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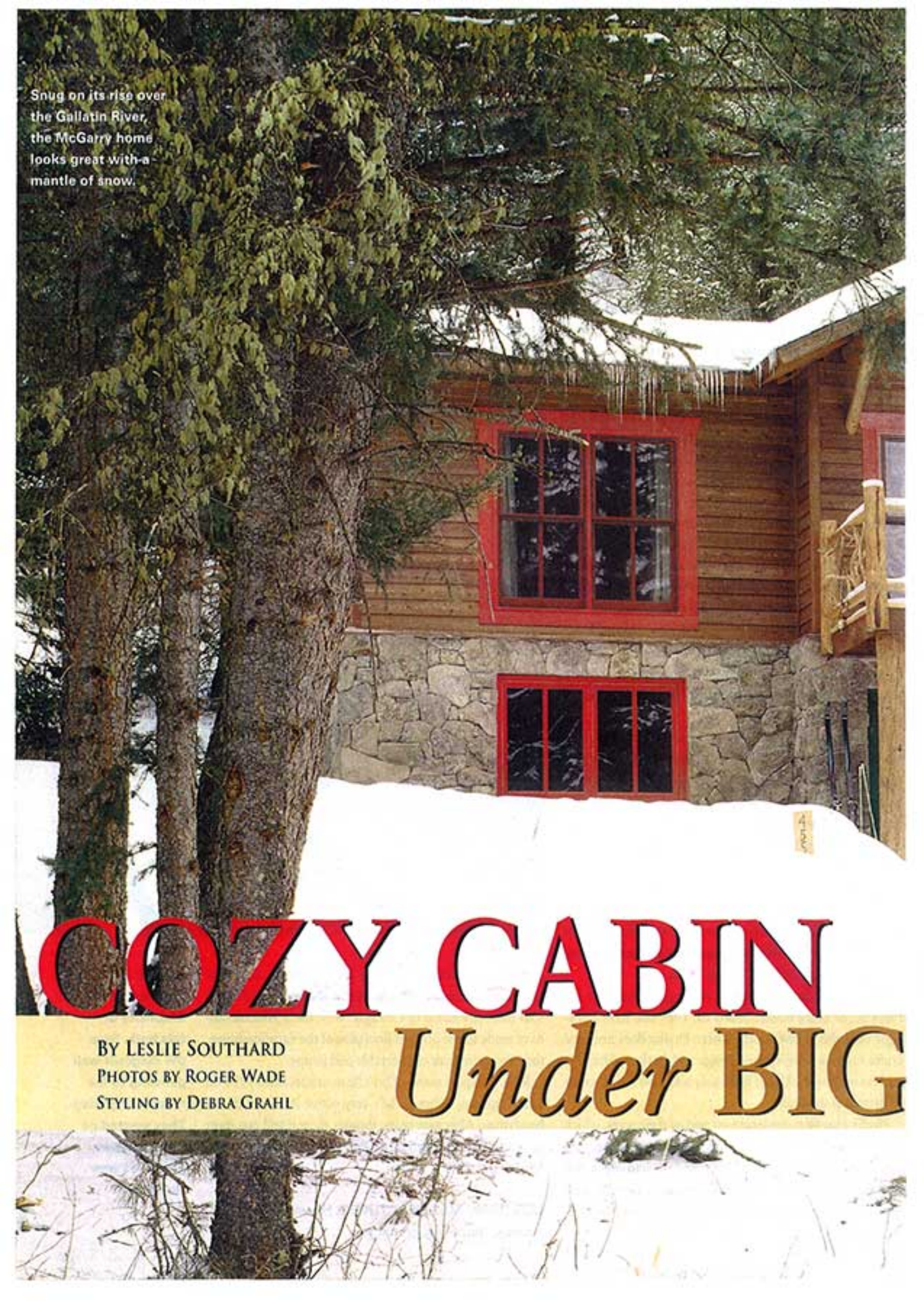
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COUNTRY'S BEST

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Snug on its rise over
the Gallatin River,
the McGarry home
looks great with a
mantle of snow.

COZY CABIN

Under BIG

BY LESLIE SOUTHARD
PHOTOS BY ROGER WADE
STYLING BY DEBRA GRAHL



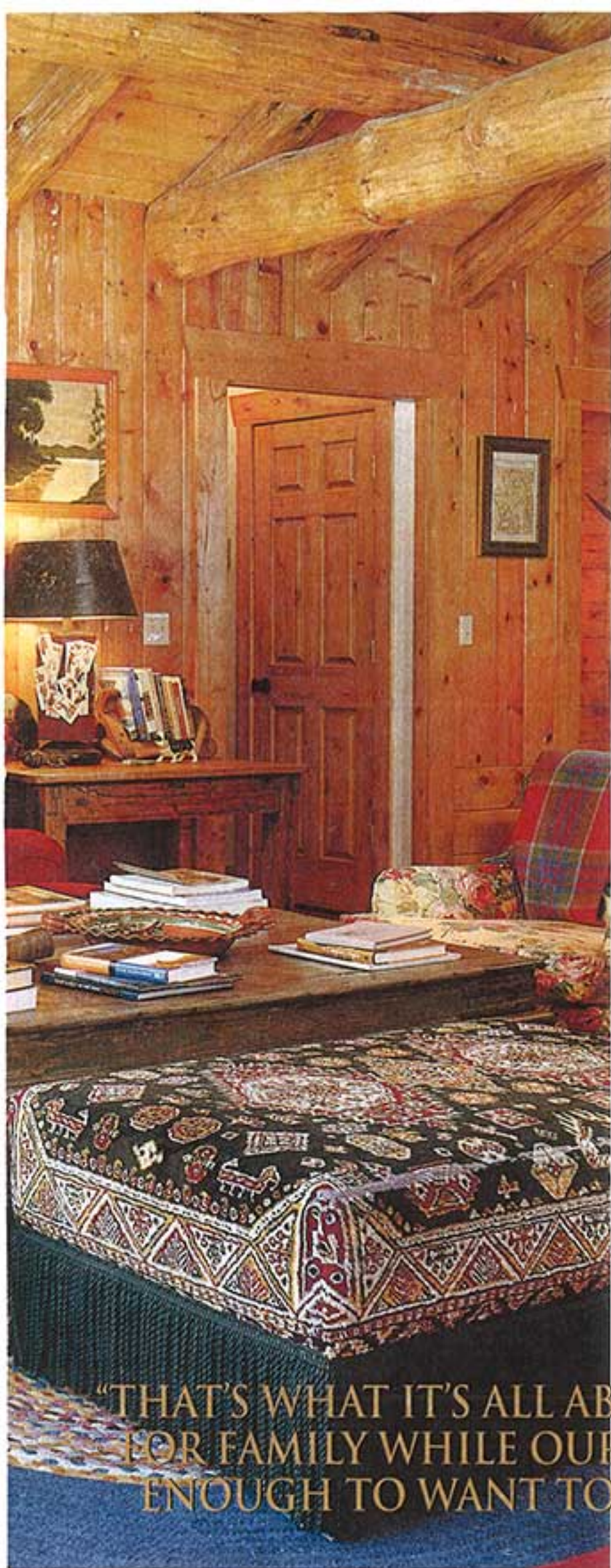
SKY

*The making of an ideal mountain
family vacation location.*



The warmth of wood surrounds sturdy and sensible furniture in the McGarry home. This great room makes for relaxed and comfortable vacations.





As its name so aptly describes, everything in Big Sky, Montana, is ... well, big. Nestled between the Gallatin and Madison Ranges and the Spanish Peaks of southwest Montana, the 3,600-acre Big Sky resort has a tremendous vertical drop—4,350 feet—more than 400 inches of snow annually, vast acreages of surrounding untouched park land and, of course, the unbelievably clear, blue expanse of sky above.

It's no wonder people flock to Big Sky all year to enjoy skiing, snowboarding, hiking, fishing, and a multitude of other outdoor activities that this natural wonderland invites. Kevin and Jane McGarry of Arlington, Texas, were typical of those lured by the beauty, recreation, and family-friendly atmosphere of Big Sky. But their occasional vacations there with their young son eventually resulted in an epiphany of sorts for them.

"We were vacationing at Big Sky in August of 2000, and Kevin and I were watching our little boy play by the Gallatin River," says Jane, a news anchor for NBC in Dallas/Fort Worth. "We both sort of said, 'Life is short and this is a wonderful place for our family to be together. Why don't we build so we can do more of this as a family?'" They had stayed at a log cabin while at the resort, and Jane and Kevin knew a log cabin was just what they wanted to build.

The McGarrys wanted to find a home site on the Gallatin River where they had spent so many enjoyable vacations but worried that very few home sites would be available because most of the property is national forestland. During a chance encounter with a realtor at a Big Sky coffee shop, the McGarrys were directed to a single lot still available on the river. Located off of a little lane and backing up to the Gallatin National Forest, the acre lot fronted the river and was covered with lovely trees. They had found the perfect spot for their vacation cabin.

Soon after buying the site, Kevin and Jane consulted with Fort Worth architect Bruce Conaway about their log home plans. "Our little boy had drawn a picture of what he said our cabin should look like," says Jane. "What was funny was that when Bruce drew the initial plans, it actually looked like our little boy's drawing. We now have our son's drawing framed and hanging in the cabin."

"THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT. A SPECIAL PLACE FOR FAMILY WHILE OUR SON IS STILL YOUNG ENOUGH TO WANT TO VACATION WITH US!"



ABOVE: A red floor and a wood paneled ceiling mark the master bedroom as one of a kind.

RIGHT: In the kitchen a breakfast table is handy, close by the stove. Longhorns mark the couple's Texas roots.

The design vision that they described to Bruce was pretty straightforward. "We wanted something that was a new construction but that looked as old as possible," says Jane. Adds Kevin, "We visualized a cabin centered around the fireplace. We had looked at other cabins, and we liked the ones that had an 'older,' traditional look with the fireplace as the main focus."

After completing the plans, the McGarrys and their architect began interviewing builders, eventually deciding on Blue Ribbon Builders of Big Sky. "Blue Ribbon Builders has an excellent reputation as a premier builder," says Kevin, a public relations and advertising executive. "They are very honest, straightforward, and offer great quality."

Founded by Doug and JoDean Bing in 1974, Blue Ribbon Builders are full-service contractors that build within and around Big Sky. "The McGarry cabin is what we think of as the true representation of what a mountain cabin should be," says JoDean. "Most of what we build are very large and elaborate log homes, but the McGarry cabin is a relatively small, cozy mountain cabin that has a

wonderful old-fashioned appeal."

Although log homes are their specialty, Blue Ribbon Builders also builds conventional stick frame houses and commercial buildings. They have a millworking shop where they make custom cabinets and finish work. "There are a number of log home companies in the area that we use, as well as some in Canada," says JoDean. "When we don't build from a log package, we custom order our materials from a small company nearby. We haven't built anything that's the same in 27 years!" says JoDean.

Although different in size from what they usually construct, the McGarry cabin was no less unique, and the experience proved to be a very positive one for both owner and builder. "Kevin and Jane were a pleasure to work with," says JoDean. "We both had young sons about the same age, and they played together and built forts on their homesite."

Once construction began, the McGarrys only visited a few times. "Most everything was done through either e-mail or by phone," says JoDean. "We would take photos and e-mail them so they could see the progress."

The cabin features approximately 1,500 square feet of



heated space with a main level and basement beneath. The master bedroom, den-kitchen-dining area, a full bath, and a "bunk room" are located on the main level. An additional bedroom, bath, laundry room, and garage are below. "We also have a wonderful 'mudroom hall' down there which is about 7 feet wide and 15 feet long. When we come in from the outside, we can just stop there and hang all of our ski gear and outdoor stuff," says Jane.

The McGarrys' desire for a home that "looked as old as possible" but with some modern touches extended to every

detail from exterior trim colors to interior décor. "We had worked for over 20 years with an interior designer in Texas named Ken Blasingame," says Jane. "He helped us tremendously, but he wasn't available to us as much as usual because he is also one of First Lady Laura Bush's designers and was doing a great deal of work at the White House!"

Of course, one of the crowning interior features is their large, wood-burning stone fireplace in the great room. "It's constructed of Montana stone and is exactly what we wanted to be the centerpiece of our home," says Kevin.



“WE VISUALIZED A CABIN CENTERED AROUND THE FIREPLACE THAT HAD A TRADITIONAL LOOK”

ABOVE: A fireplace of rugged rock is the focus of the McGarry vacation home great room.

OPPOSITE: Red flooring and red window trim set off the muted color of the home's milled logs in one room, and painted walls in another.

The interior walls, floors, and ceilings are a mixture of materials that not only added visual interest, but also reduced building costs, a tactic often employed by the builder. “We wanted an old-looking cabin but not a dark, cramped-looking cabin,” says Kevin. “We wanted the traditional elements but also large windows, lots of natural light, and an open feeling. It really was a partnership with Blue Ribbon as they realized what we wanted and came up with a solution.”

One of the authentic “old” touches is the knotty pine paneling in the great room. Rescued from an old cabin in West Dallas that was slated to be torn down, the McGarrys had it removed and then took a road trip to their cabin for installation. Walls in other parts of the house are drywall with another wood touch in the ceiling of the master bedroom.

The red flooring throughout the space is also an element of focus. “We painted the flooring red and much of the

trim red and green for a country look,” says Jane. “It’s a fun look, and everyone who sees it loves it.”

Kevin and Jane even incorporated some of their Texas roots into the Montana cabin. “I have a collection of antique Mexican jars in the kitchen along with longhorns on the walls and old Indian pillows on our sofa,” says Jane. Two old Victorian-styled chairs were even given a Western flavor after they were recovered in cowhide.

The home uses a septic tank and is heated with gas heat, but there is no air conditioning or fans. “It just doesn’t get that warm here,” says Jane. Outside, landscaping is kept as natural as possible since they only visit a few times a year. Full-time residents living on their lane keep an eye on the McGarry cabin when they’re in Texas, and a caretaker “who can fix everything” regularly comes by to check on the place.

As they originally planned, the cabin has become a



haven for the McGarry family though they only get to make the 1,200-mile trek a few times a year. "One winter morning my son and I woke up early and saw coyotes outside our home," says Kevin. "We've also seen moose and big deer, but no bear yet!"

"Everything in Big Sky is on a huge scale," says Jane. "Our main impetus was to have a cozy place for our family to come here and be together," continues Jane. "That's what it's all about. A special place for family while our son is still young enough to want to vacation with us!"

And though they currently have no plans to live there full time, the McGarrys do envision their cabin as a family fixture for years to come. "I have this dream that when our son is in college, he might like to work on one of the ranches in Big Sky and live at our cabin where we've spent so many good times," says Jane. 🍷

BUILDER: Blue Ribbon Builders, Big Sky, Montana.

