



Cottage in the Woods

A historic home gets extended life with an addition that marries past and present.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER WADE

The pond reflects the 19th-century cabin, the connecting corridor and two-level barn-like main house that were built by OakBridge Timber Framing of Howard, Ohio.



The two buildings are connected by a 264-square-foot covered hall that serves as the perfect transition between centuries.

Opposite bottom: *The timber-frame main house has a sandstone base and a wooden roof. The wooden doors slide over the large windows. The garage, which is carved out of the base, looks like an old-fashioned carriage house.*

Opposite top: *The exterior of the log cabin, which has a chestnut porch, remains largely unchanged since it was built in the mid 1800s.*

Above: *A collection of rocking chairs in the main house's family room invite everyone to bask in the sunshine flooding in through the bank of windows.*

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 1800s, ABOUT THE TIME covered wagons were carrying adventurous pioneers westward, a home was raised in the woods near Danville, Ohio, beside a picturesque pond. For more than 150 years, the cottage stood in the wilderness, amidst the coyotes, foxes, turkeys and white-tailed deer.

But before the 20th century ended, a family from Columbus, Ohio, discovered the dwelling. Charmed by its quaintness and longevity, they bought it and the 130 surrounding acres, and vowed to give it new life.

Although they wanted more than its 600 square feet, they were so taken with the history

of the Laura Ingalls Wilder-like house that they decided to preserve it, even if it meant compromising their comfort. They had heard about an Amish-owned company in Howard, Ohio, that created new structures using traditional timber framing and joinery. OakBridge Timber Framing, now celebrating its first quarter century, came up with a simple solution that let the family keep its cabin and add onto it.

OakBridge is a family-run business owned by brothers Johnny and Aaron Miller. Their father, Andrew; brother, Neal; and Johnny's son, James, also work there. Other relatives are also employed and more enlisted part-time for large projects.

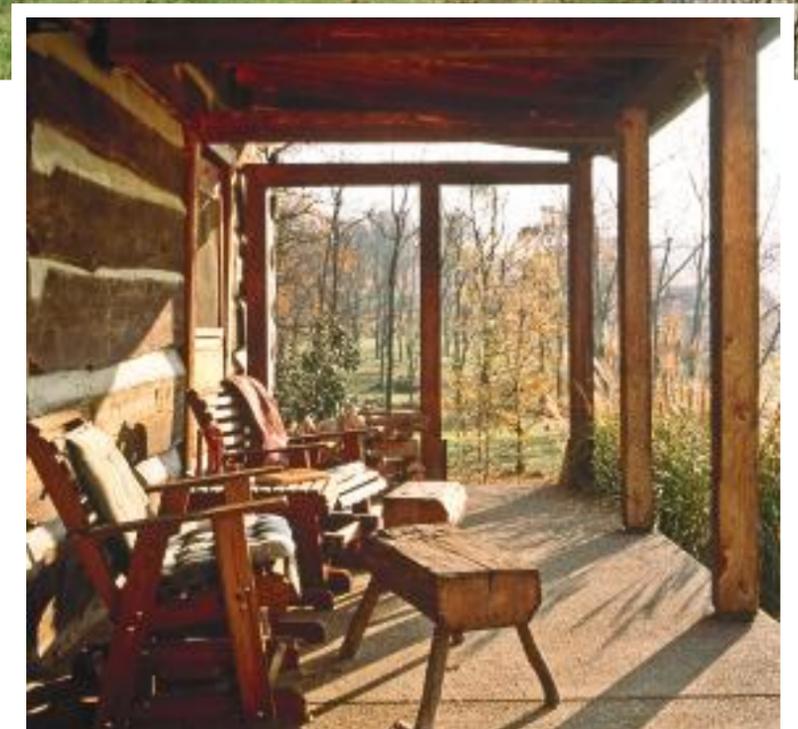


For the Danville project, Johnny and Aaron looked at the lay of the land with the idea of keeping the cabin pretty much as it was the day it was put up. They added a 1,200-square-foot, two-level barn-like main house whose style complements the original structure. It connects the two buildings with a 264-square-foot covered hall that serves as the perfect transition between centuries.

The original structure has a bathroom, sitting room and two bedrooms; the timber-frame main house has a kitchen, dining room and family room on the first floor, and a bathroom and sleeping loft on the second.

"This home, as are all of ours, is highly custom," Johnny says. "We've never done two homes the same; it's not that we can't but that everyone's lifestyle is different. We look at the wish list of clients, but we also feel it is our duty to throw in one or two things that they didn't think of but that we think they may like."

In this case, the main house looks as though it followed the cabin into the woods. Its A-frame structure includes large, barn-like doors that slide together to cover floor-to-ceiling





Left: In the connecting corridor, the oak beams of the timber-frame construction are showcased. The area provides bright, ample space to sit and read; the shelves supply space for books, souvenirs and collections.

Left bottom: In the main house, an island separates the kitchen from the family room. The pendant lights hang from an oak beam to provide illumination for dining.

Opposite: With its oak flooring and beams, the family room in the main house becomes a naturalistic retreat.

windows. On the second level, the sleeping loft, a chic and comfortable space, plays up a hayloft theme.

Inside the main house, exposed oak beams echo the chestnut posts on the little cabin's humble front porch. "The porch is chestnut," Johnny says. "Back then, there was plenty of it in these parts, and it was used because it was very strong and light. It was the most popular wood, but in the early 1900s or so a bug killed all the chestnuts and they haven't recovered. Today, we use oak because we are in the heart of the best oak in the country, but oak is heavier."

The timber-frame construction technique embraced by OakBridge Timber Framing is as rare as the Danville log cabin. Although it is an ancient building method (it dates back to Neolithic times) and it returned into vogue in the 1970s, there are few practitioners.

Most houses in America are stick-built or constructed on site and held together with nails and other fasteners. In timber-frame construction, fewer, larger pieces of wood are needed. The heavy timber is joined with pegged mortise-and-tenon joints, and the frame is pre-cut, making it possible to assemble an entire house on site in only a couple of days. "It is a naturally green process because it uses less wood than a stick-built home," Johnny says.

In keeping with the Amish principle of shunning modern technology, OakBridge Timber Framing has elevated timber-frame construction to an art,



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IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

In keeping with Amish tradition, OakBridge Timber Framing puts a great emphasis on craftsmanship. Framing packages average \$30 to \$40 per square foot erected, and panel packages average \$20 to \$25 per square foot installed. The total price depends on the inside finishes.

The company has its own architect and has put up timber-frame houses all over the country. It raises about 15 houses a year and has a waiting list of about a year.

For more information, write to 20857 Earnest Road, Howard, Ohio, 43028; call (740) 599-5711 or visit oakbridgetimberframing.com.



using hand-held power tools instead of the usual computer numerical-control machinery. "This allows us to do tighter joinery," Johnny explains. "Our focus is on exceptional craftsmanship, and we are known for paying attention to detail. Our joints are pinned with hickory dowels with offset holes so when the pin is driven, everything is pulled extremely tight. And we have incredible quality control because the same crew that crafts it installs it. And everyone who works on it is in our family."

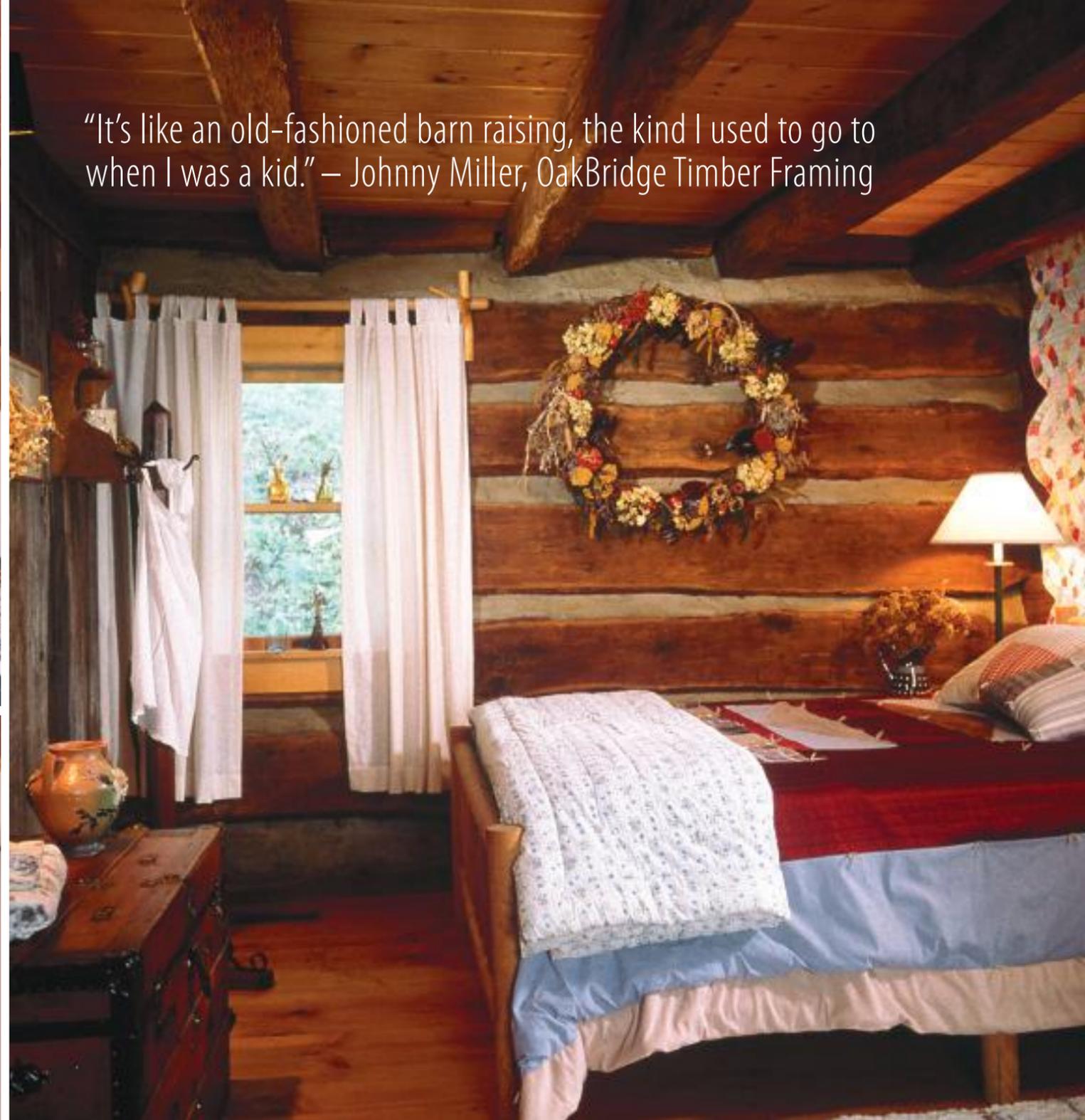
Once the oak or Douglas-fir frame is made, it is transported to the site, where, in as little as two or three days, it is erected on top of the house's sandstone base. "It's like an old-fashioned barn raising, the kind I used to go to when I was a kid," Johnny says. "I remember them well. It's part of my Amish heritage."

After the frame is put in place, it is sheathed in

Above right: *The sleeping-loft bedroom in the main house, which overlooks the family room, is a chic nod to a hayloft.*

Right: *A section of a handmade quilt becomes an art piece when it is hung over an antique chest of drawers in the bedroom of the main house.*

"It's like an old-fashioned barn raising, the kind I used to go to when I was a kid." — Johnny Miller, OakBridge Timber Framing



structural panels of polystyrene laminated between oxboard or chips of glued-together wood. "The panels are nontoxic, light and very efficient," Johnny says. "They are twice as efficient as a Fiberglas wall, so they cut down the heating use by half." The panels of the roof, which usually is made of Eastern white pine, top off the house.

For the Millers, the joy always will be in the work, and the pride will always be in the product.

"Our goal is to grow slightly and grow greener," Johnny

says. "We want to aspire to even higher craftsmanship."

Johnny points out that at 71, his father is still "healthy as a beaver, and he's happy to be putting in nine-hour days. He's always coming up with new techniques."

The Miller family tradition is to strive to be the best. "When we were being brought up, my dad always said, 'If you're going to do something, do it right or don't do it at all,'" Johnny says. "We have chosen to do it right and to make [our work] as perfect as possible." **CB**

Above: *The bedroom in the log cabin combines the past and the present, and offers a rustic yet romantic look and feel.*