



Mark and Margaret Alexander positioned their home on their heavily wooded property for maximum sun exposure.

RIGHT: The long and narrow footprint of this home provides a stunning display for the truss system.



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Picture Perfect

SITUATED ON NEARLY 12 LUSH ACRES IN CONNECTICUT, A WEEKEND GETAWAY PROVES THAT OUTSTANDING DESIGN CAN COME IN SMALL PACKAGES.

Davis Frame Co. photos

I liked the idea of building a home the natural way,” says Mark Alexander, whose appreciation for timber frame homes goes back decades. But a few years ago, he and his wife Margaret decided to build one of their own. With a vision of the perfect vacation home dancing in their heads, they purchased nearly 12 wooded acres in Bridgewater, Connecticut, then set out to find an architect who could literally frame that picture.

The couple selected Ken Wertheim, who himself lives in a timber frame home, to do the honors. “We worked with Ken to design a floorplan that fits how we like to live,” says Mark of his happy trio (including daughter, Catherine, now 10). “We wanted everything on

The Douglas fir timber frame uses traditional mortise-and-tenon joinery held together with oak pegs.



TOP: The stone hearth was designed to resemble an adobe ruin, a nod to the home's Southwestern decor.

ABOVE AND RIGHT: Design elements from the floor to the ceiling divide up the open space, including furniture positioned around area rugs to outline dining and lounging areas.

one level, and we made sure that the entries were placed as close to the ground as possible for easy access to the outdoors year round.”

Margaret, on the other hand, requested that the kitchen go in the back of the house facing east, so the family could enjoy the early sun with their breakfast each morning.

The couple purchased the frame from Davis Frame Co. in Claremont, New Hampshire. They had fallen in love with a Davis Frame home they saw in Connecticut, but what sold them were the company's “friendly and professional service” and their willingness

to take on the couple's complex floor-plan. “We also appreciated that co-founder Jeff Davis would be personally involved in the process,” Mark says.

Davis Frame took Ken's preliminary sketches and developed them into working drawings. “That's a really good way for timber frame companies to work with architects,” says Jeff, who notes that the plans stayed very true to the original concepts and included a few revisions Mark requested. However, a few additional changes were made during construction, which added to the project's cost (see the sidebar on page 47).



ABOVE: White walls reflect natural light to brighten the great room.

OPPOSITE: Pendant lights provide extra illumination for the kitchen's most-used amenities, including the island and sink.

Setting the Scene

The yearlong construction process began in 1998 after Mark hired local construction manager Neal Berko of Four Square Builders. "Neal was very detail-oriented," says Mark. "He was a stickler for doing things the right way."

A conservation area and wetlands-protection buffer on the heavily wooded property (mostly oak, ash and white pine) limited placement of the house to a relatively small area—especially because the Alexanders wanted maximum sun exposure. So before construction could begin, the couple had to obtain a variance from the zoning board to extend the driveway 11 feet into the buffer.



HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES?

Actually, the Alexander home has a whopping nine gables, several of them nested. But that complicated structure, although striking, came at a price. "Any house with lots of corners is going to be more expensive," says Jeff Davis of David Frame Co. "In general, the things that add the most architectural interest tend to cost more."

"Labor can be expensive, and you can run into some unexpected costs—particularly with the electro-mechanical aspect of the project," adds general manager Neal Berko. "And if you make design changes during construction, that will drive up costs."

In the end, Margaret Alexander says the home is everything she and her husband wanted. "You can save money along the way. You don't need a complicated design such as ours to have a beautiful timber frame home." —D.R.S.

The developer, a civil engineer, then produced the driveway. The design approaches the house from the front, loops around an island by the front door that was landscaped with original trees from the property and then wraps around to the garage entrance in back. The developer also provided the home's well and septic system.

Davis Frame erected the Douglas

fir, ridge-beam common-rafter frame, featuring oak-pegged mortise-and-tenon joinery and energy-efficient structural insulated panels, or SIPs. The home's design was rather unusual: a large (almost 3,500 square feet) one-story home with an open floor-plan, a 28-foot-high bridge beam on the ceiling, and an incredible number of windows (33) and doors (nine).



ABOVE: In keeping the home's Southwestern decor, the framing crew hand-cut the through-tenons into a jagged shape, which resembles the pattern of the comforter in the master bedroom.

RIGHT: Despite the interior design motif, the Alexanders opted for French country on the exterior, a better fit for their Connecticut-based home.

Due to these changes—and the related coordination efforts between Neal and the various subcontractors (who were in short supply at the time)—building the home took longer than expected. As the construction schedule changed, the couple had to stay in constant contact with the bank to ensure financing was intact.

“It was a challenging project,” says Neal, “but it was a pretty product when the home was finished.”

Style for the Camera

“The timber frame allowed us to choose any style home we wanted,” notes Mark, who says that he and Margaret love the Southwestern look but worried it would be a tough sell in Connecticut, if they ever decide to move.

The compromise: a French Country exterior married with Southwestern decor for the interior—a surprisingly harmonious match.

The center section of the house consists of the living area, the dining area and a kitchen with an adjacent family room. The master suite and study are to the right of the foyer. And to the left you'll find their daughter Catherine's room, a guest bedroom and access to the garage. Above the garage, there's also a large loft and walk-in attic.

“Standing in the front hall, you can see through the length of the house,” says Mark. In the back, the master suite and guest bedroom jut out to create an attractive sheltered exterior gallery.

One of the most important design elements is the freestanding fireplace that acts as a divider between the dining area and the family room. Pete Coleman, of Coleman Masonry, built it using stone from a Connecticut quarry. “We wanted it to look like something you'd find in an adobe ruin,” Mark says. Coleman also did the stonework on the front of the home's exterior as well as on the terraces.

Other design and decor highlights: lodgepole pine exterior siding; custom 8-foot-tall, double doors with wrought-iron hardware; custom cherry kitchen cabinets; and hand-carved Southwestern-style furniture.

Southwestern-style rugs, collected during the couple's trips to Arizona and New Mexico, adorn several rooms. Granite and marble countertops accent the kitchen and bath areas. And once building was complete, the crew from Davis Frame went through the house and “hand-cut the through-tenons into a jagged shape that played on the Southwestern decor,” Mark says.

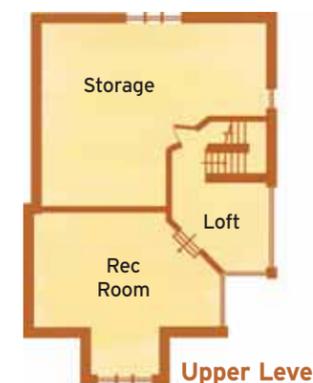


Freeze Frame

The result of this timeless design is a home that's majestic, yet light, open and airy, with white walls setting off shining beams. The many large windows have no curtains—always offering a view of the surroundings, like a painting or a postcard.

If the Alexanders could go back in time, they'd change very few things about the house. “We probably would make the fireplace two-sided, so you could see through from the kitchen to the family room,” says Margaret, “and we'd also make more wall space by eliminating some of the doors leading outside.”

But, overall, the busy couple thinks this timber frame home is picture perfect. Margaret particularly loves the sense of freedom that comes with an open floorplan. “We don't get to spend a lot of time here, so the openness is good for us,” she says. “It helps bring us together.” ■



Upper Level



Main Level

HOME DETAILS

- Square footage: 2,540
 - Architect: Kenneth J. Wertheim
 - General contractor: Four Square Builders
 - Timber producer: Davis Frame Co.
- For more information, see Resources on page 69.*