

MONTANA DESIGNS

'Historic' meets modern

Home uses newest technology to create old feel

By ANNE KAZMIERCZAK
for the Missoulian

As you round the curve of a milelong drive, smack in the middle of a field of cows, a seemingly ancient cabin appears in a nook of the land. The weathered appearance belies the modern methods that make the house appear aged.

"We wanted to build a new efficient home, make it fit into the natural environment and look like it had been there for a hundred years," Debbie Richardson said. To that end, the Richardsons chose modern methods to create an antiquated look.

The home's walls are its star. "We used concrete 'cultured logs,' a rusting metal roof and 200 tons of rock gathered from the property for the outside of our home," Debbie said.

The 'cultured logs' are molded concrete covering a Styrofoam core. Until you are beside them, they look like real wood.

"Dick Morgenstern has a patent on the system," Debbie said. Her husband "has known Dick forever," and the couple liked the system's low maintenance, energy efficiency and rustic look, so choosing the product was a no-brainer. Inside the house, the walls are studded and sheet rocked, with insulation sprayed in.

"It gives you a large amount of thermal mass, so it takes a long time to heat and a long time to cool," Dick said. The end result is "very reasonable heating bills."

"This winter we had a week where it was 12 below, and you couldn't even feel it," Debbie noted.

Their metal roof is prerusted, washed with a solution of vinegar, hydrogen peroxide and salt. "You spray it on and within five minutes, it's rusting," Debbie said.

The roofing is specially made so that it will rust to a certain point – then stop. With the inhibiting layer built in, "It's much heavier than conventional metal roofing,"



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The interior of the home is designed for maneuverability as the couple ages. Extra wide pathways, smooth floors and low-maintenance surfaces were all selected as they'll pose no obstacles to adaptive devices.

explained Dick. It should last 70 years. The couple used the same treatment on the base of their barn.

"We just liked the look of it," Debbie said.

Decks are made of Brazilian Ipe wood. "It's very dense," she said. Due to that density, "You don't have to treat it. And it doesn't get slick when it's wet."

North American woods were treated with a product called Lifetime.

"It's what the Forest Service uses on their cabins." The salt-based crystals, in solution, become a weather

and bug-proofing treatment.

"Supposedly you never need to treat it again. We're trying to cut down on maintenance," she said of their various choices. All the materials were selected for ease of care and longevity.

It is the Richardson's dream home, built in a spot Dick saw during his rounds as a veterinarian 20 years ago.

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“In 30 years, there’s very few places within 80 miles of Missoula that I have not been,” he said. Of all he’s seen, the one spot that struck him was the one where he and his wife now have their home. “I spent 20 years trying to buy it,” he said.

Eventually the couple bought the adjacent piece of land, and traded that with the ranch family who owned their dream spot.

“That’s the thing that makes a house special to someone,” said Dick. “They pick a special place and spend a lot of time planning.”

Situated atop a knoll, with no other house in sight, their meadow is full of cows, lowing and ambling about. Their house sits in a draw toward a corner of the property.

“We wanted to put it where it made sense,” Dick said, “where 150 years ago someone would have built a house – by the water, protected from the wind.”

Debbie concurred. “It can be blowing outside, and here around the house it’s quiet.”

The couple broke ground in March of 2007, and moved in in November of that year.

The house was designed to look like an old National Park building, Dick said.

Beamed porches, a rock base and “log” siding attest to that.

The 4,000-square-foot home spans two stories, although from the outside, it looks much smaller. An



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A flat section of roof was built where the home’s two segments meet. It is intended to house solar panels in the future.

attached double garage faces the gravel drive, so only a portion of the house is visible. The remainder of the home is built behind the garage, tucked into the sloping land. The illusion is a small cabin, magically enlarges when you walk through the doors.

“You need to give credit to our architect,” said Debbie.

Kelly Karmel designed the home, making the outside look rustic, while the inside is anything but.

Within, your eyes are met by a huge stone fireplace, created by mason Peggy Steffs, who also built the house’s rock base, incorporating stone arches over the windows.

Cathedral ceilings and multipane windows lend a

feeling of clarity and warmth.

Radiant floor heat, granite countertops, sprawling halls and tile throughout the house gleam. Furnishings are polished cherry and leather. Everywhere is luxury, but no carpet – “It’s nice when you have animals,” Debbie explained.

The Richardsons own 62 acres, lease adjacent ranch land for their cattle, and have permission to use the neighboring ranches for riding, as well.

“We have 600 acres we can ride our horses on,” Dick said.

Outside the windows, the couple’s cow-calf pairs amble past. They are so close, the feeling is they are pets. Debbie said they wanted it that way.

Another nod to the couple’s love of their animals is an expansive mud room, divided into two sections. One side boasts a full-sized fridge and sink, the other, a special wash area for muddy boots, dogs and buckets.

“This mud room we love,” Debbie smiled.

The upstairs is where the Richardsons live.

“The basement is for guests,” Debbie said, crossing the two bedroom, 1,700 square foot lower level. With the idea of one day turning it into an apartment, the basement is wired and plumbed for an additional kitchen. Right now, where a kitchen could be, is Debbie’s old piano.

“I never go in basement except to go to the barn,” she said. With middle age firmly upon them, Debbie explained, “We wanted everything we needed on one level. We’re getting older and I don’t want to climb stairs.”

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Upstairs, gorgeous French doors, made of oak-encased ripple glass, open from both sides of an airy hall. One set reveals a vast laundry room, the other the master bath.

The laundry room hosts a state-of-the-art washer and dryer, plenty of room to fold and hang and the working end of Debbie's in-wall fish tank. "I've always had fish," she said. This, however, is her first salt water tank. Windows pour light into the tank through its face in the couple's large bedroom, and Debbie is still figuring out how to control the resultant algae blooms.

The bedroom is simple, a combination sleeping and sitting room, with windows overlooking those golden cows. The room spans the width of the house, and windows on three sides give it a broad, airy ambience. You feel more like you're on a deck than within a typical bedroom.

The master bath is broad and spare, tiled in relaxing sand.

"We had a teeny, tiny shower in our last place, and I wanted a bigger shower," Debbie said, displaying the



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The 4,000-square-foot luxury home is a year old.

walk-in marble stall. "I hate cleaning shower doors, so we wanted something big enough that you don't need a door."

At the end of the hall, solid French doors reveal an office.

The Richardsons' halls are wider than average, about 5 feet wide, Debbie said. Angles allow for easy maneuvering

around corners, rather than having sharp turns. All the doorways are doublewide French doors.

The house, Debbie explained, is built to accommodate aging and its needs.

"I'm hoping I'm never in a wheelchair, but ..." she tapers off.

Wide halls, smooth floors, and extra

wide doorways will all accommodate any adaptive or assistive devices the couple might need. Everything was designed with accessibility in mind. The space doesn't give up luxury for practicality, but once pointed out, it is easy to imagine maneuvering a wheelchair through the floor plan.

It's simple, Debbie said. "I don't ever want to move again."

Outside, a rock patio abuts the house, while landscaping is still in progress. It is here the house looks largest from without. Where the two segments of the house meet, the roof is flat and slightly recessed.

"The flat roof area allows us to put solar hot water or solar panels on without having them visible when you look at the house," Dick explained. "The thing we wanted to accomplish is to build the house out here and not destroy the scene of this pastoral view."

Dick said that sensibility is getting rarer these days.

The view is as important to Dick as it is to Debbie.

"I drive up and down this valley every day," he said. "It's a special place."

Anne Kazmierczak is a freelance writer and lives in Missoula.

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