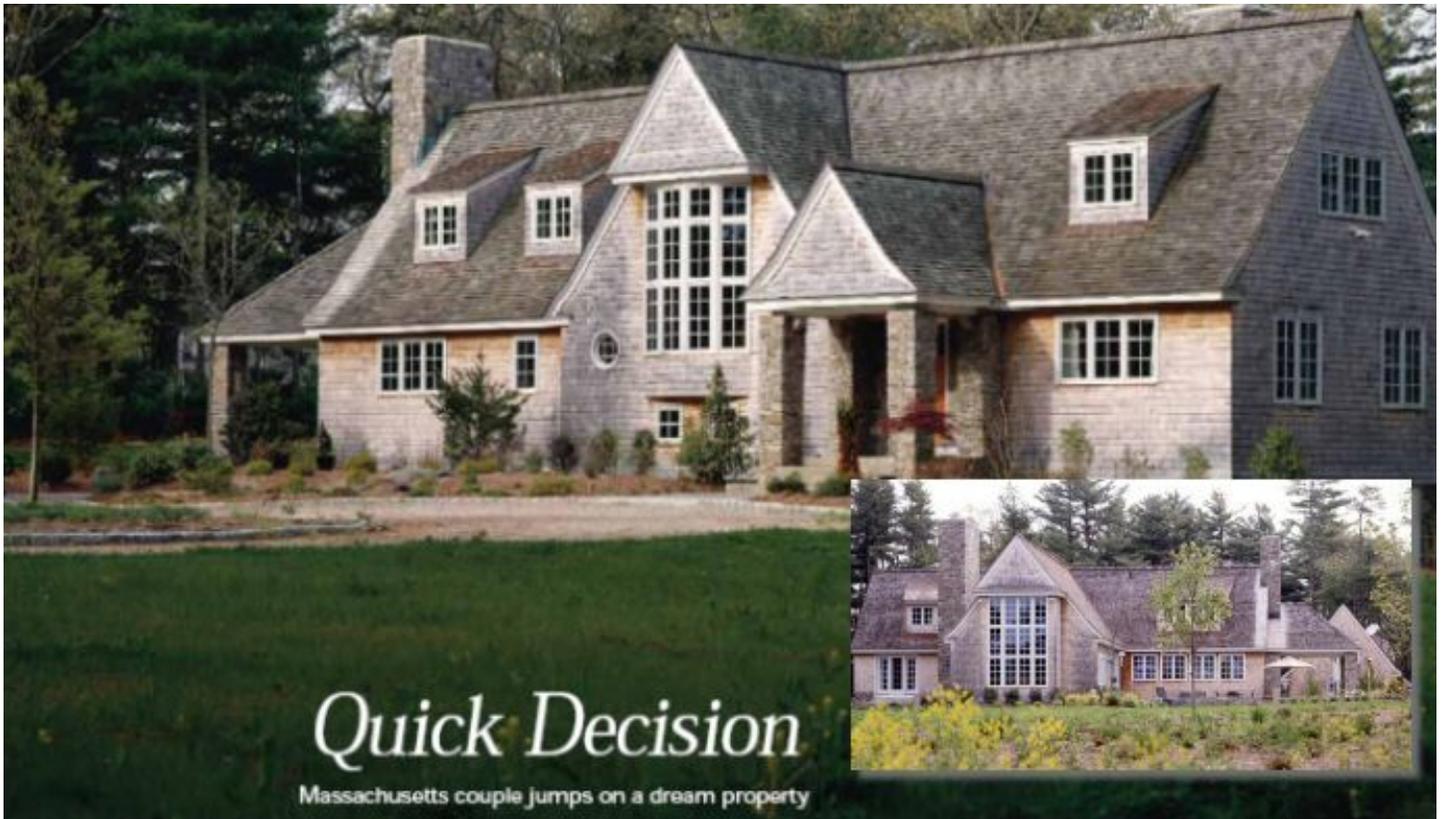




Timber Homes Illustrated - December 2005

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Dennis and Lucy Keefe joke that they only put down "10 dollars in change" as a deposit for the property they bought for their dream home. The less-than-princely sum was all the couple collectively had in their pockets that day.

While the Keefes had talked about building a home to retire to, they hadn't done much beyond that - just talking. "We did know that we wanted to build someday, but it wasn't on our agenda that day," Lucy says with a chuckle.

As a result, Dennis and Lucy weren't even looking for land when they drove past a "for sale" sign advertising 52 acres on an estuary in eastern Massachusetts. "We were just out for a Sunday drive," Dennis says.

Above left: The exterior of the home is covered with a mixture of cedar shingles on both the roof and walls--and stone accents on the home's columns and foundation.

Above right: The home sits on top of a bluff about 25 feet from the edge of an estuary--a river that feeds into the ocean. The couple landscaped with native plants to help the home fit in naturally with its site.



Above: Dennis, an architect, designed the home to capture the feeling of some of the early 19-century Arts and Crafts homes he and his wife Lucy had seen while touring England several years ago.

Look, Then Leap

The Keefes pulled over to the side of the road and walked the property. At first sight, Dennis and Lucy knew they had found something special. They hiked through thick woods, a natural meadow and even discovered a small stream meandering through the property. And since the lot borders a river that leads to the sea, they could also see that it would not only be private, but have wonderful water views as well.

After hiking in about a half a mile, the couple found a feature in the topography that cinched the decision for them - a bluff that stands about 25 feet above the bank's edge. It would make the perfect spot to site a home.

While the couple hadn't really discussed in detail their plans for building a home, they knew they had found the land for it at least. Since they didn't want to take the chance that they might lose the property if they didn't act immediately, they drove straight to the real estate agent's office that day.

Below: A long view of the great room reveals the terra-cotta tile flooring. Radiant in-floor heating is concealed from view, but offers plenty of warmth. The tile floors throughout the main level make cleaning up after the couple's dogs easier.



Below: The frame, with its cruck-style trusses, was manufactured by Timberpeg East at their plant in Claremont, New Hampshire. The frame was constructed out of Douglas fir and then given a clear natural finish to fit in with the simple look of the frame.



Dennis and Lucy had one problem, though: Neither of them was carrying a checkbook. "We didn't have a check or much money with us," Lucy says. "So we left about 10 dollars to seal the offer."

Fortunately, the real estate agent who was handling the sale was nice enough to accept their deposit until they could get home to send in a more substantial down payment.

Building on Tradition

With their land purchased, the couple started talking about what type of home each of them wanted. Since Dennis, an institutional architect (one that primarily designs buildings such as schools and churches), wouldn't retire from his active practice for several years—the couple had time to think. As an architect, Dennis knew one thing—he wanted his home to reflect the home styles he admired most from an architectural



Above: Just off the timber-framed dining room, Lucy designed the kitchen to feel like a farmhouse kitchen. To achieve the look, she had the cabinets covered with old-fashioned milk paint and installed an old farmhouse sink she and Dennis had found in England. Lucy chose Silestone countertops (made from crushed stone) not only because they resemble limestone, but also because the material is less permeable than granite.

Choosing a Framer

Combining all of these ideas, Dennis created a floor plan that is a modified version of the centuries-old cruciform shape. (The floor plan resembles a cross with a central portion and two wings). The central part of the home would house the living room-dining room. Two wings projecting off of the central portion would be home to the master bedroom suite and the kitchen. While the rest of the house would be conventionally constructed, the roof over the central portion would be supported with a series of timber-framed trusses.

Dennis was familiar with timber framing through his work, having used timber trusses in the construction of some churches and private school buildings he had designed. When it came time to choose a timber frame producer for their home, Dennis and Lucy looked at several companies in and around New England. Eventually they chose Timberpeg East located in Claremont, New Hampshire.

point of view.

He especially liked the Arts and Crafts-style homes built in the late 19th century in Great Britain by English architects C.F.A. Voysey, Baillie Scott and Edwin Lutyens. He and Lucy had seen some of these architects' homes while on tour in England. These homes were the precursors to the Arts and Crafts homes built in this country by Bernard Maybeck and Greene and Greene.

"I'm interested in architectural history," Dennis says, "so I hoped to capture the feeling of some of these architects in my house's design."

One of the characteristics of these early Arts and Crafts homes that appealed to the couple is how the interiors and exteriors complement each other. The homes' natural fit on their sites was also a big draw. Dennis didn't want the house he would design to sit too prominently on its site—he wanted it to blend in with its surroundings, which was also a characteristic he and Lucy had observed in the English homes they saw.

Wood and wooden timbers were also a prominent feature of some of these early Arts and Crafts homes. So the couple decided to use elements of timber framing in their house as well. "We looked at a lot of the different elements that went into those houses," Lucy says. "The timbers help to capture that feeling inside."



While the couple liked the quality and price of Timberpeg's packages, what really sealed the deal for them was the company's willingness to produce the type of trusses Dennis wanted for the great room. "They weren't like any of the trusses Timberpeg had built before," he says. "Yet, they were willing to give it a try."

The truss that Dennis designed is based on an old form of truss called a "cruck." "It's a style of truss that you find in a lot in old style churches in England," says Bob Britton, the president of Timberpeg East. "We hadn't done one of those before, but we said we'd do it for them."

The timber-framed portion of the home is almost entirely open except for the place near the entry where a catwalk bisects the open space to connect two bedrooms on opposite ends of the second floor. "The frame, which was manufactured out of select structural grade Douglas fir, uses laminated wood strips called "splines" and steel pins to connect the chords of the trusses," Bob says. "The splines and pins are hidden within the wood."

After manufacturing the frame at their production facility, Timberpeg sent a crew down to the couple's building site to help raise the timber-framed portions of the home. After laying all of the wood for the frame on the ground, the crew pre-assembled the trusses and then lifted them into place with the help of a crane. "It was just like a barn raising," Lucy says.

Three years after that fateful day when they stumbled on a property for sale sign, the Keefes were able to move in. With Dennis being the project's resident architect, getting through the design and construction of the house had its interesting moments. "With an architect building his own home, there were a lot of on-the-spot decisions, re-decisions and revisions," Lucy says with a laugh. She's just happy that Dennis was such a stickler for details because if he hadn't been, they might not have ended up with a home that not only reflects their aesthetic style, but who they are as a couple as well.

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