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Stone retaining walls with plantings and a wooden fence along the property's perimeter complete the rustic setting of Rick and Betty Blair's cabin.



Living in Beauty

A TINY CABIN TRIGGERS A BIG CHANGE FOR A COUPLE WHO FOUND PEACE OF MIND AND A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE.

After years of helping others lead balanced and harmonious lives, Florida psychotherapists Rick and Betty Blair decided the time had come to concentrate on their own mental well-being.

This meant escaping the hectic pace of the city. So they thought of their favorite vacation spot in northeastern Georgia, where the living was leisurely and peaceful. And this is where they decided to build their tranquil getaway—a small, rustic cabin in the middle of an old apple orchard. With lake and mountain views, it was exactly what the doctor ordered and was also the catalyst behind the Blairs' life-changing decision.

STORY BY Paulette Dague
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Franklin and Esther Schmidt



While researching log home companies, Rick and Betty found themselves able to take advantage of a great opportunity that allowed them to leave behind the frenzied pace and congestion of the city and take a new direction with their careers. “One thing led to another,” Rick says, “and before we knew it, we had our own log dealership.” They named it Apple Orchard Log Homes, appropriately, and became a certified distributor for Honest Abe Log Homes, the company they chose to build their new retreat.

The change wasn’t without uncertainty, however. It took some time and sleepless nights before Rick and Betty were ready to give up their jobs and move to Georgia full-time. But once they decided to do it, there was no looking back.

What began as a getaway cabin became the Blairs’ full-time home where they could relish the views of the Tusquittee Mountains of North Carolina and Lake Chatuge.

Apple of Their Eye

Since their original plan started out as a simple vacation home, Rick and Betty were thinking small. Honest Abe’s Monticello floorplan fit the bill with its cozy 624 square feet. Despite the size, the design provides ample living space on the main level, plus a sleeping loft above. The couple did make a few changes, insisting on an additional bath for the loft bedroom (midnight trips to the downstairs bathroom weren’t part of the plan). They also created a steep, narrow staircase so there could be a view of the fireplace from all corners of the main level.

Because of the home’s size, the design’s focus was on maximizing space.



ABOVE AND LEFT: Hand-hewn logs and beams, thick chinking and wide-plank pine floors form the backdrop for a delightfully decorated living space. The open floorplan is bathed in light from windows on every wall.



Bentwood rockers provide a cozy seating arrangement to enjoy the fieldstone fireplace.



This meant a pantry under the landing of the stairway and limiting storage areas to the loft level so as not to take away from main-level living. “Every inch is used,” Betty says. “It’s extremely well-planned.”

Rustic, but Comfortable

Rick and Betty had a vision of authentic Appalachia for their home. “We wanted a back-in-the-woods cabin that looked as though it had been built 100 to 200 years ago,” Rick says. “It had to be in sync with the area as well as our values.”

To achieve this, they used hand-hewn eastern white pine logs with a square cut and dovetail corners. Rick remembers looking at a lot of cabins with hand-hewn logs, and when he realized that he could achieve that look without spending considerably more money, his mind was set. The toasty hazelnut stain and wide bands of chinking visible both inside and out com-

OPPOSITE: Decorative elements include antique farm implements and kitchen utensils complemented by red-and-white printed linens. **RIGHT:** Though thoroughly modern, the kitchen features cabinets with custom pine fronts in keeping with the cabin’s rustic nature.



AWARD WINNERS

Rick and Betty Blair gave up thriving careers as psychotherapists in southern Florida to take a chance on a more rural lifestyle in Georgia—a big decision, but one they haven’t regretted. Before making the move permanently, the couple became dealers for Honest Abe Log Homes and began selling log homes part-time from their home in Florida.

“We knew they’d do well at this,” says Jeff Clements of Honest Abe. “They’re intelligent and great with people. But they’ve done even better than we expected.” In fact, the Blairs have done so well with their dealership that the company has honored them recently with their Shining Star Award—an accolade presented annually to a newer dealer that has tremendous potential. From counselors to log home dealers, the Blairs made a big leap, but one that has paid off.

-P.D.



The Blairs did much of the finish work on the little cabin themselves, and take pride in the finished product.



A loft bedroom has a convenient half bath, which the Blairs added to the original floorplan to eliminate mid-night trips to the downstairs bath.

plete the rugged appeal and make the logs one of the cabin's best features, according to Jeff Clements, a dealer and manager for Honest Abe. (Rick and Betty actually did the chinking themselves—a huge undertaking—along with much of the finishing work.)

Just like the logs, the home's wide-plank flooring is pine, and the tongue-and-groove ceiling is made from a lighter, white pine. On the main level, hand-

hewn beams overhead create the cozy appeal of lower ceilings and a matching hand-hewn mantel tops off the fireplace built from local fieldstone. To tie the interior design with the exterior, this same fieldstone also is mounted on the home's foundation. Kitchen cabinets are stock, but dressed with custom pine doors to match the floors, logs and ceilings.

The interior design—Betty's sister's contribution—is in keeping with their rustic vision and borrows from the apple-orchard theme. Red and blue floral and geometric-print cushions soften the natural wood furniture, while decorative plates and old-fashioned tools decorate

the walls and break up the linear feel of the square logs. Rick and Betty also are fond of antiques and have filled their space with beloved old pieces that add a personal touch to their home.

It's these combined elements that have created such an inviting space. "The walls seem as if they're holding you in. You're enveloped by warmth," Betty says. And now that the Blairs have built a larger primary residence next door, they can use the original cabin for family and friends and as a rental unit for vacationers. Rick notes, "It's wonderful—when we have guests, they have a private space."

The Good Life

Though there was no way to tell how much Rick and Betty's lives would change when they started planning their log cabin, the couple has never been more satisfied. Their days are much less stressful now, and they don't have to drive as much. And when they do drive, no one is trying to run them off the road. "People around here don't do that, because they know they'll see you around sooner or later," Rick says.

"We changed our careers, our climate, our lives. The cabin did that for us," Betty says. Now, they get to enjoy the fruits of a growing business and the simple lifestyle they'd always dreamed about. As for the career change, it turned out to be not so different after all, since they still get to help others find balance and harmony with a remedy that they know works—building and living in your dream. "Our cabin and this community allow us to live in peace and beauty," Betty says. ■



What's a country cabin without a porch? And these Adirondack-style rockers are a comfortable way to enjoy the view of Lake Chatuge.

HOME DETAILS



Main Level



Upper Level

- Square footage: 624
- Package price: \$27,000
- Log dealer: Apple Orchard Log Homes

- Log producer: Honest Abe Log Homes

For more information, see Resources on page 111.