

LUXURY LIVING IN THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

# Blue Mountain

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Extended floor joists and woodwork create a contemporary, yet cozy, feel. ( Brooke Wolfe )



The Baums' home is part retreat, part cooking school.



Joe and Lenore Baum scoured the East Coast to find the right materials for their nature-inspired home. Photos by Brooke Wolfe. ( Brooke Wolfe )

growing in a side garden confirm the easy, calm impression. Chirping birds and wind move easily through the trees on their 17-acre retreat.

This is a dream come true for the Baums: an unpretentious home — part retreat, part cooking school — that incorporates sustainable living. The 2,700-square-foot house features many green advantages — passive solar design, south-facing exposure, an earth bermed north side with insulated concrete form, and radiant hot water heating for all domestic hot water and much of the space heating. Large low-emissivity windows with extended overhangs contribute to the solar design and invite the outside in.

The house is beautifully built, functional and flows with loving attention to detail. "It was such a great surprise that we could actually do this, achieve our heart's desire and live in a piece of art. Wow, we did it! It's a place of rejuvenation, a retreat for us, one that is sustainable," Joe says.

The Baums moved here from Michigan two years ago. Joe, a retired GM engineer, and Lenore, a vegetarian cooking expert ([www.lenoresnatural.com](http://www.lenoresnatural.com)), relished the opportunity to participate in building their dream home. They became part of the crew, working seven days a week, about 13-hour days. They lived in an RV on site during the 14 months it took to complete the home, and have been in the house less than a year. "Our greatest challenge was staying ahead of the crew," recalls Lenore. "After the rest of the crew left each day, we cleaned up. We stained and sorted lumber. We also drove all over the East Coast getting the right materials."

Lenore comments that her biggest surprise was the amount of time it took to make all the decisions. "It took us hundreds of hours to decide on materials, and the research we did was amazing. I don't make easy decisions, usually deliberating on things instead, so this was a great lesson for me, learning to make fast decisions," she laughs.

No matter how rushed, the decisions they made were good ones. The house includes a six-foot, dry-stack stone wall that begins outside at the front

## A Natural Beauty

### The Baums' home is a green dream brought to life

By Melissa Stanz

The moment you turn off Ox Creek Road in Weaverville and begin the uphill climb to Joe and Lenore Baums' new home, you begin to relax. Their drive meanders around a wildflower meadow dotted in yellow, orange and daisy white, providing a foreground to their lovely Asian-inspired home reminiscent of a graceful ship.

Walking the path to the front door, unexpected natural stone rosettes, a four-foot high decorative cedar luminary, bright red bee balm and a glimpse of tender organic lettuce

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The path to the home's front entry winds around a four-foot tall cedar luminary.



A stone wall mirrors itself inside and outside the home.



The kitchen, created to host Lenore's vegetarian cooking classes, was the first priority in the design process.



The second floor is home to a meditation room and Joe's office. ( Brooke Wolfe )

entrance and gracefully moves inside. A bottom corner of the wall is a large, blue granite boulder they extracted as they graded the land. A small, black, Zen fountain gurgles amiably at the top of the wall. Natural cork flooring on the first level offers sustainability and provides extraordinary comfort for standing in the kitchen — a great benefit for Lenore and her cooking students.

Throughout the open bottom level, natural materials including wood, large windows with great views, and stone flooring make you feel like you are outdoors. Extended floor joists become outriggers, creating a cozy feeling. Lighted niches show off eclectic art works; some of the pieces reflect the couple's Zen Buddhist spirituality. A soapstone wood-burning stove in the living room looks handsome and is efficient. An elegant ebony-stained cherry wood side table with hickory inlay on the top was custom made for the Baums by Scott Olson Jr., a local furniture maker. It sits next to a 250-pound granite carving called Fallen Warrior, created by Lars Newman, an artist in Phoenix.

During the building process, the Baums were fortunate to work with architect Chris Larson and builder Doug Clark of Greenbrier Builders. The Baums speak highly of both professionals. "Working with Chris was delightful, surprising, creative and fun. Nothing daunted him; he accepted all our challenges and solved our problems," Lenore says. "When we went to see his house he had so many elements we wanted, and we adapted those to reflect our vision. Working with Doug was just as much fun. They are both craftsmen with great skill."

The kitchen is a chef's dream come true. In fact, the entire house was built around the kitchen. Lenore comments that it was the first plan their architect showed them. "We wanted an optimum efficiency kitchen with a functional design for my cooking school. The island design features a galley on one side, but the other side is for socializing — it's curvy and artistic," she said. "The whole design helps me teach people to eat healthier; which is my passion."

Excellent workflow and top of the line appliances make the kitchen hard to leave. Corian countertops, a Wolf six-burner range, Sub-Zero refrigerator, Bosch dishwasher, four Kindred under-mount stainless sinks, and Grohe faucets look great and function smoothly. A large walk-in pantry includes natural light and plenty of room for Lenore's stockpile of handy kitchen gadgets. Ample counter space and the curving island add to the functionality. Lenore easily accommodates eight to 14 students for vegan cooking classes. Those students are treated to 270-degree mountain views, looking out over the wildflower meadow and the organic gardens just outside.

The back of the lower level is tucked into the mountain and includes a master bedroom and bath, laundry room, storage, mud room, and a half bath. A carport, workshop and storage space is linked to the house by a covered walkway. The cedar-lined master bath includes a deep Japanese soaking tub, double sinks and a muted natural-shade tile shower that includes tiles hand selected by the Baums from three acres of tile showroom in Ohio. Just off the bath, glass doors open to an outdoor shower surrounded by a Japanese garden protected by another dry-stack stone retaining wall. The same tile from the bathroom shower lines the back of this shower. Special ipè wood from South America provides a comfortable platform under feet, and this wood is both rot- and water-resistant.

Due to Lenore's passion for natural, organic food, the house features a 21st century root cellar. Disguised as a closet, when opened it reveals an insulated 55-degree interior that allows vegetable fermentation and keeps other vegetables, nuts and miscellaneous items fresh.

The upper level, about 600 square feet, includes a loft used for yoga and meditation and an office/sewing room with another meditation area accessible by a ladder — a great hideaway. A spacious deck off the loft provides more room for R&R.

In a storage area under an eave, the Baums proudly point out a special beam signed by all the work crew; a sign of the care, quality and friendships forged through the building process. Architect Larson agreed with that sentiment. "Working with the Baums was a lot of fun. They knew what they wanted and made timely decisions. We had an excellent team that worked well together, and we all watched out for each other."

The Baum home reflects the care with which it was built as well as the essence of its owners. Both are natural, environmentally aware, and flow effortlessly. It is a testament to the power of dreams.



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