

Going with the Grain: *A Look Inside The Retreat Cabin*



*Story by Josh Baldwin
Photos by Timothy Luce*

MARK BOWE IS AN ARTIST. His canvas is only a bit larger than most. When you first pull up to his hand-crafted masterpiece of a home, the gravitas of history is palpable.

Constructed with the utmost attention to historical detail and aesthetic, the Retreat Cabin, located in the new development of the same name in Greenbrier County, is built primarily with antique, hand hewn logs and timber. Some of the structure is composed of completely recycled buildings, each one rescued from their dilapidated state along some lonely country road.

In fact, Bowe's process begins behind the wheel of his truck.

"You'd be hard pressed to find a road within a 500 mile radius that I haven't scoured. Then again, we've been doing this awhile," says Bowe.

Bowe is referencing his business, Antique Cabins and Barns, to which he brings over 10 years of experience building structures and interiors all over the country, including homes in Colorado, Texas, and West Virginia. A particularly proud moment for the company was being contracted to reproduce the famous log cabin from Hodgenville, Kentucky where Abraham Lincoln was born.



Right: This turnstile staircase leads to the second floor bedroom and loft area. Opposite: Closeups show that detail is key.

The reproduction was commissioned by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois and the cabin now sits at the entrance to the museum.

"We have done many museum projects, however I feel that replicating such an historic cabin was a real honor and the most significant of any," says Bowe. "We were selected among all other log cabin companies and this certainly went a long way in legitimizing our company and our efforts."

The Retreat Cabin, however, has become Bowe's benchmark for craftsmanship. For one reason, he wasn't only building another home for his business, but this time around he was building his own future dwelling place, along with wife Cindy and son Atticus.

"Knowing that this was going to be the place we called home made me realize that I needed to begin using some of the vintage materials we have saved for years, including the authentic log cabin," says Bowe.

After securing the proper structures, beams, and logs, from throughout the continent, Bowe then set to work with designer

Diane Lohman, sketching out ideas on paper until the dream transitioned into its first draft of reality. Lohman, whose work has recently been featured in *Architectural Digest*, sketched out a contemporary design based on the traditional pioneer cabins of the 1850s.

"In conceiving the Retreat Cabin, we sought to marry the historical aspects of the rustic log cabin with the techniques of immigrant stone masons which have been handed down over many generations," says Lohman.

At 2000 square feet, the cabin has three bedrooms, as well as three baths. Once the plans were readied, Bowe called in Universal Construction to help build what would ultimately become the premier example of what he and his

Right: The master bedroom. Opposite: The living room. Notice the 20 inch Poplar logs that make up the main structure. This cabin was reclaimed from farmland in central West Virginia.





A TURNSTILE STAIRCASE WITH WROUGHT IRON BALUSTERS LEADS FROM THE KITCHEN UP TO THE LOFT AREA. UPSTAIRS IS THE GUEST BEDROOM, AS WELL AS A STUDY AREA THAT OVERLOOKS THE MAIN LIVING ROOM. THE BANISTER IS A ROUGH CUT MADE OF A HAND HEWN BARN BEAM FROM KENTUCKY.



DOWNSTAIRS IS THE BOWE'S LAUNDRY AREA AND GARAGE. THEY ALSO HAVE A WINE CELLAR WHERE THE TEMPERATURE STAYS THE SAME REGARDLESS OF THE SEASON. THE RETREAT CABIN WON THE WEST VIRGINIA BUILDER'S ASSOCIATION "BEST IN SHOW 2005" AWARD.

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company are capable of.

The front entrance to the cabin is a recycled structure from central West Virginia, built with strong poplar dating back to 1855. These mammoth 20 inch face logs are secured with dovetail notches at the corners.

Once you enter through the custom built chestnut door with blacksmith hinges, you will notice a large -cut, stone fireplace, built with locally quarried stone, which acts as the focal point to this living room area. A cathedral ceiling rises around twenty feet high and a loft area above overlooks this main space. Accessorized with copper wall sconces and handmade tables and chairs, the room is as inviting and comfortable as it is rich with detail.



The lighting sources themselves are handmade, cooper replications from the same period of the cabin itself.

In this living room, Bowe has laid wide plank, antique chestnut flooring reclaimed from the farm country of Ohio. "When we were laying the floor," explains Bowe, "we sought to replicate the look and feel of what you might actually find in a cabin from the 1800s. We even made sure it creaked when you walked across it."

But in the bedrooms you will find mostly antique oak floors. The bedrooms are drywalled and then complimented with barnwood trims, and the master has a built-in window seat. All of the closet doors are custom made from barn materials. The master bath is comprised of custom a slate shower and a clawfoot bath tub.

The most historically eclectic part of this house is its porches. The two-inch thick heart pine floorboards are reclaimed barn boards that Bowe secured from a structure in Gettysburg. The beams and ceiling decking are made up of hay barns from Indiana and Ontario and the 100-year old rafters are recovered tier poles out of tobacco barns in Virginia.

With all of this emphasis on antique logs and timber, the Bowes sought to modernize certain aspects of their home without sacrificing its historical aesthetic.

"We wanted the finished cabin to look as if it was restored on this site. In doing so, we made sure the flow from the historic cabin into the kitchen and bedrooms represented a natural transition,

as when kitchens and baths were added to original structures later on in the early 1900s."

The kitchen itself is adorned with a lighted pot rack surrounded by cabinets made of wormy chestnut and built-in appliances. Installing a Kohler decorative farmhouse sink with copper faucets ensures the advantages of modern quality while retaining the same sense of timelessness that the rest of the house imbibes. The flooring is made up of a darker, squared African slate, and the kitchen table itself is also a Bowe creation.

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"We have the best crew and every member of our company has a talent. Recently we had a documentary film maker from New York City create a character driven reality show focusing on restoration. Since we have such a loveable and talented crew, I have a good feeling about the pilot that was filmed last year and currently being pitched to the networks."

The Retreat Cabin is a prime example of the ways in which modern construction techniques can blend environmental and historical aspects of the surrounding landscape into one cohesive living space. Bowe's resourcefulness demonstrates his sensitivity to these aspects, and sets a standard in the evolving popularity of reclaiming the vestiges of a time past.