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Meeting design challenges  
at 11,000+ feet above sea  
level was no problem for  
this Colorado project

# Rocky Mountain high



**D**r. Robert and Catie Briggs each fell in love with Colorado and the Rocky Mountains before they knew each other. Bob, as he likes to be called, spent four years in the Air Force in Colorado Springs and Catie worked as a nurse in Boulder.

After they married and settled in Sarasota, Florida, in 1993, the dentist and his new bride took a two-week Harley cruise through Colorado. Their ulterior motive was to find an area to build an old-fashioned log home among the mountains — a distinct change of scenery from the stucco homes and sandy beaches of Florida.

They met a developer in Breckenridge who was promoting a subdivision that was one of the highest in the world and had world-class views to match. The Briggs quickly found a lot, purchased it in 1994, and began visualizing their home that would look over the Keystone Ski Resort and Goose Prairie Tarn Lake — 11,400 feet above sea level!

An even better view was available from the lot just above theirs. The undeveloped land, however, wasn't for sale until an enterprising realtor approached with an offer to buy the Briggs' lot. The only way Bob and Catie would sell, however, was if they could buy the lot just above them. In short time, the deal was complete, and the dream moved up a few dozen yards.

The Briggs decided they wanted an affordable, complete log home package. After years of paging through log home magazines and talking with log home companies, they chose Wisconsin Log Homes of Green Bay, Wisconsin, which offered an all-inclusive log home with a wall system featuring added insulation needed to keep them warm at their high altitude.

Down the block from the Briggs' site, Ian Alexander Construction was erecting a log home, and Bob and Catie recruited the firm to take on their project. Greg Sleep's team from Ian Alexander — all of whom were from the area (Greg himself lived right down the block) — had not only the experience to build in high altitudes, but also was familiar with constructing a high-quality log home.

The crew began assembly of the 3,400-square-foot structure in 2002, when five trucks of logs and material rumbled up the mountainside. To obtain the views they wanted, Bob tailored the Wisconsin plan to fit the small footprint. Normally rectangular in shape, the plan morphed into one with a staggered wall on the one side. The garage was also tucked inside the center of the home to make it less obtrusive.

One particular challenge was the nature of the lot itself — pie-shaped, with the larger end pointing toward the valley. "We maxed out the building envelope with all the setbacks from the lot lines, while still trying to get the best position for the home," Greg says. Placing the septic



tank in relation to the home was also another piece to the puzzle, but they were able to wrap up the project in less than a year.

Other adaptations were made because of the high altitude, including the heating system. A forced air system that requires plenty of oxygen unavailable at 11,000+ wasn't an option, so the Briggs decided on electric radiant heat with 12 controlled zones. Another concern was shipping the large, argon gas-filled Semco windows to the site — they were fitted with breather tubes to allow for the change in pressure and prevent them from bursting.

Greg, who has worked on handcrafted, milled, log-sided, and cedar shake homes, found the Wisconsin Log Home package easy to work with. "There are fewer worries about the settling of the logs, and the options on the inside are very flexible for decorating and finishing," he says.

The home was made of eight- to 10-inch pine logs with saddle-notch corners. Most windows faced the valley; ambient light from the large quarter-round living room windows illuminates the 20-foot hand-framed cathedral ceiling, which is finished with large round hand-peeled collar ties. Outside, a 34-foot-long deck offers visitors a breathtaking view above an 80-degree drop-off.

The Briggs chose a metal roof for a couple of practical reasons: With a higher UV exposure this far above sea level, metal provides more UV resistance. The roof system was easier to reinforce to accommodate the 100-pound snow load requirement for this mountain area.



Western accents, including Remington bronze statues, provide a backdrop to the Rocky Mountain view.





The kitchen features a combination of stained and painted alder wood cabinets, Indian brown granite countertops, and GE Monogram stainless steel appliances (including a European-style hood fan).



LEFT: The clean lines of the dining room with clear-stained pine doors, ceiling, and trim stand out against the drywall.

BELOW: The saddle-clad bar stools and riverstone breakfast bar create a Colorado ranch setting for guests.



The wall insulation package was ideal for the Briggs' needs. According to Brian Delwiche, design manager of Wisconsin Log Homes, the Thermal-Log building system is a blend of 2-by-6 insulated construction with a solid log outer layer. The system reduces the high building costs while providing structures with far higher heat efficiencies than a comparative full-log home. (The home is rated R42 — the higher number means the logs and insulation work to keep the temperature uniform year-round, so the walls, ceilings and floors warm in the winter and cool in the summer.)

For decoration, Bob and Catie melded their tastes to match the distinctive location. For Bob, Western was the only way to go — this included a grizzly bear rug on the wall, a buffalo head over the stone fireplace, Remington bronze statues throughout the home, and saddle-mounted stools used at the breakfast bar. Catie focused on her love of gourmet cooking when decorating the kitchen and dining room; her bold use of red on the custom cabinets reflects her energetic and lively style. To complement the color, she chose Indian Brown granite for the countertops, creating an earthy combination. To add continuity, she had several room doors painted the same apple red and had the same brown granite placed in the master bath.

The bathroom is light and open with two windows looking out over the valley. Catie chose to install a large tub in place of a spa, which the Briggs have since added to the deck. The walk-in shower has subtle detail in the tile, again letting the outdoor scenery become the focal point.

Looking to the future, the Briggs felt it was important to have the master bedroom on the main floor along with the kitchen and great room, so that if their physical abilities were limited, they would have easy access to the main part of the home.

Catie's athletic abilities were not forgotten when calculating the lower level. In addition to a family room, two bedrooms, and bath, they had an exercise room built in to keep Catie in triathlon shape. This level is also dedicated to guests when they come to visit and take advantage of the nearby ski slopes.

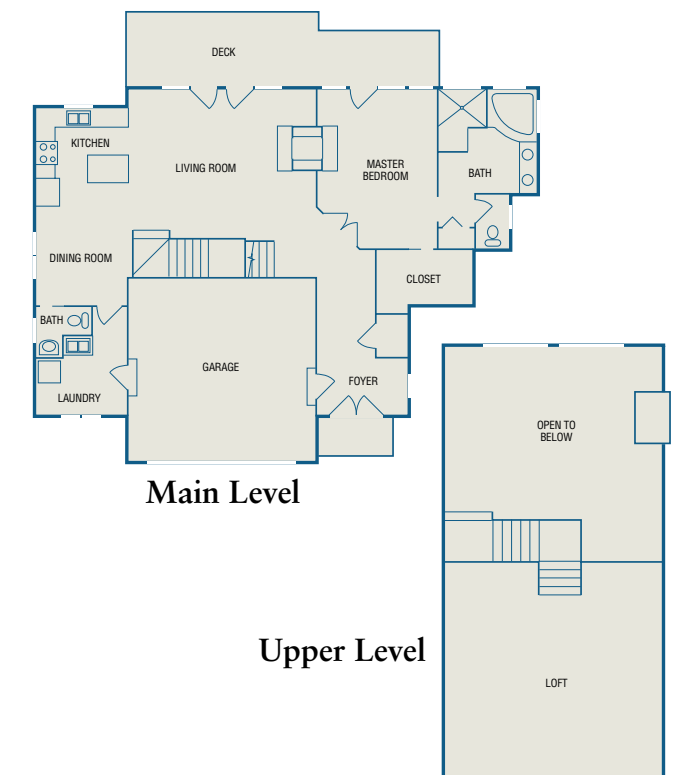
With a well-planned log-home package and experienced construction team, the Briggs are now truly able to experience a Rocky Mountain high. 🐾

**LOG HOME PRODUCER:** Wisconsin Log Homes, Green Bay, WI.  
**CONSTRUCTION:** Ian Alexander Construction, Breckenridge, CO.





ABOVE: The master bedroom fireplace adds warmth, as do the home-made quilt and radiant floor heating.



ABOVE TOP: The master bedroom is finished with log walls and French doors leading out onto the full-size deck that offers spectacular views. ABOVE: The oversized shower and tub serve as a relaxing option after skiing or hiking the Rocky Mountains.