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BEST HOMES OF THE YEAR 2010



European Influences

Adopting the Montana foothills as their new home, this couple surprises their East Coast visitors with their Tudor-style lodge.

STORY BY SUZANNA LOGAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HEIDI LONG

The expansive “Chateau de Merlette” seems right at home in its woodland surroundings, blurring the line between house and landscape. “After four years and thousands of plants and bulbs, we’ve finally got it *almost* right,” says owner John Merlette, who catalogues the name and location of every plant in the yard.



To ensure that the dining room floors could support the Merlettes' intricately carved, 2,000-pound antique marble fireplace, they were reinforced with I-beams during the building process.

After years spent in the concrete jungles of their native New Jersey, John and Gladys Merlette were ready for a permanent change. Looking for something totally different, the retired couple found their paradise in the Montana foothills and opted to design their home to resemble a European hunting lodge.

To build a structure with continental flair that would still mesh with its rugged surroundings, John and Gladys spent a full year researching every facet of their home's design. Timber frames are used extensively in European building, and the couple added

authenticity with other touches such as precast stones, brick, wrought iron and tile.

After poring over hundreds of magazines and constructing a scale model of the home, they presented their ideas to builder Orlan Sorenson of Landmark Builders. “Their research made my job easy,” says the 30-year construction veteran. “The home is one of the more unusual ones I’ve worked on, but it doesn’t seem out of place.”

It does, however, come as a big surprise to the Merlettes' guests. “We laugh because we have relatives back East who ask if we have indoor plumbing or television. The irony is

that we have every kind of technology they could possibly want and more,” says John.

The forward-thinking couple also made allowances for the future in their home's design. Provisions include 36-inch-wide doors, closets that can be converted to elevators and a master-bathroom shower that can be adjusted to accommodate a wheelchair. Other amenities include a game room, golfing green and fire pit where they toast marshmallows with their seven grandchildren.

“When someone suggests going on vacation, all I can think is, ‘Why?’” says John. “There is no place I’d rather be than here.” ■



The Merlettes achieved the European hunting-lodge look they desired in their great room by pairing a 26-foot, floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace and timber trusses with mounted animal heads and oversized furnishings, including a 10-foot, 300-year-old antique armoire-turned-entertainment center carved with a wildlife motif.



Of all the gourmet features in the kitchen, Gladys says the 14-foot-long island topped with a solid slab of black granite is her favorite. It offers plenty of room for entertaining guests and for those special moments when the couple's seven grandchildren come together to cook. "The kitchen truly is the heart of our home," she says.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

Each room in the home, including the master suite shown here, features curved tops on the doors and windows. "To create the curves, vertical beams had to be trimmed then glued together," explains builder Orlan Sorenson.

Trim painted a bright Napoleon blue gives an unexpected shot of color to the home's exterior, while wrought iron accents match its European sensibilities.

With windows and curtains strategically placed next to bathtubs, bathers can opt for either a stunning view of the Montana mountains or complete privacy.



Home Details

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 11,200
BUILDER: Landmark Builders

Not content with planting a shrub or two, the Merlettes' three acres of landscaping includes an antique fountain and a manmade stream with four cascading waterfalls. "It was a trial-and-error process to discover which plants the deer would eat and which ones they would leave alone," says John, who single-handedly designed, planted and maintains the lush landscaping.



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