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The Craft home sits atop a mountainside near Whitefish. Custom log work by Pioneer Log Homes.

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Maud and Ron Craft at their Whitefish home.

The long way home

A Dallas couple comes home to Montana

BY DAVE REESE

Ron Craft had always dreamed of his Montana home. Even when he was sitting in a rain-soaked pup tent during the war in Vietnam, Craft was thinking of a way out, a way home. In fact, on the inside of his helmet he kept a photo of a mountain home, the place he promised himself he'd build if he ever got out of the war alive.

Well, he got out of the war in one piece, and he and his wife, Maud, built that home, atop a mountain near Whitefish. The 4,500-square-foot log home sits perched on a hillside with views over the Flathead Valley and into Glacier National Park. The home is the Crafts' retreat. They found this place after years of searching, years of building their dream into reality while they owned a car dealership in Houston. Finally, two years ago, they broke ground on the home, with the help of contractor Jim Purdy.

The Crafts wanted a rustic lodge, a place that reminded them of the grand lodges of Glacier National Park. The Crafts had toured several towns in the Rocky Mountains looking for a place to build, but settled on Whitefish almost immediately when they toured the homesite in Grouse Mountain Estates. "We just fell in love with the area," Craft said. "I walked up on the lot and bought it that day. Spiritually I felt like I belonged here." >>>

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Craft worked with general contractor Jim Purdy to design and build the home. "He shared my vision of what I wanted," Craft said. "We changed things on the fly, and every bump we ran into, we turned into an opportunity."

The home features materials and craftsmanship from the northwest, but the Crafts were also intrigued by materials found in the southwest. The front door was built out of mesquite milled in Arizona, while the stone for the four fireplaces and exterior is Arizona moss flag stone. The kitchen cabinets were created in Mexico by Montana craftsmen Ole Netteberg and Doug Gamble.

The home took two years to build, but the Crafts were so dedicated to getting their Montana home built that they lived in their RV while their home was under construction.

Stepping through the front doors into their great room, the home is at once expansive and comforting. A rock fireplace commands your attention to the right, while the kitchen



Craft Residence. Photo Courtesy: Roger Wade © 2004.

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The great room at the Craft home has custom features throughout, from a fireplace screen to stone work. Interior design assistance was provided by Hunter and Co., Whitefish.

Cuy Duvall

sits just off to the left, built that way to accommodate an open feeling that's perfect for entertaining.

Hand-hewn logs from Pioneer Log Homes in Victor surround the home with a warmth and feeling of security that only logs can bring.

The wide-plank flooring was created by taking original siding taken off a barn near Libby, Montana. The wood was milled at Artisans Doors in Kalispell, then installed over a radiant heat system that heats the entire house.

Branko Nordic, a woodworker from nearby Libby, Montana, helped achieve the vision of the Crafts. Nordic took out all the stops and created original cabinets, armoires, and even a custom trim for the downstairs fireplace that resembles tree branches growing over the mantel.

The Crafts' dream started out simple; all they had set out to create was a 2,000-square-foot "cabin," as Ron Craft called it. That "cabin" turned into spacious lodge with 6,000 square feet of living space. Downstairs is a six-car garage, spotlessly clean, for his custom, restored motorcycles and cars.

"My garage is one of the prettiest rooms in my house," Ron Craft says.

Craft put his love for machinery and cars into the home. Fireplace screens made at Currier's Welding in Kalispell have a motorcycle motif, complete with motorcycle chain and a foot peg from one of his Harleys that serves as the screen handle.

Guest rooms in the lower level of the home accommodate the Crafts' children when they come to town. But despite the home's >>>



spacious size, each nook and cranny invites you to sit down, grab a book and enjoy the view overlooking the Flathead Valley.

"We live in all of the house," Ron Craft says. "I like the way our house lives. It just feels good to me. It's just a very comfortable, enjoyable house."

FOR GENERAL CONTRACTOR Jim Purdy, building a log home was something he'd never done before. But by enlisting the help of a designer at Pioneer Log Homes, Purdy and Craft worked together to create the home, start to finish.

"I like the hand hewn logs," Purdy says. "They come ready to put together, and they make you look like a hero."

Purdy has assisted on dozens of traditional frame homes, but in building the Crafts' home, he learned how complex log construction can be to someone who's never attempted it. "From electrical to framing and painting, a log home incurs costs that you wouldn't in a traditional frame home," Purdy says.

But Craft, who has designed and built several antique cars and motorcycles, had an eye for quality and detail and was willing to take the steps necessary to make sure his Montana dream home came out just the way he and his wife wanted.



Roger Wade

A custom fireplace mantel by Branko Nordic of Libby took weeks to create.

Building this house from their own sketch of plans had its challenges. On the mantel of the fireplace reads a sign: "The only difference between this house and the Titanic is that the Titanic had a band." Ron Craft said he missed his budget by a "ton" and construction took six months longer than he anticipated, but he said "I'd go through it all again if I knew we'd be this happy when it was done."

There are probably more stately mansions in Montana, or ones with more square footage. But this is the home that Ron and Maud Craft had dreamed about for a long, long time.

"I always told myself some day I would build a home in the Rocky Mountains. This house isn't that spectacular," he said. "But it was probably the most exciting accomplishment of our lives."

Clyt Dunell

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