beauty of a Montana log home is revealed after a major renovation.

It's often said that first impressions are everything, but maybe Franz Kafka knew better. The famous writer firmly believed that first impressions are "always unreliable." The owners of this majestic log home would probably agree, for when they first toured the house on a 10-minute walk-through, they left with an impression that was far from favorable.

"I was just appalled at what I saw," recalls homeowner Kelli. "The logs hadn't ever been maintained, the house felt dark and heavy and it was filled with red, yellow and peach tones that gave it a dated, almost tacky look. It was definitely not our taste."

In spite of this initial impression, Kelli and her husband John decided to forge ahead with the purchase. "John had his eye on this place for quite some time," explains Kelly. "We had a duplex up the road, and we wanted something bigger. After seeing the inside, John was surprisingly happy — he thought the bones of the house were great. He clearly saw something that I didn't."

Set on a wooded lot in the prestigious Spanish Peaks Mountain Club in Big Sky, Montana, the 6,000-square-foot home affords spectacular mountain views, and is a welcome respite from the couple's hectic life in California. Though it needed a major facelift, its layout offered a great flow of space that instantly appealed to Kelli and John. "We love it," shares Kelli. "We wouldn't change a thing about it."

Unlike the wide-open floor plan the couple has in their California home, the layout in this house offers some

Set on a wooded lot in Big Sky's prestigious Spanish Peaks Mountain Club, the sprawling log home affords breathtaking vistas in all directions. Since the original siding hadn't been properly maintained, the owners decided to replace it with reclaimed barnwood. They also restored and re-stained the exterior logs to a deep brown tone.

The living room windows frame majestic views of the Spanish Peaks and the big, beautiful Montana sky. The massive fireplace features local moss rock; it serves as a divider between the dining and living room areas. "We like that there is some separation in the home," says Kelli, who left the home's original floor plan unchanged.



BEFORE
AFTER



BEFORE
AFTER



A striking photograph of a wild mustang by photographer Tracie Spence creates a dramatic focal point in the living room. The natural hues of the photo are complemented by the home's soft color palette. Upholstery in leather and boiled wool introduces rich notes of texture. White chinking against the re-stained logs creates contrast and that unmistakable log home warmth.

degree of separation, creating very intimate spaces. "We appreciate the fact that we can hear each other, and step around spaces to see each other, but we're not on top of each other," explains Kelli. "Connections are still there yet there are distinct separations, and the house feels incredibly cozy and comfort-

able. It truly has the best flow."

The floor plan was about the only thing in the house that didn't need to be updated. The couple spent nearly nine months renovating everything from beams to knobs. The walls had to be re-chinked; logs had to be re-stained; the exterior had to be re-sided (rustic

barnwood was used); every light fixture had to be replaced; the kitchen and baths were gutted and redone; walls and floors were repainted or re-stained; and the property had to be totally re-landscaped. The main floors were stripped to remove dark red tones, and the owners were thrilled to discover the beautiful

natural wood grain that was hiding beneath.

"We weren't thinking it would be a major renovation when we started, but it had a snowball effect," says Kelli. "It was like an onion, and once we started peeling back one layer, it led to another layer, and another."

When they first bought the home, Kelli

and John knew they wanted to transform it into a place that was lighter, brighter and filled with texture. They also wanted to ensure that it was inviting. "We like to live a casual lifestyle," says John. "We enjoy curling up on the couch with the kids and watching a movie, so we didn't want a formal setting. Instead,

we craved a place that we wouldn't want to leave; a place where you could touch things and not feel uncomfortable."

To get the renovation underway, the couple turned to two talented teams from Bozeman: Pearson Design Group, and Chris Lohss Construction. The Lohss crew served

“We wanted the whole house to feel like it was done at the same time, so that nothing feels like it was an afterthought,” shares Kelli. “We wanted it to be cohesive.”



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Rustic elegance now defines the kitchen, which marries rugged details with notes of luxury. Honed black granite countertops and a hand-glazed Moroccan tile backsplash provide a backdrop for one of Kelli's favorite splurges: an upscale La Cornue range. The steel hood is one of the few original details the couple kept. “I love the space now — it's warm and rustic, but bright and light at the same time,” Kelli says.



as general contractor, and handled some of the heavier renovation work — installing the new kitchen and baths, squaring off some arches in the home and restoring the interior and exterior logs. Designer Rain Houser of Pearson Design Group oversaw the entire design process.

“Rain really understood our vision,” says Kelli. “We collaborated on everything, and she was just wonderful to work with. She also suggested some great things that I never would have dreamed about.”

One of the more arduous tasks during renovation was getting the logs back into shape. They had not been maintained properly, so they had a peachy tone to them that simply wasn't appealing. Instead of stripping the logs, which could have damaged the delicate wood, the couple opted for a special glaze on top of the existing hue. “It basically canceled out the peach,” shares Kelli.

They used the same stain for the exterior logs to create a more streamlined look. “The original house had no consistency,” explains Kelli. “You'd walk down the hall and one room would be completely different from the next. We wanted it to be more of a congruent flow, so we made sure the same tones used outside would carry over to the inside.”

In addition to matching the exterior stain to the interior, the owners decided to replace the original siding (a stained red cedar) with beautiful reclaimed barnwood. They also added reclaimed wood to the garage doors.

The kitchen is another area that underwent extensive renovation. One of the most challenging areas was the concrete flooring — the owners hated its acid-green hue, so they painstakingly converted it to an earthy

RIGHT: Structurally, very little about this house was modified. John felt the bones were good, though it was in desperate need of a facelift. The kitchen was overhauled and streamlined to impart the mountain-modern atmosphere the couple prefers.



BEFORE
AFTER





BEFORE



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shade of beige. For cabinetry, they opted to remove the upper cabinets, replacing them with open shelving. They added beautiful reclaimed white oak cabinets below. Honed black granite counters, a Moroccan hand-glazed tile backsplash and an upscale La Cornue range add notes of luxury.

"We have the expectation that we'll be in this home for the rest of our lives, so we splurged a bit in some areas," Kelli admits.

Though the renovation entailed a lot more than the homeowners ever imagined, they are thrilled with the results. "The emotional component is so different from the original house," shares Kelli. "It is lighter, more comfortable, organic and inviting. The home is a mountain-rustic-modern design, and we're thrilled that we were able to go in and make it what we wanted."

Every time they visit the house, Kelli and John feel the stress of their busy California

LEFT: The master bedroom serves up spectacular views of the Spanish Peaks and surrounding lodge pole pines. But now, the room opens up to a deck so that the owners can enjoy being closer to nature. By refinishing the original flooring with a clear-coated pine and restaining the logs a rich brown, the space appears brighter and more open.

lives lift away. "Everything slows down in Montana," says Kelli. "It's such a different pace of life, and we love it! It truly is an all-season playground for the outdoor enthusiast, and John's soul just longs to be here."

As the couple unwinds in their welcoming retreat, Kelli can't help but concede that her first impression of the home was completely wrong — and she reluctantly admits something that most wives won't dare to: Her husband was 100 percent right. **L**

HOME DETAILS

Square Footage: 6,000

Construction: Chris Lohss Construction

Interior Design: Rain Houser, Pearson Design Group

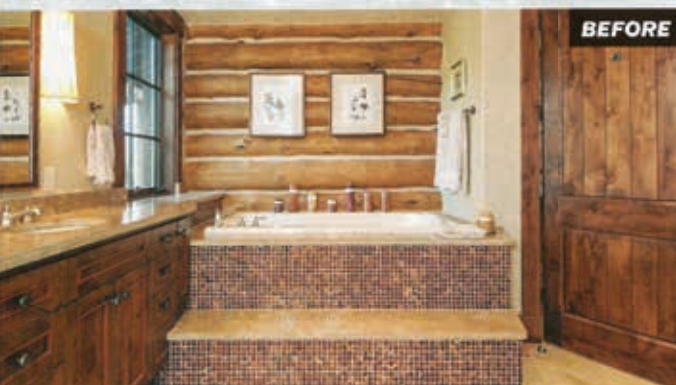
RIGHT: Not much had to be done to update "the den" — the perfect hang-out where the family and their guests can take each other on at foosball or shuffleboard. Lightening the concrete floor and toning down the orange hue of the logs made a huge difference in the room's overall atmosphere.



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER

RIGHT: Before, the master bathroom was dated and dark (above). Now, a whitewashed effect creates an instant air of tranquility in the spa-like retreat. A reclaimed sawn timber serves as a step into the tub, adding an intriguing textural contrast to all of the stone.

About Spanish Peaks

Spanish Peaks Mountain Club is a 5,700-acre ski and golf community in Big Sky, Montana. The Spanish Peaks Mountain Club offers direct access to Big Sky Resort, the Biggest Skiing in America; an 18-hole Tom Weiskopf Championship golf course; and over four miles of private access on tributaries of the trout-rich Gallatin River. The Clubhouse provides dramatic views of the Spanish Peaks mountain range and offers dining, golf and ski operations, pool, fitness, spa treatments and youth programs. Real estate offerings include homes, home sites and cabins. Learn more at www.spanishpeaksmountainclub.com.

