



# TIMELESS RENEWAL



**ABOVE:** The solid oak posts supporting the front porch's roof were made from 10 oak trees that builder Noah Bradley brought to the property and had carved on site.

A Virginia couple perfects their rustic home with a stunning reclaimed timber addition.

STORY BY DANIELLE TAYLOR | PHOTOS BY F&E SCHMIDT

**OPPOSITE:** After spending six years in a dark log cabin, Bill and Marise Craig wanted to bring as much natural light as possible into their home, as shown by the side-lights surrounding their front door.





**ALTHOUGH** Bill and Marise Craig's home in Madison, Virginia, is only a few years old, calling it "new" would be a bit misleading. Their home, a tiny log cabin with a larger post-and-beam addition, was created from two Virginia structures originally built in the 1700s and 1800s, and represents a dream nearly half a century in the making.

"We have been coming to Madison County since we started dating 40 years ago," explains Marise. The rural enclave nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains offered their family a relaxing weekend getaway from northern Virginia for years before they decided to build. After buying their property in 1990, the couple began looking into their options. As it turns out, they didn't have to look very hard.

"Our builder actually contacted us and offered to build us a little log cabin on the property we have," remembers Bill. Noah Bradley

**All of the furniture and most of the artwork in this relaxing living room came from Italy, where the couple lived while on a tour of duty with the U.S. Navy. The french doors open up to their front porch and the spectacular views their Blue Ridge mountain location offers.**

of Blue Mountain Builders had heard the couple was planning to build a log cabin, so he reached out to offer his company's services. Blue Mountain Builders specializes in finding historic structures and turning them into new homes using traditional building methods. So once Bradley got the go-ahead from the Craigs, he brought in the materials he had salvaged from an old log barn near the West Virginia border and built them a beautiful 16-by-19-square-foot cabin.

The original structure had one bedroom, a small kitchenette and a tight bathroom with a shower, which worked out fine for a weekend

**RIGHT, TOP:** In builder Noah Bradley's original plans, this airy dining room was intended to be a hall between the original cabin and the living room. To create a more accessible feel in the home, he removed a wall from his floor plans, opened the dining room up to the kitchen and turned the adjacent cabin into a den.

**RIGHT, BOTTOM:** The fully appointed kitchen represents a major improvement from the tiny kitchenette the homeowners had in their previous cabin. The custom-built cabinetry was created from wormy chestnut Bradley salvaged from another historic structure nearby.

retreat but wouldn't quite cut it once the Craigs decided to make the cabin their full-time residence. As Bill points out, a cabin that tiny "is just too small for two people to live in and maintain a healthy marriage," so the couple made plans to expand from the very start. Once Bill retired and the two moved into the cabin full time, they got back in touch with Bradley and his crew to build a timber frame addition onto their home. With the added space, the couple wanted three bedrooms to host their son and daughter and their families, plus a complete kitchen and a full bathroom with a clawfoot tub where Marise could bathe her grandchildren.

"When they originally had me building the house, I had a general idea of where the addition would be located," Bradley recalls. "The next step was to track down a frame that would fit their needs. For whatever reason, it always seems that when I have a need, there's a perfect structure to fit that." Bradley spends one day each week traveling the back roads of rural Virginia in search of old buildings he can salvage, and he found the materials for the Craigs' timber addition in a post-and-beam structure in southern Virginia.

Using reclaimed materials comes with a unique set of challenges, however, that can easily deter less-experienced builders. "The guy who owned the property had removed a lot of stuff from the house," remembers Bradley. "He had cut the frame in half and dragged different sections of the house to different parts of the property using a team of horses. It was full of snakes and mice, and at one point it was so ugly, I refused to show [the Craigs] pictures of the 'before' structure until I had finished building their home."

"He just said 'trust me on this one — I can see the beauty in her bones,'" Marise says of the salvaged structure. "It was a bit of a leap of faith," acknowledges Bill, "but we had the benefit of working with them previously." During construction, Bradley dismantled another home in Madison and was able to build the Craigs' floors and kitchen cabinets out of wormy chestnut, a move that delighted the couple. Again and again, they put their faith in Bradley's experience, which never failed to pay off in spades.

Take the Craigs' dining room for example. In the room's exterior wall, Bradley installed a small pair of windows, which failed to do justice to the gorgeous mountain views outside. So he had his crew cut out the space between to make a larger bow window. "When [the Craigs] came out to witness the window, I had to explain," Bradley remembers. "They quickly agreed they loved it and that it was the right thing to do. I think they liked telling people about their contrary builder."

Like many people building a custom wood home, the final price tag ended up being a bit steeper than the couple had planned for, but they concede that even after a few years of paying the mortgage, it was worth every penny they spent.





Maggie, the Craigs' three-year-old rescued pup, watches over the timber-laden master bedroom. Bill found her without a collar alongside the drive up to the house, and she's since made herself right at home on the property's 11.5 acres of rolling wooded hills.



Personal effects line the walls and rafters of Bill's office above the master bedroom. The painting above the desk was given to Bill as a going-away present from his job in 1975; the scene reminds him of where he and his wife spent their honeymoon. Marise's collection of antique irons and tobacco cutters graces the beams above.

"Working with [Bradley's] crew was one of most unbelievably positive experiences we've ever had," Marise raves. "It was truly a labor of love. I think often of how fortunate we were to work with his crew, not once but twice."

The Craigs, both of Scottish descent, have christened their new home "Dhuincrag," which reflects the Scottish term for "castle" as well as their surname, which also means "rocky peak." The name captures their mountain refuge perfectly. "Our daughter once said, 'I feel more at peace here than I have any place,'" Marise reflects.

Bradley attributes the home's success to the timeless building techniques his crew uses, honed by centuries of craftsmen before him, and the appreciation both he and the Craigs have for historic structures. The level of care both parties put into this home allowed him to create a true work of art that the Craigs plan to pass on to their children.

Says Bradley, "I find that one of the greenest things you can do is to build a beautiful home that people will take care of and want to live in for years to come."

That's definitely true for the Craigs. Says Bill, "We are more than pleased. Often we'll look at each other and say, 'Are we lucky to live here or what?'" ■

## Home Details

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 3,000

**BUILDER:** Blue Mountain Builders

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE "FIND IT HERE" ON PAGE 56.**



MAIN LEVEL



UPPER LEVEL