

TIMBER HOMES

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Right Time, Right Place

Building a home that's open and cozy

Timing was everything in the decision of Cornell University professors Maureen O'Hara and David Easley to build a timber frame in New York's Finger Lakes region. "We knew, as our two daughters were becoming older, that we no longer needed a house in a traditional neighborhood," Maureen explains. "That let us consider other options."

Five years ago, when she and David first set eyes on a 3-acre wooded bluff with 240 feet of lakefront on Cayuga Lake, "It was love...we knew it," Maureen says. Calculating several years for planning and construction—they wanted to make the move once their youngest daughter could drive to high school—they figured the time was right to buy.

Story by Cheryl Kenny • Photos by Roger Wade • Styling by Debra Grahl

David and Maureen's Newfoundland, Dudley, stands sentry at the front door. The basement includes a huge, modified pet shower for the 160-pound dog.





Maureen likes the triangular braces under the porch eaves. The porch has a slate floor with oak timber columns; the front door is Andean walnut.

A Classic Cottage

Maureen and David originally considered building a log home, but later decided a timber frame was a better fit. “We felt there is too much wood in a log home, and they usually have a more informal look than we wanted,” Maureen says. “With a timber frame you get bigger spaces, and I think the wood is prettier.”

At a home show, the couple was impressed with the design approach of Woodhouse: The Timber Frame Company, based in Mansfield, Pennsylvania. “Some timber frames can feel like a church,” David notes. “But Woodhouse has a good sense of proportion.” For her part, Maureen says, “Woodhouse combines openness with coziness.”

Working with Tom Seaman, Woodhouse’s Cayuga Lake area builder-dealer, and the company’s architect, Andy Harding, Maureen and David developed some parameters for the home: moderately sized with an English cottage feel and charm, and a lake view from all rooms except the baths.

The couple says that allowing plenty of time for planning and preparation, especially for excavation of their steeply sloped site, was the key to success. Tom agrees. “Having several years lead time made the process a great deal easier,” he says. “It gave them more time to ponder the design details, to become more comfortable with the process and to understand it better.”

“It also meant we could get the well-qualified tradespeople that we wanted,” Tom continues. “When projects are on a fast track, often the people you want are not available, especially when you are building in a smaller community.” Tom recommends planning at least 18 months for design and construction.

In Proportion

Woodhouse designed and raised the timbers of the 3,600-square-foot, modified Craftsman-style house, while Gallup Construction of Trumansburg, New York, handled the rest of the construction. The timbers are 8-by-10-inch Eastern white pine cut from the Adirondack area. “All of Woodhouse’s braces, purlins and rafters are pocketed [cut] so that, as the wood shrinks, there are no exposed gaps,” Tom



Above right: Lighting designers from Steigerwald in Auburn, New York, chose up-lighting and sconces for the great room. At first Maureen was skeptical about the plan; now she likes the look. “The right lighting keeps a room from being dark and foreboding,” she says.

Right: Floors in the study, great room, kitchen and dining area are cherry. The study shares a two-sided fireplace with the master bedroom.

The cultured stone fireplace that warms the great room was built by stone mason Jerry Fox of Against the Wind Stoneworks. The same stone is used along the basement walkout area of the home.





explains. David appreciates the result: “The fit and finish is just beautiful, as well as being well-constructed,” he says.

The home’s main level leads from an entry hall to a guest bath on the left, the kitchen on the right, and stairs to the upper and lower levels straight ahead. Beyond the stairs is the great room, which the couple designed to appear spacious but not massive. “We wanted a room where two people could sit and not feel lost, yet also work well with a big group,” David says.


The 22-by-24-foot great room peaks at about 26 feet with a king post truss system rising dramatically up to the white ceilings. The walls were painted a soft spring green. “We wanted a contrast between the walls, the ceiling and the wood beams,” David notes.

They chose to place their cultured stone fireplace on an interior wall so as not to compete with the view. For the same reason, they built the deck off the dining and master bedroom/study areas, rather than the great room. Maureen is pleased with the unobstructed view. “The lake changes every day...it has an infinite variety of grays...and we are surrounded by it,” she says. Since the house sits on a bluff about 80 feet above Cayuga Lake, she can look down on geese as they fly over the water.



Above: The kitchen, with its cherry cabinetry and green granite countertops, opens to the great room and its view of the lake.

Right: The original dining room design was modified to allow enough wall space for the couple’s china cabinet. The table is by Stickley Furniture—a local manufacturer of traditional Arts and Crafts style furnishings.

A photograph of a wooden loft interior. On the left, a wall is constructed from stacked, irregular grey stones. The ceiling and structural beams are made of light-colored wood, showing a complex truss system. A wooden railing with vertical balusters runs across the foreground. In the background, a doorway leads to another room with a bookshelf and a lamp. To the right, a portion of a bed with a grey headboard and a red blanket is visible. The lighting is warm and focused on the wooden elements.

The loft provides an excellent example of the precision work required in quality timber framing. "There are no spaces or gaps," Tom notes. "The product looks very finished."

The couple's emphasis on people-friendly proportions guided them in designing the kitchen. "We wanted the kitchen functional but not vast," Maureen notes. "We wanted it comfortable to cook in, but not taking up the entire house." To make the kitchen feel cozier, the couple brought the ceiling down to standard height. They chose natural cherry cabinets with Hawaiian green granite countertops.

Behind the kitchen is the dining area; the laundry, mudroom and entry are also off the kitchen. The master bedroom, one of David's favorite rooms, is to the far left. "I like the vaulted ceiling and the beautiful wood of the bedroom," David notes. "With windows on both sides we can see the lake and the hills."

A study behind the master bedroom suite shares a two-sided gas fireplace with the master bedroom, and is accessible from both the bedroom and great room. The second story has two bedrooms, a bath and small loft. The lower level is a walkout with a guest bedroom and bath, pool room and family room.

Finishing Touches

The couple debated whether to stick with neutral colors for their exterior. During the design process, Tom arranged for Windham, New York, builder Dick Jordan to take them on a tour of area houses to look at design and colors used. "At the end of the day, when Dick showed us the colors we had originally chosen, they looked drab," David says. "We realized we liked the Arts and Crafts colors."

One of the home's many charms is its proximity to a railroad track that winds around the lakeshore. A few times a week, the slow-moving trains, which have been operating since the 1870s, take coal to an electric-generating plant several miles up the lake. "It's nice," says Maureen. "You can hear them in the distance from outside. And it's fun to walk near the lake along the railroad tracks."

RESOURCES

Against the Wind Stoneworks, (607) 863-3887

Gallup Construction, (607) 387-6502

Woodhouse: The Timber Frame Company,
(800) 227-4311, www.woodhouse-pb.com



Above right: A vaulted ceiling lends drama to the master bedroom that overlooks the lake. All of the bedroom floors are lined with plush carpeting.

Right: The master bath features a whirlpool tub and a double sink with blue and green granite tops. For continuity between the two rooms, the bathroom walls are painted the same color as the master bedroom.