




DREAM LOG HOME

By Mary Ellisor Emmerting
Photographs by Michael Skott

Creating a Rocky Mountain retreat that's as rustic as it is elegant is a lot easier to do if one of the country's top custom log home craftsmen lives right in the neighborhood. So when a prominent Midland, Tex., oilman located a humble, 1950's summer cabin in a spectacular riverside setting near Gunnison, Colo., he called on Steve Cappellucci for advice.

A gifted woodworker with a passion for even the smallest detail of carving and joinery, Cappellucci set in motion the property's two-year transformation to a lavish family compound with guest house, barn and workshop. The entire project was closely managed by

◀ The sprawling 1,800-square-foot main house, of spruce and lodgepole pine, was designed as a purely private owner's refuge. Despite its size, it has only four rooms: living, dining, kitchen and master bedroom. Cappellucci took much of the timber directly from the surrounding property. No trace remains of the original, tiny summer cabin.

Part sculptor, part builder, ► Cappellucci created the entire compound with as little recourse to lumberyards as possible. By employing stable timber that has dried and aged by itself, his custom designs and construction techniques need make no compromise for shifting from shrinkage.



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a crew that never exceeded five artisans, and was more often just three. Though the complex's cost approached \$500,000 at about \$140 a square foot exclusive of interior decorating, it was kept intimate. Both houses together have just four bedrooms.

Cappellucci, at 40, is as colorful as any of the homes he has created. Discharged from the Army in 1971 with no particular plans, he moved to Gunnison where, as it turned out, his grandmother remarried a log home builder. Steve began helping his new grandfather by ferreting out unusual pieces of wood to be used as interesting architectural details. Now, he's been at the business full tilt for 17 years.

Today, no matter how lavish his creations are, Cappellucci uses as much locally gathered timber as possible. Done almost entirely by hand, with lumber often grown on the property, his works are not only enduring, they look as if they've been there all along.

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An enormous, elevated redwood deck is where much of the family's entertaining is done. The gawning fire pit, for atmosphere, had to be supported from the ground below by a tall, concrete-block base. Almost close enough to touch is one of the finest trout streams in Colorado, where the home's fly-fishing owner can often be found at 4 A.M. on a summer morning, catching that night's dinner.



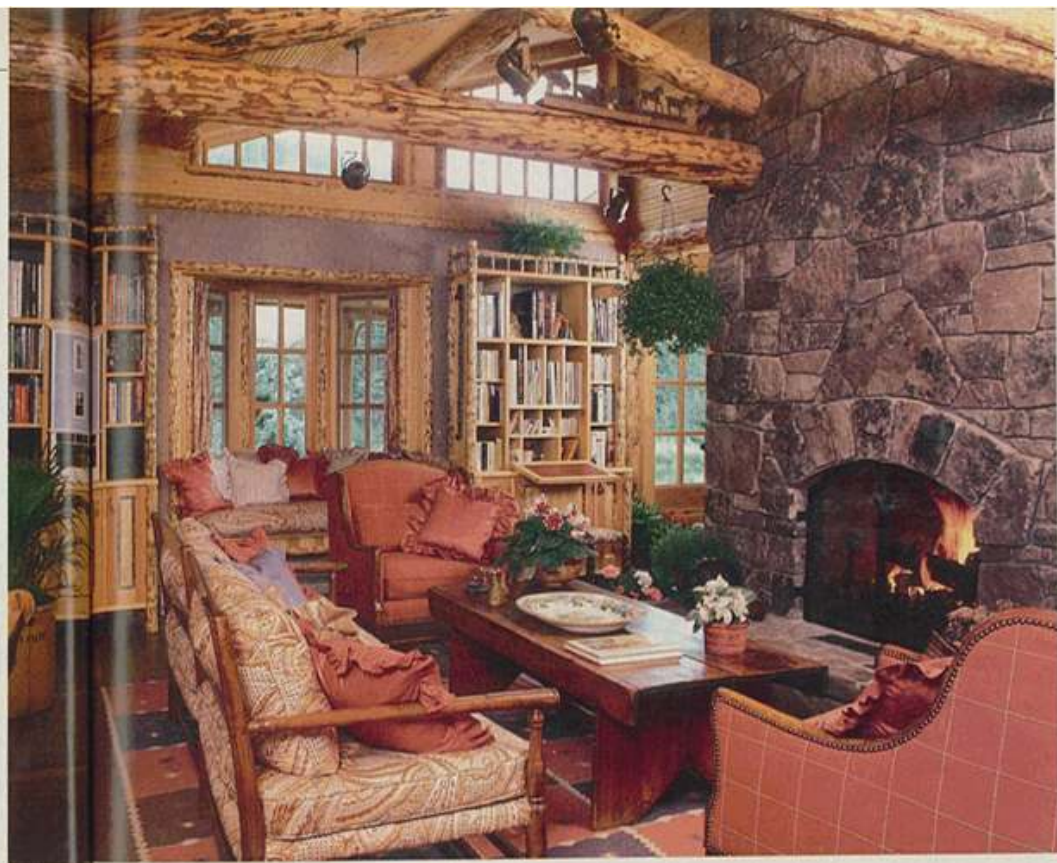
◀ For Cappellucci, perfection is in harmony of details. Window boxes are, naturally, simply hollowed-out logs. Hidden from view is a highly effective foam seal positioned between courses of timber, pre-compressed so it can automatically expand should any gaps develop between logs.



◀ A tree-stump stool was made by the builder's grandfather and mentor, Cappellucci, who also crafts rustic furniture, made much of the home's door and window trim from hand-split poles. Cabinet handles were fashioned from twigs.



▲ The large kitchen is simultaneously rustic and thoroughly modern, belying the fact that plumbing and electrical work present special challenges in a solid-walled log home. Every piece of timber must be pre-drilled for wiring before assembly—no afterthoughts. Plumbing vents must rise through special furred-in “plumbing walls.”



▲ A two-sided hearth bisects the living room into formal (shown) and informal areas. Log construction automatically provides excellent insulation, though for winter-time use, Cappellucci would have supplemented electric heat with a woodburning stove. Exquisitely detailed bookcases are typical of his work. ☼

The cathedral-like, handmade arches and wrought-iron tie rods of the guest house's main room show why Cappellucci's work is admired. The chandelier is English staghorn style; the painted cupboard is an antique from Denmark.

