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Love at First Sight

An Ohio couple falls head over heels for timber-frame construction

When Mike and Lynn Miller saw timber framing for the first time, they were smitten. “We had never seen it before,” Lynn says, “yet we knew it was something different. It was instant love.”

It all started one day when Mike and Lynn decided to investigate a new development that was going up in nearby Chagrin Falls, Ohio. A local farmer had recently sold some of his land, which was subdivided into 22 five-acre home sites. The couple liked the fact that there was no central builder controlling the development. “So you could

The 4,000-square-foot stone and cedar-sided home doesn’t resemble a typical timber-frame home on the outside. Architect Stephen Ciciretto designed the home with an interesting roofline, featuring lots of tall peaks and short dormers. As a result, there isn’t a flat surface to be found on the front or back of the home.

do what you wanted,” Mike says.

But what really attracted the couple to the new community was the fact that the original farm was still there, surrounding some of the home sites. “The barn was at the beginning of the street, with sheep, horses and chickens,” says Lynn, who grew up on a family farm near Dayton and became excited by the thought of once again living near a working farm.

As the couple continued their tour, they noticed some unusual construction at one of the sites. They drove up the driveway to find out what was being built

Story by Colleen Morrissey • Photos by Roger Wade • Styling by Debra Grahl



Timber framing envelops the great room. The first view from the foyer, straight ahead into the great room, is a series of massive hammerbeam trusses with elegantly carved hanging pendants. Beyond the trusses is a floor-to-ceiling wall of framed glass windows from which the homeowners enjoy bucolic views of their pond, meadow and stand of evergreens.

and saw the graceful posts and beams of a partially constructed timber-frame home. The couple got out of their car and climbed onto the foundation. "The moment we stepped inside the frame," Lynn says, "we loved it."

After that, she adds, "we knew we had to build our own." By January 1997, the couple had bought their own lot in the community and contacted an architect, Stephen

The exterior facade consists of high peaks, low valleys and compact dormers.

Ciciretto of Chagrin Falls. Stephen was familiar with timber framing, having designed several timber-framed additions for a number of clients, but he hadn't done a fully framed home and was interested in taking on the project.

The couple didn't go to Stephen empty-handed. They had a stack of photos from magazines and books that showed how they wanted their home to look. They also brought some sketches they had drawn of a floor plan and room sizes based on the home that they lived in at the time and loved. When they finally met with Stephen to hammer out their ideas, Mike recalls, "We gave him all of our picture references and descriptions. Stephen did the design based on what we were asking him to do and his own repertoire of ideas."

"My goal," Stephen says, "was

Lynn sprinkled her home with old quilts and farm implements salvaged from her family's 1873 farm, where she grew up. The couple had a granary door from the farm mounted between two posts in the great room. When decorating, Lynn found that dark colors worked best against the home's lightly white-washed Eastern white pine frame.





Since Eastern white pine yellows over time, the homeowners had their frame slightly tinted white to preserve the look of the freshly cut green timbers. Tongue-and-groove Eastern white pine boards on the walls and ceilings help the home maintain its bright and cheery demeanor. The floor on this level is topped with white oak.





Above: To carry the look of the keystones above the windows on the home's facade to the inside, builder Matt Benes inserted a small arched window in the space above the kitchen window and the front door in the entryway. While the homeowners wanted to be surrounded by wood, they didn't want to feel like they were living in a box. They requested that the ceilings in the kitchen, and the dining room it faces, be placed at a comfortable 10 feet above their heads and that few walls enclose the floor space.

Right: The home can essentially be divided into three timber-framed sections. Two of the sections are connected on the second floor by lofts, which the couple use as sitting rooms. One is located directly over the kitchen, and the other one, featured here, overlooks the great room below.

to design an interesting and elegant stone and cedar-sided home. I wanted the exterior to have an interesting roofline that didn't look like the typical timber-frame home."

The result is an exterior facade that consists of a multitude of high peaks, low valleys and compact dormers. "There isn't a flat surface on the front or back of our home," Lynn points out.

"I also wanted people to walk into Mike and Lynn's





home and have a 'wow' moment," Stephen says. To achieve this effect, he cantilevered the upstairs floor over the entryway. (A cantilevered floor is one that is anchored to a wall, enabling it to project out over a space unsupported.) When guests enter the home, the floor above encloses them. Then, when they walk a few steps out from under the canopy, he says, "all the beautiful timber framing opens up for the 'wow' moment."

"When you drive up to our house," Mike says, "it looks like a nice stone and wood house in the country. You have no idea that it's a timber frame until you walk in the front door. Everyone is surprised and taken with the beauty of it when they walk inside."

Since the couple didn't want any surprises when

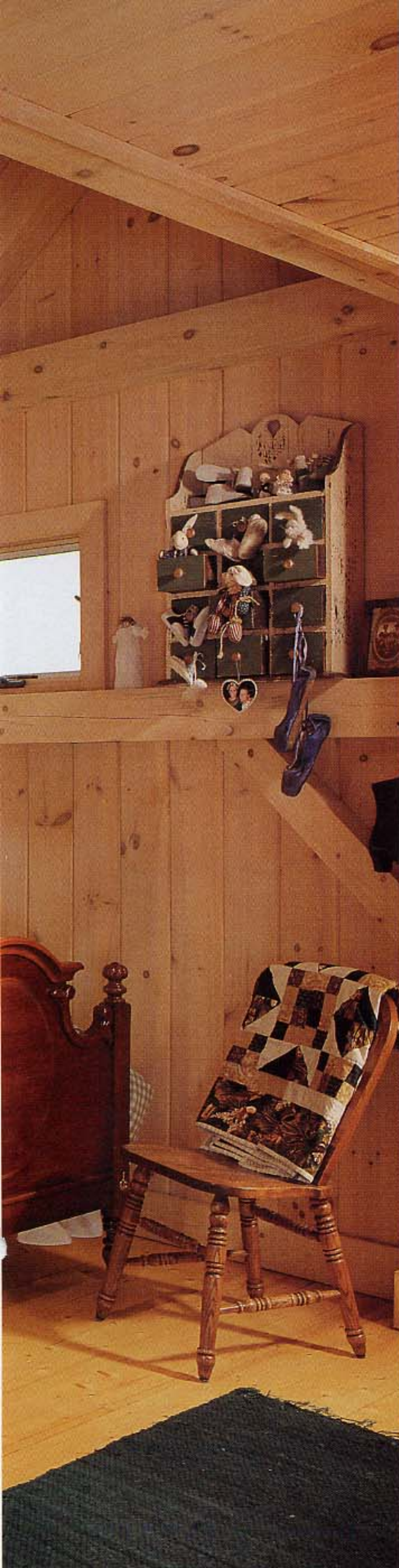
Above: The home's wood-burning, river rock fireplace is double-sided, sharing its warmth with both the library and the great room. To get the exact color, shape and style of their all-natural stone fireplace, homeowners Lynn and Mike spent a lot of time looking at different hearth styles in a variety of homes.

Opposite: Anyone sitting in the light-filled reading room, in the loft space over the kitchen, enjoys the property's serene pastoral views from skylights placed strategically along the home's sloped roof, as well as the intricate workings of the home's common-rafter roof system overhead.

they built their home, they took great care choosing their home's timber-frame producer, visiting several companies and looking at samples of their work. In the end, they turned their attention to Matt Benes, who is the owner of Chagrin Post and Beam and the







This is one of two bedrooms on the second floor of the spacious home. The other bedroom on this level serves as the couple's gym. Every room, like this bedroom, is timber framed except for the master bedroom and bath. The floors on the second level are covered by 2-inch-thick white pine tongue-and-groove boards that also do double duty as the first-floor's ceiling.

Timberpeg builder-dealer responsible for producing their neighbor's timber-frame home. They met Matt while he was building that home and were impressed with him from the start.

Matt took Mike and Lynn on a tour of several homes he had built, including his own and his mother's. Since they planned to act as their own general contractor for the project, they decided Timberpeg's complete package of components would make the home-building process simpler to deal with. "That plus the fact that Matt was going to oversee every step of the process," Mike says. "We settled on Timberpeg."

Matt and the Millers met several times to hash out the details. On one occasion, when they visited the site together, Matt brought a stepladder with him. "We all stood on the rung where we thought the first-floor level should be," Matt says, "and we built the house off of that."

Over the next several weeks, Matt made several other site visits and then sat down with Stephen to discuss the floor plan. When Matt had all the information he needed, he worked with Timberpeg's design team to create a frame to fit Stephen's plan for a three-bedroom, three-bath home.

Since Mike and Lynn wanted an all-wood, yet light-filled home (with wooden walls and ceilings along with the timber frame), Matt suggested that they slightly white-wash the frame. "Typically we recommend to customers that with that much wood in their homes, not to put any stain on their frame because too much wood can be really oppressive," Matt says.

The Millers' package was delivered to the home site in November 1997. Within a few days, the couple drove in the first peg, and Matt and his crew began the process of raising the frame one timber at a time (known as the piece-on-piece method), which enables large

homes to be raised without the use (and expense) of a crane. After all the posts and beams were in place, Matt covered the walls and roof with Timberpeg's Wrap and Strap insulating system, a series

of layers that include tongue-and-groove pine boards (which form the finished walls and ceilings), insulation, furring strips (the straps), followed by the siding and roofing materials.

The home was finished by the following June, and the couple moved into their new 4,000-square-foot timber-frame home. Mike and Lynn are still as enamored of timber framing as they were the first time they laid their eyes on one. "Every week we discover some architectural aspect we hadn't noticed before," Lynn says. "We've been in our home for three years, and we still see new things. We love that." **THI**

*The moment
the owners
stepped inside
the frame,
they said,
"We love it."*