

# Deck the HALLS

A cozy Osler log home offers the perfect holiday escape for a busy family



by JUDY ROSS • photography by JOHN deVISSER • holiday styling by MARGOT JARRETT

**I**t was a race—would the house construction be finished before the turkey came out of the oven? “The builders were still there,” says Beth Burgess thinking back to Christmas of 2002, “and we were having 10 people for dinner. We’d arrived up from Toronto with the Christmas tree because we weren’t sure we’d find one in Collingwood at the last minute. The kids were all excited because this was our first night in the new ski cabin. I was still figuring things out in my new kitchen. The builders worked really

hard to finish and despite many incomplete last-minute details the house was livable and the Christmas dinner took place.”

Beth and her husband Andy started to build this log home across from the Osler Bluff Ski Club in the spring of 2002. Andy’s father (a founding member of the club) had obtained the property 40 years earlier in one of the club lotteries. For years the couple and their three children Charlie, 9, Sarah, 7 and Campbell, 4 had bunked in on ski weekends with Andy’s family, but

**ABOVE:** The sunny disposition of this living room comes from many windows and a colour palette inspired by the tribal floor carpet. A pair of sturdy hickory hoop chairs with soft chenille cushions flank the fireplace and, befitting the season, stockings are hung by the chimney with care.





now they would have their own digs for the winter season.

The 3,600-square-foot home was designed by local builder Bruce Cannell using square cut timbers assembled by Legendary Log Crafters, also from Collingwood. The 2-storey home also includes a yet unfinished 1,800-square-foot basement. Despite its generous size the house feels cozy. Much of its warmth and character the Burgesses attribute to designer Margot Jarrett.

Margot owns Peaks & Rafters, retail furniture stores (one in Collingwood and one in Muskoka) that specialize in north country interiors. "I think a house in the country—whether it's a log house here or a cottage on a lake—should have a totally different feel than a city house," says Margot. "It should be very comfortable and very user-friendly. After all, this is the place you come to escape from the city and relax."

Escapism begins the minute you enter the Burgesses's living room with its log fire

blazing in the stone hearth surrounded by an array of comfy chairs and a sofa. The furniture is over-sized and extra sturdy and the antique pine coffee table is tough enough for feet-up comfort after a day on the slopes. With its chunky log texture and beamed ceiling the cabin seems to wrap itself around you—especially at Christmas when fresh evergreens add a piney scent to the woody interior.

One of Margot's trademarks is designing rooms that feel as if they have always been there. This settled ambience comes from a timeworn patina on furniture, accessories and fabrics. The living room sofa and chairs, big and cushy to begin with, are covered with soft chenille and corduroy. Everything about the room invites relaxation.

"I can't lie on that couch without falling asleep," says Beth with a laugh.

With three lively children durability is another factor. The house has to withstand

AT LEFT, L-R: Custom-made newel posts add character to the staircase. Margot Jarrett designed several pieces of furniture for the Burgess house, including the black hall bench. ➤ A clawfoot tub and generous two-person shower share space in this upstairs bathroom. The bow-tie pattern rug (a vintage reproduction) is from Peaks & Rafters. ➤ Margot Jarrett designed the custom-made bar area, which has a wine fridge, bar sink, limestone counters and reproduction vintage glass cabinets. "I use a lot of black in country homes," says Jarrett. "In log homes like this it's best to keep things clean and simple." ➤ The headboard for the king-size bed was designed like a panel door and painted country red. It fits snugly beneath the roof eaves in the master bedroom. ➤ The honey-toned logs were hand-hewn and assembled on site by Legendary Log Crafters of Collingwood. AT RIGHT: All decked out for Christmas dinner, the dining table made from old barnboards is surrounded by classic black Windsor chairs. English china ("The Friendly Village" by Johnson Bros.) and an American-made folk art horse add country charm to the table setting.



Charlie and his buddies hanging about after a ski day and the steady flow of friends and family coming and going, especially during the holiday season. For Beth and Andy the living is easy—unlike the city house where Beth says, "I'm always saying to the kids, 'don't put your feet up on that,' or 'keep your hands off this.'"

This casual welcoming aura continues into the large kitchen/dining room. Designed with subtle colours that "don't jump out at you," it was important to the family to make the kitchen a gathering place. A generous pine-planked island looks more like an old-fashioned store counter than the custom designed unit it is. "We purposely



Although the kitchen is thoroughly modern, elements such as distressed painted cabinetry, a farmhouse sink, limestone counters and a huge wooden island give it a sense of history. Bruce Cannell of Oster Bluff built the cabinetry and millwork throughout the house.

didn't use bar stools at the island," explains Beth. "I like a kitchen where people just stand around." On ski weekends the island functions as a buffet table. "We come home for lunch after a morning of skiing," says Beth, "everyone is hungry, and I just put everything out on the island—cheese, breads, chilis, meats; basically empty the fridge and cupboards—and everyone helps themselves. It's the perfect kitchen for that."

And now, after two ski seasons in their charming weekend home, the finishing

details are almost complete. Preparing for the holidays means adding some whimsical touches like pieces of folk art and vintage ski posters. Cedar swags will decorate the chunky newel post and the wooden beam mantel will be filled with candles. With ski hills beckoning across the road, snow piling up outside the windows and a warm glow from the fireplace, it's hard to imagine a more perfect setting for a Canadian Christmas in Southern Georgian Bay. ■