

INSIDE: 15 FAVORITE FLOORPLANS

Timber Frame Homes®

Fall 2004

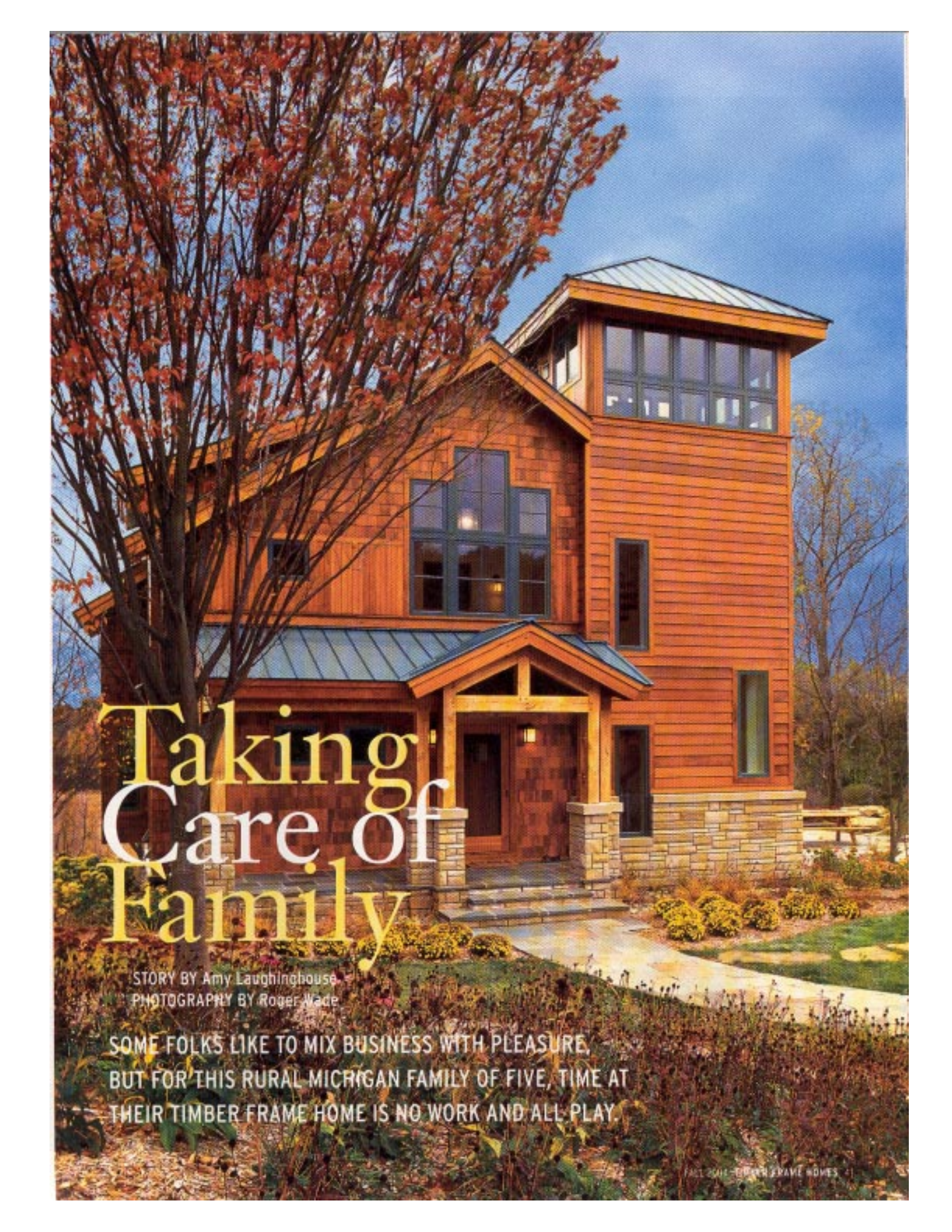
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DAZZLING HOME TOURS

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A large, multi-story timber frame house with a prominent tower, surrounded by autumn foliage. The house features a mix of wood siding, stone accents, and a metal roof. The tower has a large window and a smaller window below it. The main house has a large window on the second floor and a smaller window on the first floor. The house is set on a slight rise with a stone walkway leading to the front steps. The foreground is filled with autumn plants and trees with orange and red leaves.

Taking Care of Family

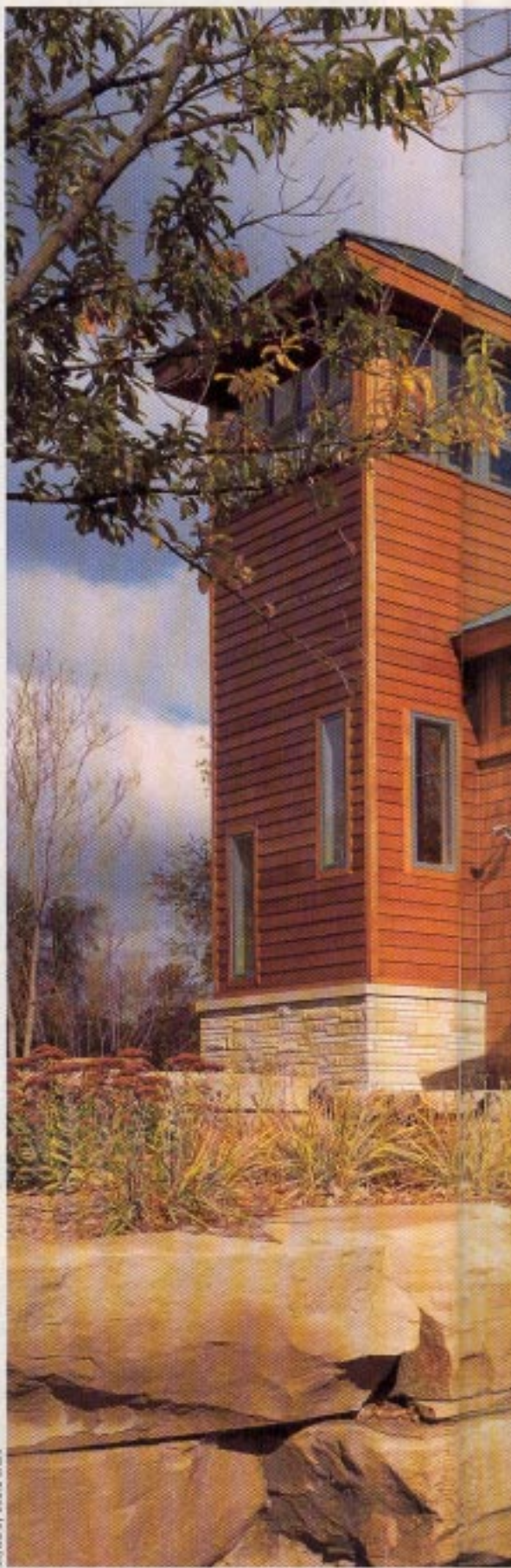
STORY BY Amy Laughinghouse
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Roger Wade

SOME FOLKS LIKE TO MIX BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE, BUT FOR THIS RURAL MICHIGAN FAMILY OF FIVE, TIME AT THEIR TIMBER FRAME HOME IS NO WORK AND ALL PLAY.

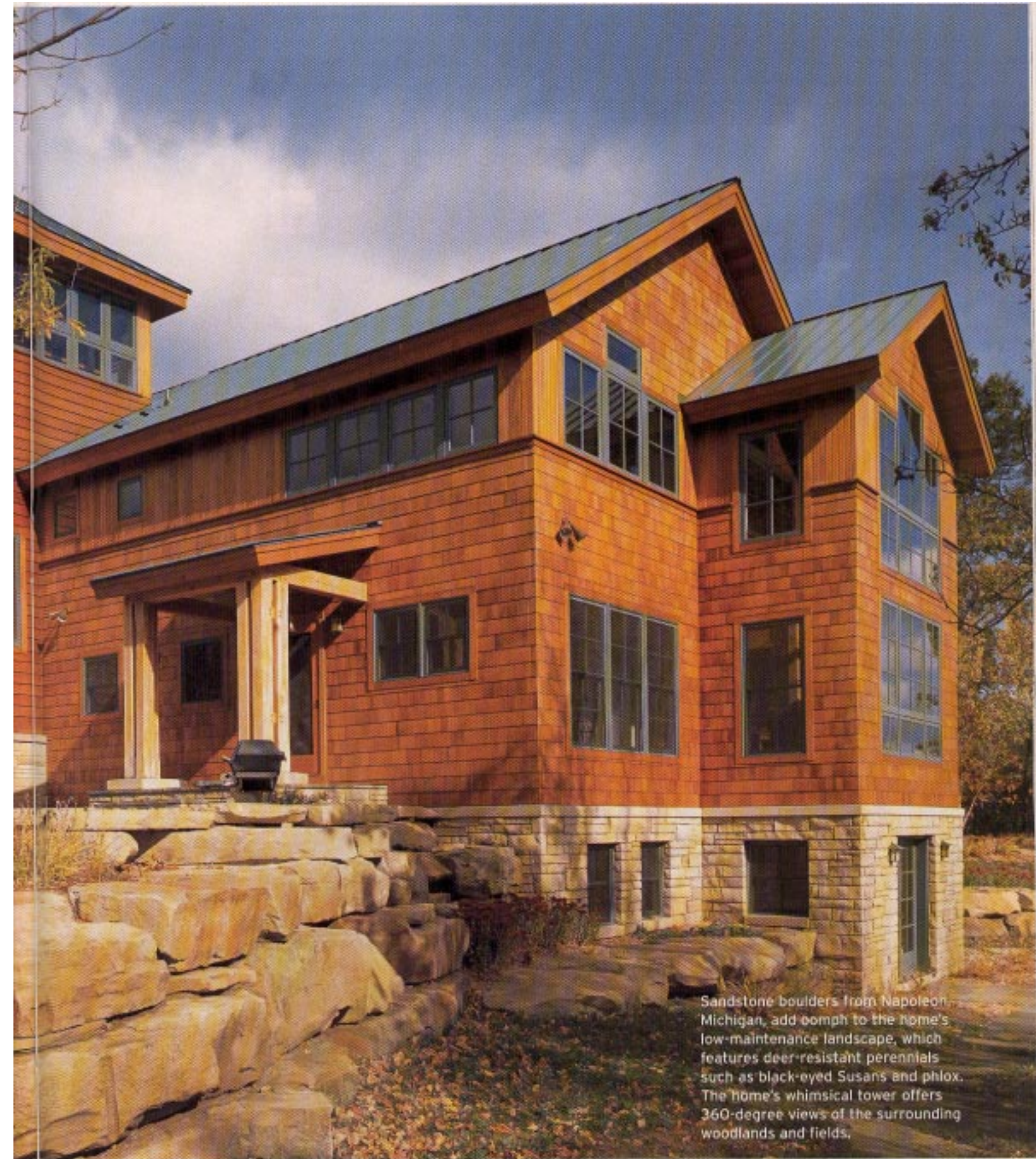


Builder Tim Powell had the vertical cedar tongue-and-groove siding specially milled for the Johnsons' home.

Juggling work with family life can be tough for even the most organized, detail-driven of us. But when you work for a family-owned business, keeping all your balls in the air gets even tougher. "There's no such thing as a vacation," according to Joe Johnson, a private investor whose get-togethers with extended family frequently turn into impromptu business meetings. With three young children and a demanding schedule, Joe and his wife Jill began plotting a second home where they could escape the rigors of the work-a-day world. "We wanted a place where just my wife and children and I could be together," Joe says.



Styled by Petra Graf



Sandstone boulders from Napoleon, Michigan, add oomph to the home's low-maintenance landscape, which features deer-resistant perennials such as black-eyed Susans and phlox. The home's whimsical tower offers 360-degree views of the surrounding woodlands and fields.

Multiple window groupings take advantage of the views, but the sturdy oak timbers lend a reassuring sense of strength when neighboring coyotes howl at night. A comfortable leather sofa and chair cozy up to the limestone fireplace, which is accented by a still-life painting by Jill.



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But just as the path to maintaining a successful business can be less than smooth, the road to the Johnsons' dream retreat began as a rather bumpy ride.

The first problem was a lack of available land within driving distance of their main residence in southeastern Michigan. "We didn't want to spend our time traveling—we wanted to spend our time *being* someplace," Joe says. "But most of the really great places around here are still owned by farmers who aren't interested in selling."

Just when their dream of a private retreat seemed to have run out of gas, they found a farmer willing to hear their plea. The property in question was an unspoiled parcel just outside the 60,000-acre Pinckney State Recreation Area. "This farmer was only the second owner since it was land-granted by President McKinley," Joe says. "When we met with his family, they basically interviewed *us*," he recalls with a chuckle. After eight nail-biting months, the Johnsons finally got their answer. "They came back and said, 'OK, you pass!'"

Their next step was to enlist Mark Melchi and Ron Thomas, principal architects at Archetype Inc. in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to find a suitable building site on their newfound acreage. After considering nearly a dozen different scenarios, they decided to create an approach from a gently undulating gravel road. This sleepy back road leads, in turn, to a winding hillside driveway that threads its way through pasture and woodland before finally revealing the house nestled in the middle of 160 acres of wetlands and rolling woodlands.

"It's kind of a dramatic way to arrive at the house," Ron explains. "It's a very natural spot, because it's near the middle of the property and is concealed from view as you approach it from the road."

"Interestingly enough," Joe adds, "when we finally picked the spot, it turned out to be literally on top of the site's original 1840s farmhouse, which burned down in the early part of the century. Whatever the first owners liked about the site—the

really good views, the way it catches the breeze—appealed to us, too.”

Given this pristine woodland setting, a timber frame seemed the natural choice. “I’ve worked in a lot of old commercial buildings that were timber-framed, and Jill and I very much like the style,” Joe explains.

In addition to architectural expertise of Mark and Ron, who together had helmed several renovations at Joe and Jill’s main residence, the team gradually expanded to include Connie Seiser, project coordinator at Riverbend Timber Framing in Blissfield, Michigan, and Tim Powell, owner of Handcrafted Homes Inc., a high-end custom-home builder based in Saline, Michigan.

Though this was the first timber frame for Tim, Mark and Ron, Riverbend has been perfecting its craft for 25 years. “There was a collaboration with the timber framers,” Mark says. “They were great in terms of showing us their process and how they cut their timbers.”

“The team we put together got along famously,” adds Tim. “I think that’s what made the final product what it is.”

Model of Success

That final product, completed over a span of 10 months, is a 3,900-square-foot, three-bedroom, four-bath timber frame, enclosed in Riverbend’s energy-efficient Insulspan panels. The home’s massive oak posts and beams, which are held together by mortise-and-tenon joinery and affixed with kiln-dried oak pegs, give the



A graceful spiral staircase leads to a glassed-in observation tower. “It’s a great place to watch the weather and the wildlife,” says Joe, who has spotted fox, coyote, deer, hawks, owls and majestic sand hill cranes on his 160-acre farm.

HEAT IT UP

Even in the worst of Michigan’s winter weather, Sand Hill Crane Farm stays cozy and warm. The timber frame features radiant heat, with hot water running through copper and PVC pipes embedded within the floors. “It’s a little more money up front, but it’s very energy efficient,” says builder Tim Powell of Handcrafted Homes. “You don’t get warm spots

next to registers and cold spots elsewhere.” Multiple thermostats allow owners Jill and Joe Johnson to control the heat level in every room.

And to ensure the heat that’s generated doesn’t escape, Riverbend Timber Framing’s Insulspan panels enclose the frame tightly. “The panels include two layers of oriented strand board (OSB) with expanded

polystyrene sandwiched between them. Then they’re laminated together,” explains Connie Seiser, Riverbend’s project coordinator. “Our model home in Blissfield, Michigan, is about 3,000 square feet, and in 2003, it cost \$463 to heat it.” That’s less than \$40 a month—and this kind of savings would receive a warm welcome in any home. —A.L.



TOP AND ABOVE: An ingenious, window-filled interior wall insulates Jill and Joe Johnson's daughter's bedroom from noise from the great room below without blocking light or views of the cathedral ceiling. French doors lead to an interior balcony, giving her a dramatic space to call her own.

new home the aura of an old-fashioned farmhouse that's withstood the test of time.

Strategically placed windows take advantage of the views and fill the home with light. Though it boasts soaring cathedral ceilings in the great room, creating a striking sensation of space, each room was deliberately scaled to human-sized proportions. In fact, after viewing the initial blueprints, the Johnsons asked the architects to subtract 2 feet from every side.

"They didn't want to overbuild this house," Mark explains, "because they may want to add a bunk house to host larger family groups, with connecting footpaths or boardwalks in the future."

"They also wanted it to be easy to take care of," Ron notes. So, in addition to keeping the home to a manageable size, the Johnsons selected exterior materials, such as a metal roof and window casings, as well as cedar shingles and siding that could both stand up to Michigan's harsh climate and age gracefully.

Yet for all the home's practicality, it's also rife with whimsical touches that appeal not only to the children, but also to the couple's inner child. The boys' bedroom, for example, features a ladder leading to the loft. "It became sort of a little fort up there," Mark says. The Johnsons' daughter enjoys a theatrical Juliet-style balcony overlooking the great room just off her second-floor bedroom. French doors open to the balcony, completing a little girl's fantasy room while giving dad a place to have some fun. "That's where I give my State of the Union/State of the Family address," Joe jokes.

But for all of the home's character, the most fanciful feature is the tower, accessed by a spiral staircase. "That's the place to sit, because you have a 360-degree view, and you can see for more than half a mile," Joe says. "It's like a tree house." He keeps a pair of binoculars handy to spy on the wildlife—fox, coyote, deer and birds of all kinds, including the giant sand hill cranes for which the Johnsons named their home.

Sand Hill Crane Farm is full of fun, intriguing features to be sure, but the house also is notable for what it lacks. "It has no

The Johnsons' home incorporates many fanciful elements designed to spark the imaginations of their children, such as a vaulted loft accessed by a ladder in the boys' bunk room.

radio, no TV, no electronics. Our 6 year old says, "You're ruining my life!" Joe says with a laugh. "But the rest of the family is infatuated with going there. We've got a big stack of hay bales the kids can climb on and use as targets for archery practice. Every time we go, we come back with some creature the kids have caught—a snake or a turtle or a frog."

They're less than 90 minutes from home, but when the Johnsons spend time at their timber-framed farm, Joe feels like he's a million miles away. "The phone doesn't ring, because nobody knows we're here. We don't get mail. There's no UPS man. There are lots of animal noises; but otherwise, it's totally silent. We wouldn't do anything different," he says of his family's getaway. "It's perfect." ■



HOME DETAILS

- Package price: \$140,000
- Square footage: 3,900
- Timber producer: Riverbend Timber Framing

- General contractor: Handcrafted Homes Inc.

For more information see Resources on page 67.

