

BY JIM FOX
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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A RIVER RUNS BY IT

East of Tara

The home, appropriately named Hidden Waters, has a spectacular view of a river, which flows through the backyard.

Still waters run deep—so deep sometimes that they erupt unexpectedly from the ground like a refreshing spring. This unique feature highlights the stunning timber frame home of Brenda Nicholson built on five acres of treed land, east of Tara, southwest of Owen Sound in Bruce County. From the great room and loft, through tall, cathedral windows, Brenda has a perfect view of one of nature's beautiful anomalies. Before her eyes, a tributary of the Sauble River emerges miraculously from underground in the backyard and flows past the dwelling, lending its name to the home itself—Hidden Waters.

In April of 2002, more than 130 people celebrated the Nicholson "house raising" with food and live music. The event was the culmination of a collaborative process between the homeowners and **Pliny Loucks**, chief designer and owner of **Great Lakes Frame Company**. Once the massive frame was in place and the insulation package installed, it was less than four months before the Nicholsons took occupancy.

Loucks explains that with a custom timber frame home much of the work precedes the actual on-site construction. During eight months prior to building, eastern white pine timbers from southern Ontario are cut, shaped and fitted at Loucks's operation, just north of Chatsworth. Because little, if any, metal fasteners are used in the process, each hand-turned wooden dowel is tested to ensure the structure is flawless before it's lifted into place on the property. This kind of care and craftsmanship is immediately apparent when you enter the Nicholson home. The welcoming entrance is bordered by well-kept gardens of hostas and ornamental grasses. Inside, you experience a sense of calm because the décor captures an earthy country feel with its tasteful, eclectic mix of antiques and collectables. Brenda Nicholson, our friendly hostess, explains the kind of home she and her husband, Bob, envisioned. "We originally thought of building a log home, but we didn't want to be coating the logs every so often. So we chose a timber frame home that incorporates *continued on page 30*



TOP LEFT: The timber walls are raised and construction of the 2,200 sq. ft. home begins. TOP RIGHT: The kitchen features Brenda Nicholson's treasured antique butcher's block. BOTTOM: The spacious main floor is anchored by a solid stone fireplace. *continued on page 32*



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TOP: Nicholson uses the beams and towering walls to display antiques and collectibles. BOTTOM: An abundance of windows in the master bedroom allow light to pour in all year round.



the warmth of wood and natural materials we wanted," Nicholson explains.

"We like natural products, so we went with stone. Built as a retirement home, we wanted all the necessary rooms along with the master bedroom on the main floor, while maintaining as much open space as possible. There are two bedrooms in the basement for family and guests when they visit."

The spacious main floor of this 2,200 sq. ft. home is anchored by a solid stone fireplace, which soars three storeys high. Off the foyer, to the left, is the kitchen, which opens onto a large dining space, lighted by the enclosed sunroom beyond. The kitchen cabinetry and sideboard of finely crafted cherry is the work of Amish Mennonite carpenter, **Harvey Stutzman**. A unique feature is the kitchen island, built around the Nicholson's treasured antique butcher's block.

Aside from the rustic, heated tiles in the foyer, the flooring of the main open area is mill-run white ash of varying widths, which gleams with natural light, bringing the outdoors in. The master bedroom on the right opens onto a large covered porch, complete with hot tub, while the spacious loft looking down on the great room houses Nicholson's office and her favoured antique pipe organ—the perfect place to work and play.

Loucks explains his collaborative approach to construction: "We custom design and build the main structure then turn it over to a general contractor to finish the job. We first go to the site and look at the geography of the property. Next, I ask the customer what they want to build. Together, beginning with an on-site bubble diagram, we examine what will actually work, considering the direction of the sun, drainage and all the other variables. We then finalize a house plan that's unique to that homeowner—formal, country or contemporary."

Loucks's collaborative approach and dedication to excellence extends to the other companies involved in the building of the Nicholson home. **Tom Clancy** of **Tom Clancy Builders** of Owen Sound acted as Construction Coordinator. Along with Harvey Stutzman's carpentry and **Rob Hicks's** masonry work, **Van Dolders** of Owen Sound provided windows and doors and **Owen Sound Ledgerrock** the attractive limestone facing.

Starting in 1989 with a crew of three, Great Lakes Timber Company now boasts three full crews, one shop crew and two site crews, all involved in several projects a year in a variety of locations from north of Toronto to the Muskokas to the Bruce Peninsula. "The beauty of timber frame construction," says Loucks, "is that it's adaptable to any look you want."

That unique look is on full display at Nicholson's Hidden Waters home. With the gentle background sound of river waters emerging from the land, this one-of-a-kind home becomes a calm oasis that reflects the beauty of its natural surroundings. **OH**

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