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REAL ESTATE

A 21st-Century Frontier Home That Lives Off the Land

Drawn by the lure of the American West and low taxes, a Wyoming couple builds a home using primarily local materials like timber and stone

By Adam Bonislowski

Nov. 1, 2018 10:30 a.m. ET

Like a modern-day frontier family, Robert and Jan Hartman built their log home in Jackson, Wyo., with the timber, stone and other materials available in their area.



Jan and Robert Hartman PHOTO: TAYLOR R GLENN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Both the great room and the outside patio feature towering fireplaces built of farmer's stone that came from just across the state line in Montana. A gas fireplace in a sitting room features river rock that's also from Montana. The exterior of the house is clad in half-log siding using Douglas fir and pine sourced from Montana, as well. Inside, bare log

trusses span the ceilings, giving the home a rustic feel. And local craftsman Terry Chambers created the ironwork for the stair railings, light fixtures and fireplace screens.

"Getting this [local stone], the wood for the beams, trying to use material from around here was important for Bob and me," Mrs. Hartman said. "Because we were also helping the Wyoming economy. Why wouldn't you use somebody from here that knows everything about the area?"

Just as many restaurants and grocers have embraced locally grown and raised food, builders and homeowners are touting the benefits of locally sourced construction materials. Some cite environmental reasons, saying local products require less fuel to transport to the job site. That also makes building less expensive. But aesthetics are a big reason homeowners go local, since homes using indigenous materials fit in with nearby homes and the setting.

"I've cut trees down on people's lots and turned them into mantels in their homes so that they felt like they were truly connected right to the land they were living on," said Peter Lee, owner of Teton Heritage Builders, the Jackson-based firm that built the Hartmans' home.

The Hartmans first discovered the area, which sits in the northwest corner of the state just below Yellowstone National Park, when visiting from Scottsdale, Ariz., with their children in 1989. They bought a vacation home there in 1997 and moved to a second, larger home a year and a half later. In 2004, as Mr. Hartman, now 70 years old, was winding down his career as an executive at automotive vocational-school chain Universal Technical Institute, the couple decided to make Jackson their full-time home.

The Hartmans hired Jackson-based Hawtin Jorgensen Architects and Teton Heritage to design

Home Builders Go Local, Local, Local

A look at homes where builders found stone, timber and craftsmen near the job site.



The peaks of the Grand Tetons are visible from throughout Robert and Jan Hartman's home in Jackson Hole, Wyo. TAYLOR R GLENN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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and build an 11,000-square-foot log house. It was completed in 2006. Mr. Hartman declined to say how much the home cost to build, but Latham Jenkins, an agent with Jackson Hole real-estate agency Live Water Jackson Hole, said but it would likely list for around \$10 million.

The house itself is modeled after the mountains, Mr. Hartman said, with the up and down slope of the roof as it moves over the property meant to reflect the range's snowcapped peaks, which rise to anthe one elevation of nearly 14,000 feet.

With the master suite at one end of the home and



The couple enjoys the wildlife in the area and once had a herd of elk drinking out of one of their ponds. PHOTO: TAYLOR R GLENN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

a wing with four guest bedrooms at the other end, the property is designed for visitors—children and grandchildren foremost among them.

The couple sometimes find themselves entertaining guests of shaggier sort, as well.

“We’ve had a herd of elk standing in one of the ponds drinking out of it,” Mrs. Hartman, 68, recalled. “One day we came home from a hike, and there was a bison laying down in one of the



The master bedroom PHOTO: TAYLOR R GLENN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

flower gardens. Another time there was a mother moose and a baby in the backyard.”

Another favorite local feature? Tax policy. As far as the decision to settle in Jackson permanently, Wyoming “having no state income tax was certainly not a small part of it,” Mr. Hartman said.

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The most essential local feature, though, is the view. The master bedroom, office, and exercise room as well as the great room, dining room, and kitchen all face the Grand Teton Mountains, Mrs. Hartman noted. The outside entrance to the basement screening room is terraced “so that you can even see the tops of the Tetons

from down there.”

A Waterfall Runs Through It

When building his home on the Caribbean island of Virgin Gorda, developer David Johnson wanted it to look like it was part of the landscape. To that end, he clad the exterior in local granite and surrounded it with lush, native plants including golden creeper, sand cordgrass, sea oxeye, and sea purslane. A waterfall built with granite boulders excavated from the island flows from the home’s rooftop through the dining room and into a 100-foot swimming pool.

Using local materials helps the home blend into the landscape, but it also is more economical than shipping building materials from afar to the job site.

Mr. Johnson’s home also serves as “the ultimate model” for prospective buyers at Oil Nut Bay resort his company, Victor International, has created on Virgin Gorda, part of the British Virgin Islands. The 400-acre residential community opened in 2008 and has 88 lots ranging from \$1.5 million to \$50 million. So far, 35 lots have been sold and 25 homes have been built. The development doesn’t require that owners use local materials for building, but highly encourages it, Mr. Johnson said.

Home-Grown Cabinetry

In Manhattan, developers incorporated some local flavor into 30 Warren, a 23-unit condo building in the Tribeca neighborhood.

The custom kitchen cabinets are made of oak <<they won’t say (apparently wood sourcing is a closely held secret)>> and crafted by Hudson LaGrange in LaGrangeville, N.Y.

The cabinet exteriors are finished with hand-rubbed white paint and glass fronts designed to mirror the paneling used in the building’s façade.

Getting the details right was tedious, said Craig Wood, CEO of building developer Cape Advisors, noting that the builder and Hudson LaGrange went through around 10 iterations of hinges and almost as many choices of finishes before settling on the final versions.

“We were very impressed with the handcrafted nature [of the work],” he said. “They weren’t like these big, giant millwork production shops that developers, including ourselves, have often used.”

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