

2009 | ANNUAL BUYER'S GUIDE

# Country's Best Log Homes®

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# Log home *lineage*

A North Carolina couple uses a lifetime of experience to build a classic log home

By Ronda Mollica > Photos by Roger Wade > Styling by Debra Grahl



# 1

How do you build a great log home? Growing up in the business can certainly help. So can living in nine different log homes while growing up. You can also marry someone with the same passion discipline to oversee log-home projects.

Nicole Robinson and her husband Joel married 13 years ago after he retired from the Air Force. They knew someday they'd be involved with the North Carolina-based log-home business that Nicole's parents started back in 1989, Log Homes of America. "I grew up in a log home and can't imagine living in anything else," Nicole says. "Luckily, my husband is a cowboy at heart and loves everything that goes with it, including log homes."

Her years close to the business influenced what she wanted and did not want in a log home. "We took a traditional floor plan [the Park Vista] and tweaked it a bit to our tastes," she says. The customization included lots of glass and light, additional outdoor living spaces, and an enlarged master wing off the back of the home.

The Robinsons then found a 29-acre property near Boone, North Carolina, that had room for horses, barns, and the family home. "We were lucky to find such a beautiful property that had forested hills, but also space for a pasture and home — sort of a ranch-type complex," Joel says.

As the couple started to map out what they wanted, they began by building a small carriage house/garage that they lived in while taking their time to build the main home.

"Just like everyone else, Joel and I had a budget to work within,

RIGHT: A recent addition to the Robinsons' backyard is this raised outdoor room with a covered area, fire pit, comfortable seating, and an open area for soaking in the spa tub.

BELOW: The back deck and newly built outdoor room offer added space for entertaining and outdoor meals. Log walls feature traditional dovetail notching and drawknife finish.





especially with a child in college. That's why we built the home ourselves," says Nicole. "Since our home would be our model, we wanted it to be as perfect as we could make it."

The Robinsons hired a local crew to assemble the log shell, and they finished the interior themselves.

"We had a few hiccups along the way that kept us on our toes," says Nicole. "This included dealing with some damage to wood from a chemical the crew used to melt ice on the second floor during the winter. The chemical did the job, but it stained the

**"It's hard to feel out of place in a log home. You can see why we wanted to build one of our own."**

— Nicole Robinson

floor decking and beams below that was visible from the first floor. I have fond memories of sanding and finishing every deck board and beam to remove the stain."

As they watched the home grow from the ground up, there were more alterations that transformed their house into the exceptional and efficient home it became. "I changed the stairway from a normal L-shaped to an interesting 45-degree angle," says Nicole. "This new angle took up more space, but added more 'wow' to the great room."

The stairway was built with Douglas fir rails and aluminum balusters that are powder-coated to look like wrought iron. This material was easier to work with and more economical and was used on all the railings inside and out. "I like the contrast of metal and wood in this area," says Nicole. "It's always good to introduce other elements into a log home."

As planned, the Robinsons wanted lots of glass in every room, and especially the great room. "My father, the lumberman, reminded us that we're in the log home business, not the glass business," Nicole laughs, "but we love the outdoors and all our windows."

The great room has large fixed panes in the peak of the gable end

**RIGHT:** The 45-degree angled stairway creates more drama in the great room than a more common 90-degree turn. The metal balusters are a powder-coated aluminum that are made to look like wrought iron, but are much easier to work with.

**CENTER:** The spacious great room is full of natural textures that provide warmth and casual elegance. The occasional chairs are made with a leather seat with a southwest tapestry back and dark stained legs and arms. The dark accent is carried throughout the home with the use of wrought iron lighting and accent pieces along with aluminum railings, which all contrast nicely with the white pine



**BELOW:** Joel Robinson and his dog Sam on the roof during construction. Sam learned to climb the ladder on his own and ended up on the roof more than once.

**BOTTOM:** The dining room area is kept bright and bold with red chair seats and a red, green and blue southwest-inspired rug.





and two sets of French doors below that open to the wraparound deck. The front of the home has two picture windows with lower crank-out windows on either side of the 23-foot fireplace. “Having an awning window at the bottom of the picture window brings in the fresh air, but doesn’t block the view,” Nicole says.

The master suite was added to the back of the home. This wing has windows on three sides for great views and comfortable cross breezes. The single-story wing allows for a grand cathedral ceiling with exposed beams.

The master bath has a raised spa tub for incredible views of the back yard. The tiles start at the floor and work their way up the side of the Jacuzzi tub to the darker diamond accent border. Light is provided by a delicate chandelier.

The kitchen is a model of efficiency. The wormy maple cupboards are 42 inches to take advantage of the tall ceilings and the tall homeowners. The lower cabinetry is made up of mostly drawers, which are easier to organize and access.

In addition to the two-tiered working island with five-burner cooktop and breakfast counter, the kitchen possesses a unique butler’s pantry, which hardly looks like a pantry at all. The kitchen counters and cabinets continue uninterrupted into a small room that wraps behind the refrigerator. This space holds the same tall cabinetry, but with pull-out shelves so that cooking appliances such as mixers, processors, and waffles irons can be within easy reach.

One of Nicole’s “must-haves” was a quartz kitchen counter top. “To afford this, I had to scale back somewhere else,” she says. “I did some bargain hunting and found inexpensive vanity tops to use in the bathrooms.”

“We also decided to finish the stonework on the island ourselves to save a few dollars,” adds Joel. “This wasn’t as easy as it looked and we would definitely recommend that homeowners assess what skills they have and hire a professional if they’re unsure if they can complete a project.”

The home is beautifully decorated in Western

## Kitchen design

Kitchen cabinets are a major investment and have a large effect on the home’s interior design. One of the most important factors to consider when selecting cabinetry is one that is commonly overlooked: function. Too often homeowners select cabinetry based solely on looks, giving little or no thought to how it will work.

**Here are four steps to help you create an efficient, functional kitchen:**

**1. Find your “kitchen style.”** How do you use your kitchen? Think about your style of cooking and how many people use the kitchen. Consider any special needs your family might have and the non-cooking-related activities that take place in the kitchen.

**2. Take inventory.** Most kitchens contain a lot of stuff, including cooking utensils, appliances, food, supplies, dishware and so on. Take inventory of all these items and prioritize them by how often you use them. This will help you decide where to store everyday items versus seasonal items, and you may even find some things you don’t need at all.

**3. Think “zones.”** Almost every kitchen has six major functions: planning, meal prep, cooking, eating, cleaning and storage. In your new kitchen, try to designate a zone for each of these functions, and design your floor plan accordingly.

**4. Select solutions.** Select cabinetry that fits the way you live in your kitchen. Choose cabinets that will give you easy access to all the items you need. Look for special cabinets, components and accessories that add functionality to your kitchen — a pantry rack to maximize your food storage; a roll-out tray divider for easy access to baking sheets; and an under-sink roll-out rack to organize cleaning supplies.

— Doug Austin,  
Manager of Advanced Design,  
Merillat Industries



The kitchen has many hidden features, including a butler’s pantry behind the refrigerator wall. Cooks have easy access to appliances and mixing ingredients. The handy double oven is at the entrance to this space, while the five-burner cooktop is located in the island and kept out of view by the raised breakfast bar. The upper cabinets measure 42 inches for added storage and the lower cabinets are large drawers for access to pots and pans. Lots of under-cabinet and rafter lighting was installed to provide light into all corners of the room. The rough-cut Eldorado limestone on the bottom of the island matches the stone found on the fireplace.



ABOVE: The master wing is a private getaway for the Robinsons — it has more than 500 square feet of space that includes a luxurious bathroom, walk-in closet, cathedral ceilings, and French doors that lead to the rear deck. “We close the double doors and leave the world behind,” says Nicole.

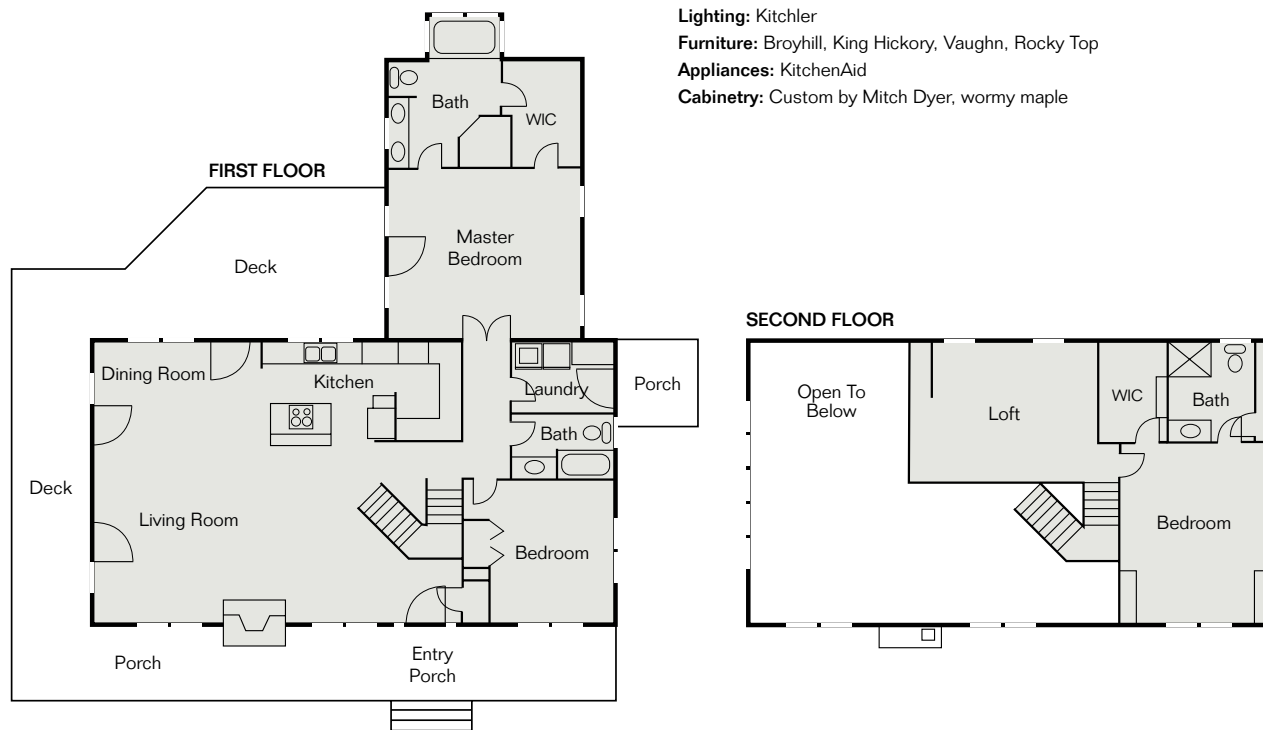
ABOVE RIGHT: To capture the views while taking a soak, the master tub was raised several inches from its original elevation. Two different tile colors were used: a brown chocolate on the floor and up the sides of the tub topped with a row of neutral beige tile and a Southwest border of green, brown and beige.



style with pieces of local art used to punctuate each room. “We have a wonderfully bold horse print that greets you as you enter the home,” says Nicole. “We have statues, saw blade art, photography and paintings that honor the Western lifestyle. We specifically installed lighting fixtures to highlight these works.”

Equally enjoyable are the outdoor spaces were customized into the design. “Each year, we try to add a new improvement to the house,” explains Joel. “Recently we added a raised outdoor room in our backyard that has a spa tub and fire pit for entertaining and stargazing. This area gives us another space to entertain. We find ourselves outside more than ever.”

This is in addition to the large deck and front covered porch that offers everyone a place to watch the wildlife and the horses. “A log home is not complete without a covered porch and rocking chair,” Nicole says. “It’s one of the best seats in the house.”



## RESOURCES

**Square footage:** 2,774

**# bedrooms:** 3

**# bathrooms:** 3

**Producer:** Log Homes of America. For free information on this plan, circle 048 on the Reader Service Card or visit [www.loghomesinfo.net/RS](http://www.loghomesinfo.net/RS).

**Model name:** Park Vista

**Builder:** Nicole and Joel Robinson

**Wood:** White pine square log, dovetail notching

**Windows:** Vetter

**Front Door:** Moulding Associates

**Interior Doors:** Sierra

**Tile:** American Olean, Florida Tile, Shaw

**Flooring:** Ash hardwood (prefinished)

**Balusters:** Decorators

**Stain:** Sikkens

**Architectural stone:** ElDorado, Limestone Savannah

**Mason:** James Trivette

**Fireplaces:** Custom masonry, wood burning

**Lighting:** Kitchler

**Furniture:** Broyhill, King Hickory, Vaughn, Rocky Top

**Appliances:** KitchenAid

**Cabinetry:** Custom by Mitch Dyer, wormy maple