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Interior design for custom wood homes

Two experts discuss commonly asked decorating
and interior design questions



Above: A pottery collection, antiques, candles, woven chairs, and well-positioned paintings help to turn attention from the stunning fireplace to the artistry of the interior design.

Right: The furnishings fit the elegance of this great room. Further back, the décor becomes more practical as traffic flows to the kitchen.



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e spoke with two prominent interior design experts in custom wood homes to go over some of common questions we frequently hear. Cindy Trimble Kelly, ASID, is owner/president of Trimble Kelly Studios and RusticGoneWild.com, specialists in interior design for log and timber homes. Stephanie Gauthier is the interior design expert at Wisconsin Log Homes.

Are the must-have items different between a log home and a timber frame or hybrid home?

Stephanie: Not when thinking about the “big picture.” No matter what type of home is being designed and outfitted, there’s a common denominator in good taste and design — basic principles like balance, harmony, scale and proportion. The style follows next and will vary greatly between you and your neighbor’s wood home. This can be rustic lodge, contemporary, western, folk art, etc. The overall look of the architecture and furnishings will dictate what kinds of accessories are appropriate.

How do you introduce color into a log or timber home?

Cindy: I design many all wood homes and work hard each time to encourage my client to introduce color into the “wood” environment. Wood in its natural state is either brown or gray. Both those colors are depressing if a person is surrounded by them for prolonged times. However, there is much brown and gray in our natural environment that is surrounded by many other colors.

The critical element is proportion of color. In a log house, my goal is to try to incorporate one Sheetrock wall painted in a color, in each bedroom and all rooms other than the great central spaces including great rooms, kitchens

Right: Color is easy to add to a timber frame home. Most owners choose a lighter color or have one wall with a secondary tint to keep the emphasis on the craftsmanship of the timber frame.

Bottom: The table and chairs — including the easy chairs in front of the hearth — fit the “size” of the sitting/dining room in this Colorado home.

and dining rooms. Those rooms that are typically “all wood” are decorated with large rugs full of color, colorful furniture pieces, window treatments that bring more color and large pieces of art, wall hangings, paintings, etc. that introduce color into the brown space.

Stephanie: Depending on whether there are any plastered walls and ceilings, paint is probably the easiest way to introduce color into a space rich with wood, like a log or timber home. Next would be soft goods, like upholstery and bedding. Try not to get too trendy with your sofa color. If you have to have the latest shade of blue, limit it to one chair or a few pillows. You can easily change these types of pieces when you tire of a certain look. Painted wood furniture and cabinets can also add color and stand apart from other wood surfaces.



photo courtesy of Oakledge Timber Frame



photo courtesy of Wisconsin Log Homes

Above: The lighting scheme in this Wisconsin log home gets a big assist from light-hued stone along the wall facing the dining area.

photo by James Ray Stearn

How important is lighting?

Cindy: A great house design can fail with a bad lighting design. There are three types of lighting in a house including task, ambient and accent. Many times these are not used correctly resulting in a bad lighting design. A perfect example of fixtures used incorrectly are where can (recessed) lights are used in tall and vaulted spaces. These types of ceilings were never intended to have “recessed can lights” placed on/in them. They usually do nothing but provide glare to the eye when you look at the ceiling. The distance from the fixture to the floor many times is so great that the light never makes it to the floor or table surface.

To achieve a good lighting design for a home, I develop the lighting plan on top of the reflected ceiling plan that has the furniture ghosted on it. This way I know exactly where each task will take place and what the architectural features are. I then analyze what type of fixture will work in that given space and then which type of lamp (bulb) and wattage is best.

Stephanie: Lighting is critical in all homes, but especially log and timber-style homes full of non-reflective wood. Also, with vaulted ceilings, it becomes more of a challenge to effectively illuminate the ground, middle of the space, and ceiling. It can be done, however, by mixing layers of light through general, task, and accent lighting. Each room should have sources from all three.

What are some of the mistakes people make, like too much stuff or not enough contrast?

Cindy: The biggest mistake I see by designers and homeowners is “over decorating” and not knowing when to stop. What is so important before any design is started is to develop a strong “concept” developed around the homeowner’s lifestyle and special needs and goals. Once the concept is in place and the design is in motion it is so important to know when the design is finished and you need to stop.

Stephanie: Too much clutter is not relaxing and can make a space feel overstimulated. Too many accessories make special ones become lost and lose pizzazz. The opposite also applies in lack of contrast and textures.

Custom wood homes are three-dimensional works of art. Too much of the same neutral browns and these spaces can seem flat and lifeless. Although neutrals are a tried and true natural color scheme, it is important to vary the depth of colors and texture for comfort and style. Dark against light, and vice versa, are very effective, as is all neutrals with a pop of non-committal color.

It is extremely important when designing your home in the floor planning stage of the process to carefully consider each room, how you will move about in it, what you already have that you will bring into the space, and incorporate a budget for at least the basic furnishings. A good interior designer will virtually walk through your floor plan, feel the flow from room to room, even checking door swings and window heights and give you feedback on your floor plan so you can make comfortable choices that are right for you. [CWH](#)



photo by James Ray Stearn

Bright red cabinets in the kitchen of this cozy half-log home provide a cheery gathering place for the retired owners. The red offsets the muted colors of the wood and tile.

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