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Memory MAKER

A Montana couple spends 20 years
getting their home just so

BY JAMES ASKEW | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HEIDI LONG

Mike and Sandy Kones are timber framers by occupation. Owners of Centennial Timber Frames in Kalispell, Montana, they built this home as they built their business. Work began in 1989, and has been accomplished with the help of family and friends along the way. The great room on this page is Sandy's favorite, because she likes to sit and study the joinery, timbers and carvings. The Japanese-inspired entry on the opposite page is the home's most recent addition.

Planning to build the house in two stages, Mike designed the main house with the addition in mind. The Douglas fir post at the corner of the kitchen counter was once the outside wall. Mike attached the original stress-skin exterior panels with bolts rather than spikes, which allowed him to remove the panels with ease when it came time to expand.





A Tale of Two Timber Styles

Mike and Sandy Kones used two distinct timber-frame styles for their home: the classic bent and the timber-and-truss. For the bent style, the frame of the house is made up of three or more structural units, spaced 8 to 14 feet apart to create bays. The units consist of the wall posts and rafters, built as one piece on the ground, then raised into place on the foundation. Purlins are then installed from post to post and rafter to rafter to form the building's skeleton.

For the timber-and-truss style, the walls of the frame are erected first, including vertical eaves beams (or plates), as seen in the couple's great room. Trusses, built on the ground, are then hoisted into place (typically with a crane), and additional rafters fill in the structure of the roof.

In the Koneses' home, the bent style provides a cozier, county-cottage look in the living room and kitchen, while the timber-and-truss style makes for an open and more dramatic great room.

THIS PAGE: A giant slab of Douglas fir helps tie the newly added great room to the kitchen. Below the bar, recycled tongue-and-groove fir used for the great room ceiling also makes for beautiful wainscoting and helps unify the structural elements of the room.

OPPOSITE: The inset eaves beam in the dining room is Mike's take on a detail he saw at a friend's house, working with the idea that "not everything needs to be flush." On the trim above the window at the rear are two Japanese characters, which Sandy carved. One means "great," the other "work;" together, they translate as "carpenter."



Mike and Sandy Kones take pride in having devoted the past 22 years to turning dozens of families' wish lists, magazine clippings and sketches into custom homes. Owners of Centennial Timber Frames in Kalispell, Montana, they've labored almost that long building their own, lone home. Yet, they consider it their proudest accomplishment.

Started in 1989 and still not entirely finished, the home has been a constant labor of love (and toil) that has produced fond memories. One that stands out the most is that barely a sliver of wood went into the house that a Kones hand didn't touch. As a professional timber framer, Mike knew he would eventually build his own home. What makes this home truly special is that the entire family, along with friends and neighbors,

pitched in. "We had a couple of work parties when we were doing the frame," Mike recounts. "I'd call up friends, and they'd come over and help cut, sand and oil the timber frame."

"We were really fortunate," Sandy adds.

The couple's story actually began in 1988, when the young family was still renting in Kalispell. That summer, Mike and two friends dismantled a water tower built in the early 1900s in Somers, Montana, trading their labor for the tower's Douglas fir timbers and long, 3-by-5-inch cedar planks. The following year, the couple bought eight acres just south of Kalispell and set to work building their home.

Mike designed the house and drew up the plans, dividing the project into two phases: the main house and the addition to follow. The couple



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: To help unify the new addition with the main house, Sandy matched the lighting in the great room with the Minka Laverty fixtures hanging above the kitchen counter.

The open vaulted ceiling in the saltbox design allows the front wall of the second floor to be only 7-feet tall, increasing efficiency for heating without limiting floor space. The handcrafted pine bed demonstrates Mike's early mastery of his craft; he built it 28 years ago, during the couple's first year of marriage.

Mike handcrafted all the cabinets in the home, including the elegant oak vanities in the three bathrooms. He milled all of the trim from reclaimed cedar planks, reserving those pieces with the most dramatic nail patterns for prominent places.



During their first winter on the land, the Konesses lived in a small, roughed-in apartment above the garage, wearing winter boots indoors during the harshest winter days. By the close of the following summer, the main house was up, but it would be another 12 years before they began the addition, far right.

Home Details

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 3,000

TIMBER COMPANY: Centennial Timber Frames

chose a traditional saltbox design and a bent style of timber framing for the main house; for the great room, completed in 2007, they opted for a more ornate timber-and-truss frame.

About 70 percent of the Douglas fir frame in the main house came from the water tower. Mike milled its 24-foot-long cedar planks for interior and exterior trim.

In addition to the lumber from the water

tower, the couple used recycled wood wherever possible, buying new only when necessary. The kitchen ceiling is two-and-a-quarter-inch-thick Douglas fir car decking left over from a church that Mike worked on. The floors throughout the downstairs are recycled Douglas fir. The oak for the kitchen and bathroom cabinets came from Mike's brother-in-law in Minnesota. The great room ceiling is Douglas fir from a Denver

warehouse. The porch is recycled Australian jarrah, commonly used for sheep barns. The timbers in the great room were once part of a shed in a Libby, Montana, lumberyard.

"Some people say there is too much wood in our home, overwhelming even," Sandy says. "But I would disagree. We have all types and styles of wood, a good deal of it is recycled, and we very much like it that way." ■



LOWER LEVEL



MAIN LEVEL



UPPER LEVEL

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