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**A Touch  
of Santa Fe  
in  
Manheim...**

**Courtesy of  
Designers  
Kathy Shenk &  
Carol Mylin**



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# A Touch of Santa Fe... in Manheim

Texas-grown John Vastyan and his family have always been drawn to the Spirit of the West. Their new home in Manheim, with its wide open spaces, timber-frame construction, natural materials, pottery collections, period furnishings and a treasured Navajo rug, provided the foundation for a western-inspired decorating scheme.

by Sue Long  
photography by Allan Holm

## Credits

Home Builder: Elm Ridge Construction  
Timber Framing: Lancaster County  
Timber Frames, Inc.  
Mechanical/Plumbing Contractor: F.W.  
Behler, Inc.

## Trading Lifestyles

Three years ago the Vastyans decided they wanted more land and a newer home. They began visiting subdivisions in the Manheim area, but for one reason or another, discounted everything they saw. They opted to build and found a perfect lot just west of Manheim, which is surrounded by farmland that's part of the Clean and Green program. They began poring over trade and homestyle magazines, clipping pages that contained ideas that appealed to them. The tearsheets were then added to a detailed filing system that Erika Vastyan had developed. Having grown up in Europe, Erika wanted a roomy house with an open floor design. A spacious working kitchen was also on her list of priorities, as she loves to cook, bake and entertain, especially when family members from Germany visit.

Based on those ideas, the Vastyans thought the great room concept would work well. To further emphasize the open staircase that led from the foyer to the second floor. A ground-floor in-home office



*Timber framing created what homeowner John Vastyan calls a "cathedral-like" ambiance in the living room. Radiant heat keeps the room warm and toasty, even on the coldest days.*

and master suite also figured into their plans. Upstairs there's a loft that overlooks the living room, two bedrooms, a full-bath and just-completed multi-purpose room that's become a favorite hang-out for Daniel and Rachel Vastyan and their friends. The Vastyans are currently working on a project in which the lower level of the house will be transformed into a den and guest suite.



## Selecting the Team of Builders

John, who had built an addition on the farmhouse that was outfitted with radiant heat, was eager to delve further into the heating system as well as experiment with hydronics (hot water and steam heat). So, the Vastyans built their home around the mechanical system, which includes a boiler that provides heat for the tap water, garage slab and basement. Radiant heat warms a majority of the first floor, while combination heat services the second floor. The climate in the master suite is controlled by baseboard heat, which is kept to a minimum, as Erika and John prefer to sleep European-style, i.e. under a down comforter, with very little heat and plenty of fresh air (even on the coldest of nights).

While attending a trade show in Rhode Island, John became acquainted with Dave Yates, who heads the York-based contracting firm, F.W. Behler, Inc. Yates was impressed by John's grasp of the subject and agreed to discuss his plans and ideas at a later date.

"The guy had done a lot of research. He knew what

he wanted," Yates explained in an article, "Radiant For The Common Man," which appeared in the May 2001 issue of the trade journal, PM. (The project was also featured in the Philadelphia Inquirer.) "Hydronics is a passion for us. These folks were talking my language."

Of course, budget concerns figured into the design of the system. According to Yates, a home's heating and cooling system typically accounts for 20-30 percent of total building costs. If radiant heat is used extensively in the project (and snowmelt and air conditioning are figured in), the higher percentage generally holds true. In accordance with Yates's figures, the Vastyans' dream system was out of the question from a budgetary standpoint. Thus, they went back to the drawing board and through researching the market, improvising and sacrificing items such as a snowmelt system, nearly \$14,000 was pared from the bottom line.

Having now spent two winters in the house, the Vastyans are more than satisfied with their heating system. "You feel almost giddy when you're inside and enveloped in this very comfortable heat," Erika notes, "while outside it's snowing and the wind's howling."

With ideas in hand, the Vastyans began interviewing building contractors. "We discussed the project with five builders," John recalls of the process. "As soon as some of them heard 'radiant heat,' they said, 'No way.' The mention of timber framing dissuaded a few as well. A friend suggested they contact Elm Ridge Construction, which is based in Lititz. 'I'd seen their trucks, so I was familiar with the name,'" John remarks.

The couple met with Kevin Hess, who, with partners Doug Longenecker and Larry Davis, launched the business in 1994. Since then, they've expanded from building custom homes to doing remodeling and addition work (much of which is for previous customers). "I'd guess that in a typical year our work is split evenly between new construction and remodeling work," Hess says. The builder also makes the observation that low interest rates are prompting homeowners to refinance and reinvest their savings in their homes. "That's been great for the industry and the local economy," he notes.

Hess explains that Elm Ridge had worked on projects that entailed radiant heat, so far as he was concerned that posed no problems for his work crews. While they had never worked with timber framers, Hess was game to add that experience to Elm Ridge's resume. Hess explains that having to work so closely with two other major contractors extended the time frame somewhat, due to the fact that such a project requires that "added stages" need to be built into the schedule.

The Vastyans had a builder. "What most impressed us about Elm Ridge was their desire to take on the chal-



*Installing radiant heat system in the great room.*

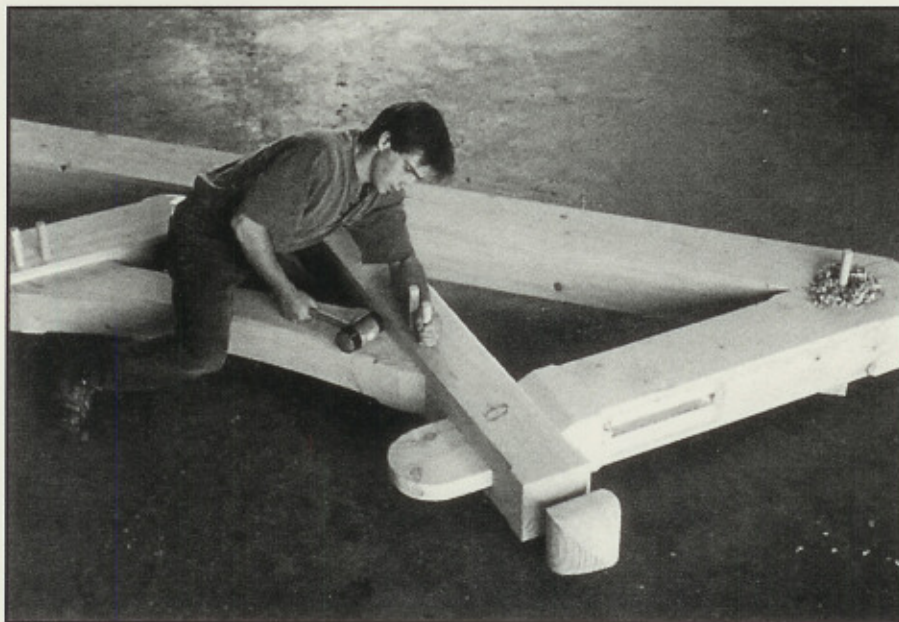


lenge of doing something so unique," John states. The couple also appreciated the fact that at least one of the partners in the firm made it a point to be onsite each day. "We all have our specialized areas," Hess explains, "but because this project was so unique it wasn't unusual to find all of us at the site on any given day."

The couple also appreciated the fact that Elm Ridge personnel were forthcoming in making suggestions of their own. It was Elm Ridge that devised the hip-roof design. They also pointed out that by moving more earth than was originally planned the Vastyans could have a daylight basement. Finally, Kevin suggested that by moving a few trusses, the dead space over the garage – now Daniel and Rachel's rec room – could be utilized. Working with Ray Macariola of Paramount Design, the Vastyans were able to reduce the size of their proposed home from 4,500 square feet to 3,000 or so. "Despite reducing the square footage, Ray maximized the space we had," John says.

As for the timber framing, the Vastyans interviewed several firms and chose to work with Lancaster County Timber Frames, Inc. "We spent the day with Tony Zaya, president of the firm," Erika recalls. "He showed us their facility, as well as several completed homes. We were immediately impressed with him, as both a craftsman and a person. He and John have since become good friends." In fact, the two hope to collaborate on another project as the Vastyans would like the company to return and construct a small barn on their property.

For their living area of the great room, the Vastyans expressed a desire for an "expressive design" and Zaya took it from there. "They settled on hammer beams made from Douglas fir, which are the quintessential showpiece of the timber framer's craft," he explains. "It was a pleasure to combine these with a queen post at the end of the great room wall, tongue-and-grooved pine for the ceiling and a design for heavy insulation of the high-pitched roof." John describes the result as "cathedral-like."



*The timber framing consists of hammer beams, queen posts and a tongue-and-groove ceiling.*