

Is there an architectural style with more symbolic baggage than the log cabin?

It is North America's scrappy emblem of the frontier spirit—sturdy and solid enough to keep out all manner of hostile forces, from flaming arrows to harsh winters. Think Daniel Boone, Abe Lincoln, *Little House on the Prairie*.

These are the timeworn associations that architect Paul Alter and designer Sara Bengur had to play against in their work on a large log home in the Hudson River Valley. It all began when new clients of Alter's—a fiftysomething couple (he in finance, she in psychology)—showed him the 140-acre estate they'd purchased. "The main house was well-crafted and substantial," Alter says, "but totally unconscious of its spectacular surroundings. It was a sleeping giant that needed to be awakened."

The clients didn't hold fast to cabin nostalgia. Mario Buatta had decorated their Park Avenue apartment, and while the wife didn't want that brand of polish here, says Bengur, "they entertained a lot, so it had to be sophisticated and a little exotic." At the same time, the husband wanted to retain some of the structure's rustic character.

Built in the early 1980s, the house has walls of flat-hewn logs locked together at the corners with impressive dovetail joints. It sits on a ridge that faces west and south toward serene views of low fields and distant hills. But small

In the living room, the look is refined yet robust. Sofas in John Robshaw's custom Links in Madder are paired with an American ball chair from Niall Smith Antiques, NYC. Ikat pillow from Madeline Weinrib Atelier, NYC; Indian coffee table, ca. 1910, from Lief, L.A.; Moroccan tray table from Vieux Carre, NYC; an ammonite and a quartz cluster from Astro Gallery of Gems, NYC; reclaimed teak stool from Chista, NYC; Bakshaish carpet from Rahmanan, NYC.





Exotic fabrics blend with the cabin's frontier spirit to create the sort of panache that Teddy Roosevelt would have loved



windows scattered haphazardly throughout the chopped-up, fortresslike interior largely negated those views, and bland brick fireplaces and cheap wood floors looked merely drab. A kit-built log garage sat to the south, and a guesthouse, also bizarrely segmented into tiny rooms, lay to the north.

Alter's master plan, which the clients embraced wholeheartedly, called for rerouting the roadway approach through the woods and behind the existing structures, leading visitors to a new car barn. The move thus spared the vista from the glint of chrome and car enamel. Guests now enter what Alter calls "the domain of the walking person," crossing through a courtyard on stone paths to a new eastern entryway to the cabin—a stone and glass foyer designed by Alter that nestled within the L-shaped structure. This set up "a new pattern of movement into the house that," he explains, "goes toward the view, toward the light."

The architect gutted the first floor to create one large living area bookended by fireplaces that were amply enlarged and faced in fieldstone. He laid new floors of antique heart pine (hand-rubbed with stain and given a lustrous tung oil finish) and cut larger windows and French doors into the walls to bring in light and open up views. A wood staircase had connected this floor to the second level, while a dark narrow one led down to an unfinished basement. Alter ripped out both, creating a well of light extending from the top floor to the now deepened and refinished basement. A curvy, sculptural modern stair of steel (built in the Brooklyn Navy Yard) now connects all floors.

To add more light and offer visual relief from all the wood, Alter installed an overhead recessed pin spotlight system in the deep bays between the ceiling beams. Bengur—daughter of a Turkish economist and raised in Istanbul (*Cont. on page 184*)