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MOUNTAIN TOP

For this get-up-and-go couple, retirement is all about staying active — and having a place they love coming home to after their adventures.



Work hard, play hard” is a way-of-life motto adopted by Bill and Mikki Lukens. For years these high school sweethearts, now celebrating 45 years of marriage, excelled at their professions — Bill as an equestrian veterinarian and Mikki as nursing clinical instructor. So, when it came time to retire, they set their sights on the next part of the phrase: It was time to play hard.

The Ohio natives began making plans to pull up roots from their 30-acre

horse farm and head west. Having vacationed in Montana every summer over the previous decade, they knew that Whitefish had the natural beauty and recreation opportunities their retirement dreams were made of.

“We wanted the pretty mountains and rivers and lakes for hiking, fishing and hunting, which are probably my three favorite things,” shares Bill, before running down a long list of other activities the couple enjoys. “There’s skiing in the winter, fishing in the spring, boating, rafting, hiking and

backpacking in the summer, and fall is for hunting.”

In other words, retirement mode for these two was about gearing up, not slowing down. And a major part of their stay-active plan included the biggest endeavor of all: building the mountain home of their dreams. They wanted a well-placed launch point for their outdoor adventures and a comfortable place they could sink into at the end of a full day.

After an extensive property search (only a bird’s eye view would do),

EXPERIENCE

By Suzanna Logan | Photography by Heidi Long



An expansive flagstone patio that extends from the rear of the home offers plenty of spots for taking in the views. The couple's favorite place to settle in? The Nordic hot tub perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking a 150-foot drop. "There are no lights, no noise. It's the most peaceful place in the world," says Bill. "It's pure silence. It's spectacular."

they discovered a cliffside lot nestled between state and national forests, with lake and mountain vistas. "We fell in love with it right away because it had 360-degree views in every direction," says Bill.

The only hang up? The property wasn't for sale. The owner had taken it off the market four months prior. But after some negotiating, the Lukens entered an agreement to close on the property within three years. "We weren't in a hurry," explains Bill. The couple expected the extra time would

give them the space they needed to settle their affairs back in Ohio and continue to perfect the plans for their forever home.

But, during the interim, serendipity took over.

While they were still in Ohio, Bill caught wind that a 3,000-acre property near his vet clinic was set to be redeveloped. Having rabbit hunted on the land previously, he knew there was an 1850s-era barn on the land, and it happened to be made of timbers that would be perfect for constructing a

rustic retirement retreat. As expected in a small town, Bill knew the developer. "His kid played lacrosse with mine," Bill explains. After a gentleman's agreement — "I gave him Ohio State/Texas football tickets to seal the deal," laughs Bill — the Lukens found themselves the proud owners of not just one 19th century-era barn but two, along with three outbuildings.

Their Montana timber home was shaping up. The only sticking point was dismantling the materials and getting them across the country. "We

right In the great room, it's not the sofas in front of the grand fireplace that are in demand as the best seat in the house but the adjacent 9-foot window seat. "I can sit up and read on one side, and Bill can stretch out on the other," says Mikki. "It's my favorite spot."

hired some of the local Amish to tear the barns down, and we stacked three semi loads of wood," says Bill. Because the longest beam was 75 feet, it had to be cut down to 57 feet to fit on the truck. While the beams are all different sizes, Bill says the most common are 10-by-12, 12-by-12 and "one monster that is 12-by-17."

Fast forward two years; the Lukens closed on the property, the timbers were onsite, and it was time for floor plans. The couple reached out to Ross Anderson, a local architect they'd used before, who went to work making sure the barn timbers were used to their full advantage. "I was like a kid in a candy store with all these beautiful, hand-adzed timbers and wood," says Ross. "The house is a hybrid, but a lot of the timbers are structural, not just accents." The weathered wood appears in various applications throughout the house. "Every piece of wood you see, with the exception of the cabinetry, came from those barns and outbuildings," Ross continues, "siding, wainscoting, sliding barn doors, even the hardware."

The weathered, antique timbers would serve not only as the backbone of the home, from a material perspective, and as the inspiration for the home's rustic aesthetic, but they would also be an ever-present reminder of the couple's roots. "The timbers are a part of our lives and







HOME DETAILS

SQUARE FOOTAGE
2,686

BEDROOMS
3

BATHS
2

ARCHITECT
ROSS ANDERSON, AIA
rossganderson.com

BUILDER
LEE BUILDING COMPANY
406-862-1643



left **The light-filled dining nook just off of the kitchen is a perfectly cozy place for casual meals.**

opposite **Alongside the more rustic timbers, the kitchen cabinets made from reclaimed oak add a sense of refinement. But don't let the fine finishes fool you. "It's a true working kitchen," says architect Ross Anderson. "We worked hard in the design process to keep a close triangle and keep the space efficient."**

childhood," shares Mikki. "A little part of Ohio here in Montana."

When it came time for the couple's builder of choice, Greg Lee of Lee Building Company, to bring the two-story design to life, matching materials with the plan required careful calculations. "I remember the architect asking me if we had enough timbers to build what he drew," Greg says. "It was close, but we made it work."

Initially, the building team assumed they would be dealing with oak, but various species were discovered as they begin to mill the antique timbers. "There were some hickory, black walnut, maple, beech and ash," recalls Greg. "It's not every day you get that variety. It was a really fun job."

Not ones to sit back and just observe the action, Bill and Mikki got in on the construction process, helping brush, pressure wash and stain the timbers. "They were very hands-on," says Ross. "We were a pretty tight family putting this place together; everybody got along, worked together and shared the vision."

With building behind them and the home in full swing as a springboard for their retirement adventures,

The home is “fairly orthogonal” says Ross of his design, but the covered entry set at a 45-degree angle gives it a special edge. “The house kind of wraps around you, and the covered entry and porch shelter you and funnel you towards the entrance.” Once guests are through the front door, the dining room’s picture window, which delivers stunning mountain views, is immediately on display.



Mikki is proud to say they nailed that vision. Wherever life takes them, coming home is always the best part of the experience. “Every time we walk in the house, you get this warm, comfortable and welcoming feeling, and it’s like ‘Oh my gosh, we’re home,’” she shares. “We look at each other, and say, ‘Why did we ever leave?’”

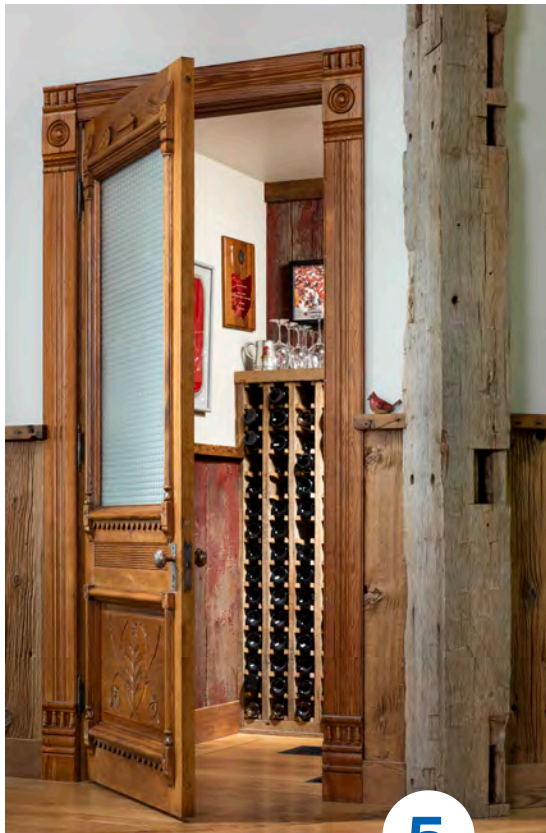
right The home’s abundance of outdoor living spaces culminates with the screened porch, which features cushioned seating centered around a wood-burning fireplace. “The Lukens are outdoorsy people, so they can be outside in the shoulder season late in the fall and early in the spring and still be comfortable around the fire,” states Ross.



This is Lukens' second timber home! See their 962 s.f. cabin at cabinlife.com/lukens-cabin



Montana's version of dinner and a show: A big picture window in the dining room delivers stunning views of Whitefish Mountain Range. Overhead, a custom light fixture is made from a hay harpoon hook sourced from the same Ohio barn as the home's timber frame.





1 A covered patio provides a welcoming place to dine al fresco rain or shine. Clear sightlines to pristine national forest land make outdoor meals feel like a five-star affair, no matter what's on the menu. **2** The 19th-century mahogany furnishings in the primary bedroom are prized family heirlooms. "I had three great uncles, old guys who all smoked pipes and owned a furniture store," shares Bill. "The bed, armoire, two dressers and a giant picture frame all came from them." **3** A well-placed window in the primary bathroom's walk-in shower preserves privacy while also ensuring the homeowners don't miss a minute of the views. **4** The sliding barn door leading to the home's guest bedrooms and bathrooms includes the original track and hardware from the Ohio barns but is most notable for its signature red color. The rest of the home's doors were made by the builder onsite from 2-by-8-foot barn rafters. **5** The entrance to the wine room features a hand-carved Pennsylvania Dutch door with original hardware. **6** A ladder entry isn't the biggest surprise of the home's lower level. Rather than blasting out a rock face that intruded into the walk-out basement, the couple decided to keep it. The area now houses an extra seating area, sauna and storage space, while the rock doubles as a conversation piece and indoor jungle gym for the Lukens' grandchildren.