



Head Over HEELS

A Minnesota skier flips for northern New Mexico's conifer forests, spectacular sunsets, and her new mountaintop log home.

BY GLORIA GALE
PHOTOS BY BILL MATHEWS
STYLING BY GLORIA GALE

RIGHT: The wall of windows accentuates the height of the cathedral ceiling and frames a stunning view of the surrounding trees. The extensive use of drywall keeps the house light and bright and draws the eye to the log and timber accents. **BELOW RIGHT:** Everything in the home is designed to be practical, efficient, and attractive.

Deep in Pueblo country it's all about color. If you contrast the gray and black of an urban landscape with New Mexico's indigo sky, emerald green mountains, and pink adobes, it's simply no contest.

Ginny Mulvany certainly wouldn't argue. As an avid outdoor enthusiast, she was immediately drawn to the vibrant high desert environment after skiing at Taos Mountain one season. She quickly surmised, "Not only was the Taos area beautiful but I felt I was meant to be there." It didn't take long before this lifelong Minnesotan was completely smitten with the southwestern scene. "It was better than I expected," she says. "I decided this would be a place I could return to year after year."

Not wasting a moment, Mulvany, who operates on "fast forward" most of the time, called a Realtor. "We looked at everything from Santa Fe northward. I settled on Taos because this area has abundant trees and mountains—it's more like the Northwood's I'm accustomed to."

Ascending nearly five miles up a steeply rutted road, Mulvany discovered a heavily wooded acre of property that she promptly bought. This rich conifer forest, consisting of pinion, juniper, pine, and spruce, was a superb setting for her vision. "It was a beautiful site with the seclusion I was seeking." She would soon discover that it would be a formidable building location.

"When I went back to Minnesota, I combed through magazines researching everything I could find on log homes. I went to log seminars and settled on Wisconsin Log Homes as my log company of choice," says Mulvany.

Sales representative Chip Krautkremer became an integral partner in helping her through the process of choosing a plan. "Ideally," says Mulvany, "my future home would have to accommodate friends and family with plenty of natural light, a loft, and enough bed- and bathrooms to house everyone. Since I'm one of 12 siblings, the rooms would need to be generously sized, at least big enough for everyone to come together or be able to retreat into their own space."

The order was quickly put into motion by Krautkremer at Wisconsin Log Homes as Mulvany headed for the slopes at Taos Mountain. "As I was riding up the ski lift that very winter, I happened to befriend Christine Lowry, a ski instructor who referred me to a fellow part-time instructor and full-time builder, Jim Henderson.

Henderson and Mulvany hit it off immediately. "I'm a perfectionist and so is Jim. I felt the more I talked with him, the more I could trust him." Her instincts were correct and what unfolded was a confident relationship, formed the minute Henderson was brought on board.

"Ginny was exactly the type of client every builder should have,"



The kitchen is both functional and beautiful. The economic use of space makes it a pleasure to work in.





The master bedroom is as full of light as the great room. There is access to the deck through glass doors. The comfortable furniture is made for relaxing.

says Henderson. “She’s smart, understands how to give and take direction, and is basically willing to let me do my job.”

Mulvany then flew Krautkremer to Taos to meet with Henderson. The three of them put their heads together to design a three-story log home with all of the requirements Mulvany had initially suggested.

It wasn’t long before the custom plans were ready and materials shipped. “My two-man crew and I went out to the site and literally rolled up our sleeves and dug in,” says Henderson.

Clearing the densely forested land and then leveling the steep, rocky outcrops was first on the agenda after the spring melt. Prior to the log package arriving, Henderson stabilized the ground by building a 30-inch-wide gravel trench to serve as an ice shield around the perimeter of the house. “I saw the water that surged out of the ground in the early spring, so I figured this

barrier would be a preventative measure just to ensure that water wouldn’t invade the structure.”

When it came time to build, “You would think there would be enough water for a decent well,” says Henderson. “However, this property was full of surprises and, quite frankly, this was the well from hell.”

Recalls Henderson, “I called on 74-year-old dowsing expert Jim Bell to help find potable water. I watched as he ‘witched’ the property, finding numerous potential sources but they always failed due to subground cave-ins. Finally, he struck viable water, but it not only had low, but slow recovery. This meant that we would need a backup cistern or alternative water retrieval system installed in the house.”

Once the well was finally operable (after considerable headaches), Henderson excavated and poured a concrete basement. This area, below ground level, would eventually house two bedrooms and a full bath.



ABOVE: Ginny Mulvany liked the zero-clearance fireplace in the great room so much that she had a second one designed for the master bedroom. **BELOW:** The large shower in the master bath is decorated with a lovely tile mural.

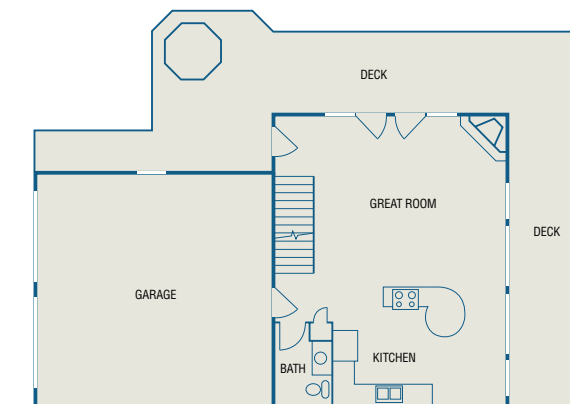


Mulvany’s house is located in El Salto, about five miles up the road from the center of Taos. The location was about to present another “situation” that had to be addressed. “It’s not easy to get up to this property in a car, much less a truck,” notes Henderson. The road is narrow, rutted, and certainly wouldn’t be conducive to semi-trailers getting through. When the load of logs arrived, the entire package had to be unloaded onto smaller trucks provided by a local lumber company. That whole scene was one we didn’t anticipate, but you have to adjust to what Mother Nature has designed.”

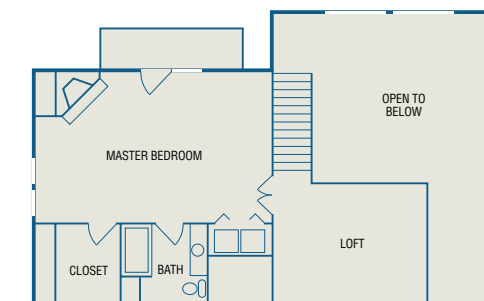
The large load of materials was scattered over 1½ acres and it had to be



Ginny enjoys her New Mexico getaway in all seasons. There is plenty of room for her large family to visit, or she can spend some quiet time on her own. One day she hopes to spend even more time there.



Main Level



Upper Level



Although the building site presented a few challenges, the technicolor view at 8,500 feet made it well worth the effort. There is nothing quite like a blue New Mexico sky, and the sunsets are awe-inspiring.

Ginny chose white cedar Cottage log siding for her home. The green metal roof is practical in an area that gets lots of snow and it allows the home to blend in with the surrounding trees.

organized. “There just wasn’t a whole lot of room to rumba. We had logs everywhere—beneath the trees, on the rocks—they were all over the place,” Henderson explains. Despite what could have looked like utter confusion, his team had a complete grasp on the situation. “Once everything was located logically, we proceeded step by step,” he acknowledges.

After a full-size basement was poured, the framing followed. “Under no circumstances was a crane going to fit on the road up to the site, so we raised the frame by hand and continued building the entire structure. The logs Ginny picked were white cedar Cottage log siding for the exterior and extensive sheetrock walls accented with log beams on the interior,” says Henderson

For the next 18 months, the house progressed as the crew diligently worked throughout the seasons. “Ginny was great. We communicated by phone, fax, and e-mail. I would send her construction pictures and we discussed anything and everything—she’s one smart business-

woman,” says Henderson.

“I really didn’t come down to Taos as the house was being constructed. I knew that Jim would advise me accordingly, which he did. I run a family business and know what it takes to get things accomplished. I had confidence that Jim would do the same.”

Henderson subcontracted the entire house himself, installing all of the interior work including plumbing, wiring, finish woodwork, and radiant heat. “I figured radiant was the best choice since it would keep it warm underfoot during our cold New Mexico winters,” he says.

Mulvany wanted the house to be bright and cheerful. Thus, the plans were designed with light filtered through multiple sets of French doors surrounding the great room. “When I saw the windows and the Technicolor view outside, it’s as if we had managed to bring the outside in. The French doors have also provided us with easy access to the deck. In the spring and summer,

we sit outside or jump in the hot tub. Even in the wintertime, you wouldn’t believe the New Mexico sunsets we can see at this altitude. At 8,500 feet, it’s pretty spectacular,” says Mulvany.

“I have to say the floorplan is very user-friendly. The living, dining, and kitchen areas are part of one large great room. Even the loft looks down onto these areas. Yet, each space has its own distinctiveness. For example, everything in the kitchen—from the Silestone countertops to the custom cabinets and stainless steel appliances—is functional and beautiful ... nothing fussy. There’s a real economy of working space,” Mulvany says.

She continues, “Similarly, I enjoy the living room, which has evolved into a natural gathering place. The fireplace, beams, vaulted ceiling, and comfortable furnishings make this a very attractive and comfortable place to relax. In fact, I appreciate the fireplace so much I had a different design, called a zero-clearance model, built into a wall in my bedroom.”

Ultimately, it’s all about convenience for this homeowner. Mulvany had the washer and dryer incorporated into one wall in the master bedroom. “It makes perfect sense: I don’t have to trudge downstairs into the lower level; I just toss in the laundry; when it’s done, I put most of it away in my upstairs closet.”

“I haven’t finished decorating yet, but I’m on the way. Actually, I

used my hairdresser, David Pederson, who happens to be not only a good friend but equally talented in interior design. He picked the oriental rugs, the leather furnishings, and many of the other accessories. I also had help from my sister-in-law and my friend, Susan. Everything in this house, including the cultured stone fireplace, is practical, efficient, and attractive. It’s exactly the way I had hoped,” Mulvany comments.

Step outside and the fresh smell of pinion and pine surrounds you. Mulvany, who owns a family-run pool and spa business in Minnesota, and her friends particularly enjoy the hot tub. Now that the spa poachers are under control (with a tamper-proof locking cover), Mulvany and guests will have access not only to the best sunsets that New Mexico offers, but to a warmly inviting soak at the end of a tough day on the slopes. “This is where I’m supposed to be,” she says with little hesitation. Her Taos log home is her home away from home for now, but she is confident that it will become a more integral part of her life as time passes. 🌲

LOG HOME PRODUCER: Wisconsin Log Homes, Green Bay, Wisconsin;
BUILDER: Jim Henderson, The Noble House, Arroyo Seco, New Mexico.