

"The craftsmen who built our house are ... into wood and the beauty of it."

Angie Long, who is building a timber-frame house in West Friendship



Wooden works of art

Beaming: The Long house is best viewed from the inside out. Its huge exposed beams show why the timber-frame style is so appealing - and expensive.

By ELIZABETH KLEIN
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As you drive up Angie and Craig Long's home site in West Friendship, the frame house looks like any other cookie-cutter house that could be found in most any neighborhood. But enter the house and all of a sudden one is overwhelmed by the thick wooden frame.

The Longs are building a timber-frame house - a house that Angie Long believes is reserved for "a certain type of person, one who's in touch with nature and the environment."



"It's like big pieces of furniture that you live in," said Tony Zaya, owner of Lancaster County Timber Frames in York, Pa., which cut the timber for the Long house.

From the outside, a timber-frame house looks like any traditional house. But inside is a different story. Exposed wooden beams dominate the interior, bringing the outdoors inside.

Timber-frame houses, "are notched together with mortise-and-tenon joinery and held together with wooden pegs," said Nancy

Wilkins, executive director of the Timber Frame Business Council.

The mortise is a hollowed section at the end of the post. The tenon is carved onto the end of the beam, which fits into the mortise.

Constructing a timber-frame house is a lot like putting a puzzle together.

"The frame is pre-cut in the shop, delivered [to the job site] and goes up relatively quickly," Wilkins said.

While in the shop, sections of the walls are put together to ensure that they fit correctly. The sections are then disassembled and loaded onto flatbed trucks for shipment to building lots. Each piece is reassembled at the site.

The oldest known timber-frame house dates back more than 700 years and still stands in Europe. Well-known timber-frame structures include Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. While early American settlers built timber-frame dwellings in New England, the residential concept never really took off in the United

A wood lover's fantasy house

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States other than being used for barns.

But in the late 1970s, the timber-frame style began to become more popular as the hippies of the 1960s became consumers in the 1970s, according to Zaya.

"It's an earthy type of building. ... You're looking at structural sculpture. There's nothing fake or phony about it. What you see is what you get."

Zaya estimates the average timber-frame house contains 32 tons of wood, requiring more than 100 trees. Environmentalists may flinch at the prospect of cutting down such a large number of trees for one house, but Zaya said over time the environment is better served because "these structures will last at least 700 years. Isn't that a good use of wood?"

More than 100 white oak and pin oak trees were used for the Long's timber-frame house.

Each 10-by-10-inch post came from trees that were about 29 feet tall. Each piece was hand cut in the workshop at Lancaster County Timber Frames.

The Longs first fell in love with the idea of building a timber-frame house a decade ago while watching the television program *This Old House*.

The births of their two children put their plans for a timber-frame house on the back burner and instead they bought a new house in Ellicott City.

Still they wanted to build a timber frame and in 1994 were invited by a builder to see a timber-frame raising.

Then in 1999, while on a weekend bike ride, the couple found a wooded lot that they thought would be perfect for their timber-frame house. With some investigation, and some rezoning issues to tackle, the Longs finally purchased the lot and began building their house after contracting with Lancaster County Timber Frames.

"We originally wanted to do the entire house in timber frame, but it was too much money," Angie Long said.

So Zaya suggested a hybrid design, with

the core of the house in timber frame, and the periphery built as a traditional house, allowing for more flexibility in the design of the house.

"The hybrid aspect of the home allows us to do more," Craig Long said. "It's easier to work with living spaces that aren't defined by the beams."

The kitchen, bedrooms and home office are built outside the timber frame, while a two-story great room and a loft are housed within it.

Next the Longs needed to find a builder. They interviewed four potential candidates and chose Owen Kelly of Carrigan Homes.

"Owen was the only one who took an



interest. He took it on as a project and is a very elegant builder," Angie Long said. He wanted to build a more refined timber-frame house "unlike the rustic style of the West."

Kelly had never worked on a timber-frame house but appreciated the workmanship involved. He met with Zaya of Lancaster County Timber Frames before agreeing to take on the project.

"It's not as easy as building a traditional home," Kelly said. "There's not as much room to work with in the house."

Kelly estimated that building around the timber frame would add an extra four to six weeks but said, "It's well worth the effort because of the beauty of the wood and timeless design."

In all, building around a timber frame added more than \$50,000 to the price of the Longs' house, which came to approximately \$500,000, including the cost of the lot. Zaya estimated that a timber-frame house costs from 15 percent to 20 percent more than

building a traditional house, while Owen Kelly increased his building price by 8 percent.

The Longs believe that the extra cost was well worth it. "We love wood," Angie Long said "We want to celebrate wood. The craftsmen who built our house are totally into wood and the beauty of it."