

BY CAROL THUERBACH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALPINE LOG HOMES/ROBERT BROWN



# A Tahoe TREASURE



“**T**he design of this home grew from the likes and dislikes — mostly the dislikes — the homeowner had for her previous house on the lake,” says Tahoe-based architect Sherry Guzzi. “The homeowner seemed to always be complaining about it, so one day her youngest daughter suggested she build a home that would make her happy.”

Thus a spectacular home on Lake Tahoe was conceived. In this instance, the “addition by subtraction” approach worked with the homeowner, because she had very clear-cut ideas on what the home should not include.

“When we first discussed the project, it was paramount that this house not be high or soaring; she wanted it placed close to the ground, to nestle into the landscape,” Guzzi says. “She did not want it to feel tall and remote, and she did not want it to have steep stairs, which were some of the issues she didn’t like about the other house. In the new design, she sought easier access for family and pets so that all could enjoy the natural world that surrounds the house.”

Tucked onto a hillside overlooking the Lake Tahoe basin, the house sits on 16 wooded acres. “We sited the house to take full advantage of the views,” says Guzzi. “However, those views are toward the southwest, the direction from which most of the storms come and which gets the most afternoon sun.” Knowing of those two important weather conditions, the homeowner and

**ABOVE:** Decks extend the full length of the house with a series of French doors that open to the outside and to the wide vistas of the Tahoe basin. **OPPOSITE:** Crowning the outdoor fireplace is a hand-carved mantel that depicts fish and stones on the lake bottom. Off to the side is a barbecue and sink, providing a convenient area for preparing and serving al fresco meals.





The low profile of the home is designed to provide a more "human" scale. Rather than towering interior peaks, the spacious rooms focus on the view. The architect designed the floor plan to provide each room with either a large view of Lake Tahoe or an opening to the outdoors with a door, sliding door, balcony, or deck.







Guzzi decided that the house would have porches that would protect the house but not obstruct the views.

### Logging On

Once Guzzi and the homeowner had the preliminary design mapped out, Alpine Log Homes was contracted to provide the handcrafted log structure. The homeowner chose the company because of its environmentally-sound practice of using only dead timber. "No healthy trees were harvested to build this house," she says.

The log shell was built according to Guzzi's specifications at Alpine's plant in Victor, Montana. Each log was hand-peeled, and the entire home hand-assembled. After the last timber – the ridgepole – was in place, the logs were numbered, then loaded onto flatbed trucks, and shipped to the Tahoe building site.

The exterior details and landscaping were a collab-

oration between the homeowner, Guzzi and general contractor Alan Richards, Alpine Log Homes, and landscape architect Brent Thrans.

Before any craftsmanship could be applied to the house, the problem of accessing the site had to be solved. Four weeks and a 20-foot retaining wall later, the driveway was installed and work on the house began.

Key to the success of a house this size and complexity was the general contractor, Alan Richards of Incline Village, Nevada. Richards and his team of craftsmen and subcontractors spent nearly three years completing the 10,000-square-foot house. There were, however, no horror stories that are often associated with lengthy, multifaceted projects like this one. "The homeowner understands and appreciates quality craftsmanship, and she knew it would take time," says Guzzi.

**ABOVE:** A cozy seating arrangement is positioned around the hearth with an adjacent game table with four chairs. **OPPOSITE:** The great room is the public room, used for entertaining, visiting, and taking in the astounding views. It's divided into multi-seating areas for large groups and parties.





**ABOVE LEFT:** The corner location of the breakfast room ensures that it is always bathed in sunlight. The round table is by Woodland Furniture Co. and is hand-painted with a pine motif. **ABOVE RIGHT:** In the kitchen, Alpine's distinctive log details in the ceiling are highlighted by a large skylight. Windows span the length of the room for wonderful light and for views of Lake Tahoe and the woodlands below. Oak cabinets are topped with granite and the floors are Nevada quartzite.



"She allowed us so much freedom," says Richards. "She was always open to innovations and creative ideas that we might come up with. She had a dream, and all of us who worked on the house shared in that dream."

### Interior Planning

The owner also had specific ideas for the inside of her dream home. She asked architect Guzzi to keep the spaces dramatic but in human scale — no towering ceilings so often seen in mountain settings. For the interior design, the homeowner contacted an old friend, Jan Gardner, of Carmel, California. The two had worked together on the owner's previous home in Carmel.

Gardner explains, "I had never designed anything like this before, and I voiced that to the client. Her reply was a joyful, 'Well, then we will have fun learning together!'"

From the beginning, Gardner took the lead from her client who wanted the log home to be "refined," not Western or Cowboy. "I banned any plaid fabrics, log furniture, Native American rugs, or traditional log home motifs," she says.

"My client wanted it to be elegant but casual. She

has large extended family and a host of dogs and cats. The house had to be easy-going."

Gardner and her daughter, Julie Gardner-Chesney, teamed up on this project. "We listened to the client and we listened to the environment," she says. The color scheme is shades of sage, taupe, rust, gold, sand, celadon, and cream.

"The key to decorating a log home is to understand the scale," says Gardner. For example, in the great room Gardner and her daughter chose sofas and armchairs that have strong, clear lines. The design team also created the iron chandeliers with rawhide shades, repeated in several rooms of the house.

They selected large-scale furniture throughout the house for its balance, comfort, and pleasing proportions. Gardner chose textiles like wool tapestries, chenille, paisleys, leather, and hand-woven rugs that are durable, that won't easily show wear, yet they are soft and comfortable to the touch.

### Accentuating the Natural Touch

An elaborate yet natural-looking landscape was installed by Thrans who brought in 50-ton rocks and a small forest of aspen trees to augment the hillside setting. A stream with waterfalls now meanders





The dining area is located on the opposite side of the great room fireplace. The table and chairs are from the Guy Chaddock collection. The chairs have leather seats and fabric backs.



## What Is Standing Dead Timber?

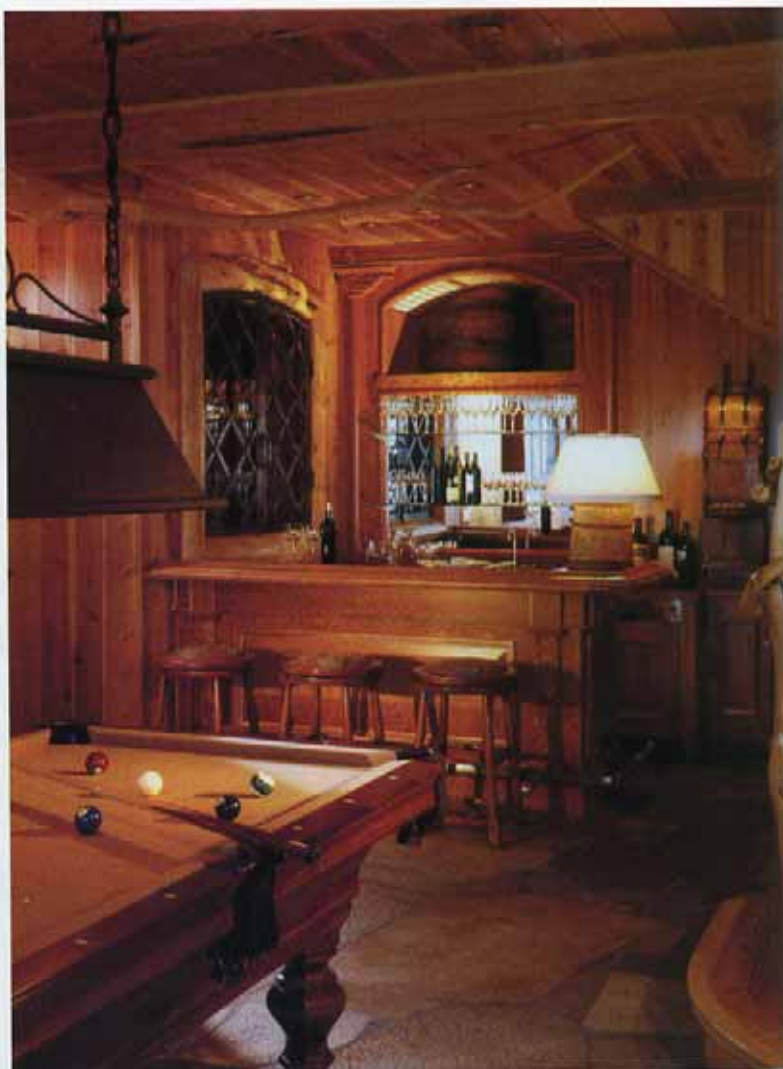
"Standing dead timber" is the term used to describe logs that have been either beetle-killed, frost-killed, or fire-killed.

Alpine Log Homes was one of the first major log home manufacturers to utilize this ecological method of harvesting logs. Some logs are naturally killed by the pine beetle, which bores into the cambium layer of the tree and virtually cuts off its lifeline of food. The wood itself is not compromised and dries naturally, providing a great source of timber for log homes.

Fires also provide natural sources of standing dead timber. Trees are "suffocated" during these lightning-induced fires and loggers harvest the old to make way for the young trees.

Logs brought into the Alpine Log Homes yard are moisture-tested and must be 19% moisture or less, tested both butt & tip. If the wood doesn't reach the minimum, it's racked until it meets the standard.

**RIGHT:** Family and guests enjoy gathering in the lower level family room where there is a wine bar and pool table. The iron gates in the bar area open into a climate-controlled wine cellar. Some of Alan Richards' handiwork can be seen on the ceiling above the bar and along the stairway.



**ABOVE:** On the door leading into the Media Room, the homeowner commissioned an artist to paint a likeness of her mother inside the "Box Office."  
**LEFT:** During the winter months, the Media Room is the choice hangout after a day on the slopes.



Guzzi added interest to the decks and porches that span the length of the house by varying their width. Elevations also change with steps up and down. Several decks are open and others are covered. Even the railings have different designs.





The stone garage is set into the hillside in order to maintain a low profile. From the front, the house appears to be only one story.



- ▲ Several areas in the home were detailed with a palisades log design, which is an Adirondack-style application of the logs that are installed vertically. This breaks up the horizontal line of the home and provides visual interest. Here it is applied to the dormer above the garage and can be seen in the patio area.

The home's entry gate was custom-designed and crafted of steel and logs. It is topped with a metal silhouette depicting the surrounding mountains.







**LEFT:** On the upper deck, designer Jan Gardner created a special place for reflection and relaxation with a comfortable chaise lounge and overstuffed cushions. **BELOW LEFT:** "The Little Garden Gate" at the side of the house offers access to the lush landscaping – the ponds, stream, waterfalls, and flower gardens – that border the house.

around the house, providing a calming sound.

A series of French doors from each room on the main floor opens to 2,000 square feet of covered decks. The great room, kitchen, master bedroom and spa room each have large gables with overhangs that open up the spaces, allowing in light and views.

"You can see the lake from every single room in the house," says the homeowner.

Chris Bishop of Alpine Log Homes comments on the success of this project, "We had a dream team — the architect, the builder, the log company, the landscape designer, the interior designer, and the homeowner — that continually worked together and collaborated to make this all come together with such harmony." 🌲

**LOG PRODUCER:** Alpine Log Homes Inc., Victor, MT. **ARCHITECT:** Sherry Guzzi, AIA, Tahoe City, CA. **BUILDER:** Alan Richards, Incline Village, NV. **INTERIOR DESIGN:** Jan Gardner and Associates, Carmel, CA. **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Acanthus Studio Inc., Sacramento, CA