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Great Outdoors

A Michigan wood lover escapes to a private wildlife refuge

Dave Tuxbury has a passion for wood, whether it is growing in a forest or used for a log home. He set out to try to find a way to be able to meld his love of wood and woodworking talents into an outdoor activity. Since he also enjoys watching wildlife, especially large deer, when a 1,600-acre parcel of land with mixed forests and marshes came up for sale, he seized the opportunity to create a private wildlife refuge.

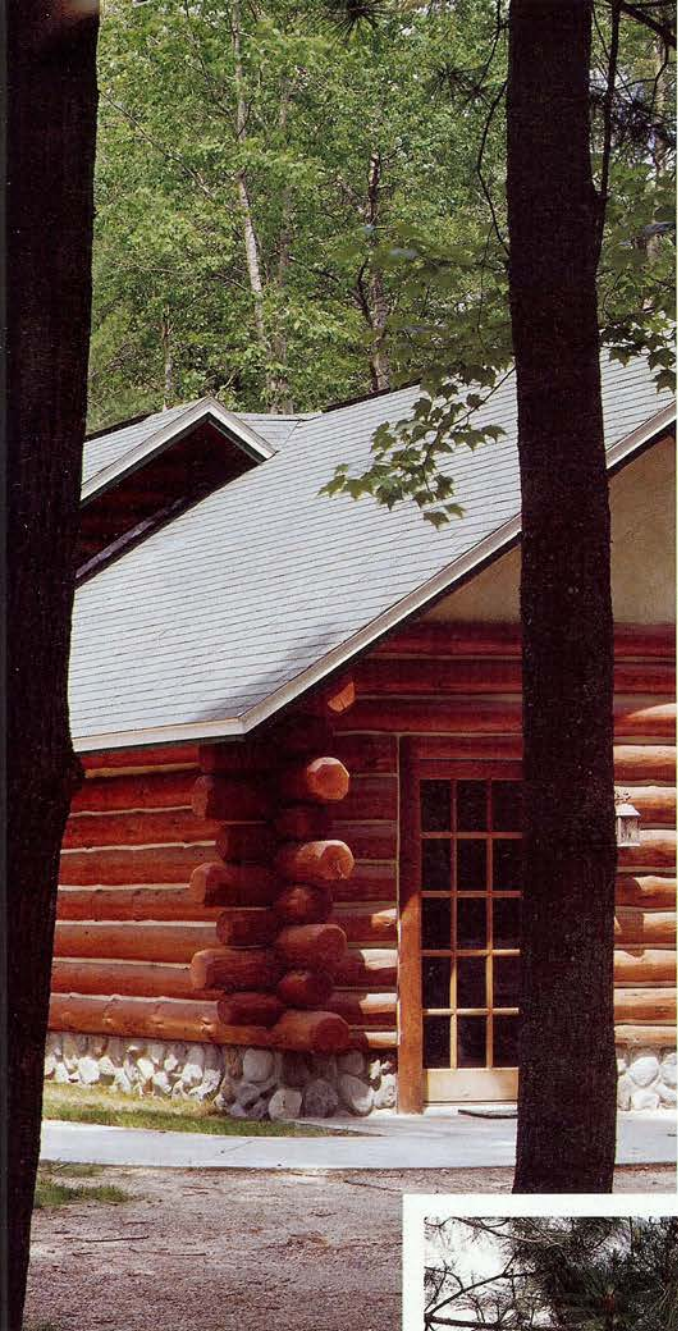
"You just cannot find large deer on public land," he explains. "Here, we have left the area in a near wilderness

state and feed the deer a scientific antler-growing diet that results in some of the most magnificent animals many have ever seen."

Set in the wilds of northern Michigan, Dave's Deer Tracks Ranch is bounded by the Big Manistee River, known for its quality trout fishing. It is located a two hours' drive from Lansing on Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

When Dave acquired Deer Tracks Ranch, the property had no buildings. Before he could open his business as a site for guided hunting tours, he had to construct accom-

Story by Teresa L. Wolff • Photos by Roger Wade • Styling by Debra Grahl

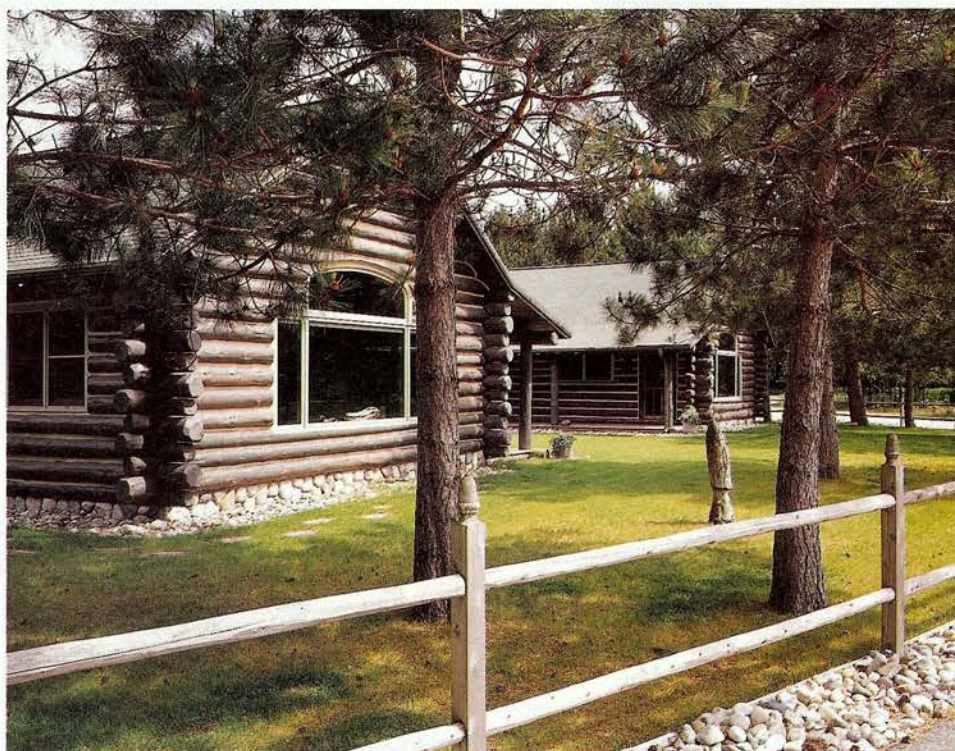


Left: Set in Michigan's Lower Peninsula, Deer Tracks Ranch is constructed of red pine logs, chinked in the Adirondack style.

Below: A king-post truss highlights the gable end and exposed extended ridgepoles. The home is set on a river rock foundation to blend with the natural surroundings.



Right: The left wing of the main lodge houses the dining hall with a large picture window. The right wing is the caretaker's residence.





Above: Scenes from the property were hand-burned into the oak countertops with flagstone backsplash. Even the door pulls are made of antlers from white-tailed deer on the Ranch. An Adirondack-style railing adorns the loft.

Right: A hand-forged chandelier with 400 deer antlers is the star attraction in the great room. Flagstone flooring makes the lodge "boot friendly." The stairway to the loft circles around a gnarly cedar tree, harvested from the ranch's marsh. A light inside the nest on the top of the tree illuminates the ceiling and log purlins.

modations for the guests and workshops to hold the equipment necessary to maintain the ranch. Fortunately, he owns Maple Island Log Homes.

All 10 buildings on Deer Tracks Ranch feature Maple Island's full-round, red pine, chinked log construction, built in the Adirondack style. Every building also features hand-hewn ceiling boards, whose rustic look Dave admires.

The 3,000-square-foot main lodge sleeps 12. It has a great room for relaxation. The hearth of the room's river rock fireplace includes three stones, each weighing close to 800 pounds. Dave opted for sassafras wood from southern Michigan for the fireplace mantel, pointing out that the bark can be left on and still stay attached.

A full-time cook is in residence at Deer Tracks Ranch. The kitchen in the main lodge is equipped with a commercial range and to prepare meals served family style.

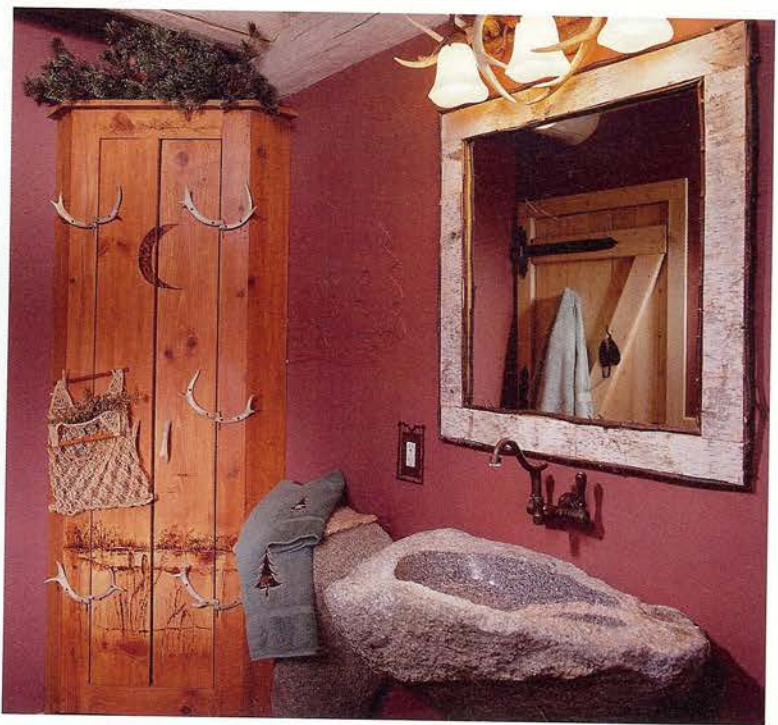
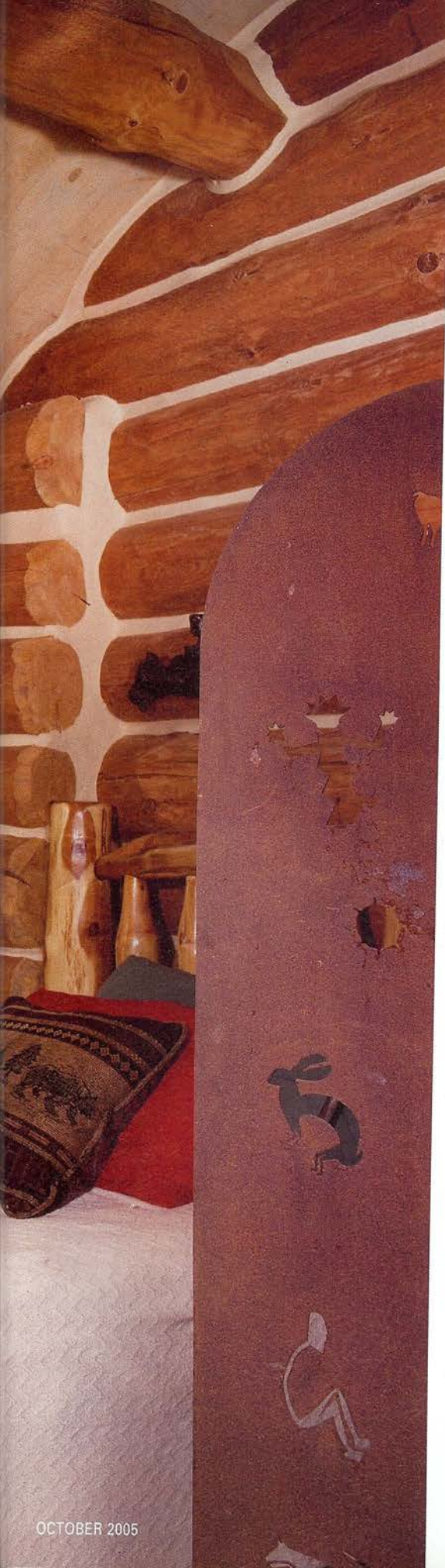


Double king-post trusses frame the dining room. Guests sit on sassafras benches at the pine dining room table. The natural base and roots of trees form the bench and table legs.



Deer mounts and wildlife décor highlight the cozy loft guestroom.





A 500-pound rock used for the bathroom sink features a natural quartz ring around the inside. Maple Island craftsmen fashioned the mirror from birch bark and twigs and included antlers on the chandelier and as hinges on the storage cabinet.

More formal dinners also are available.

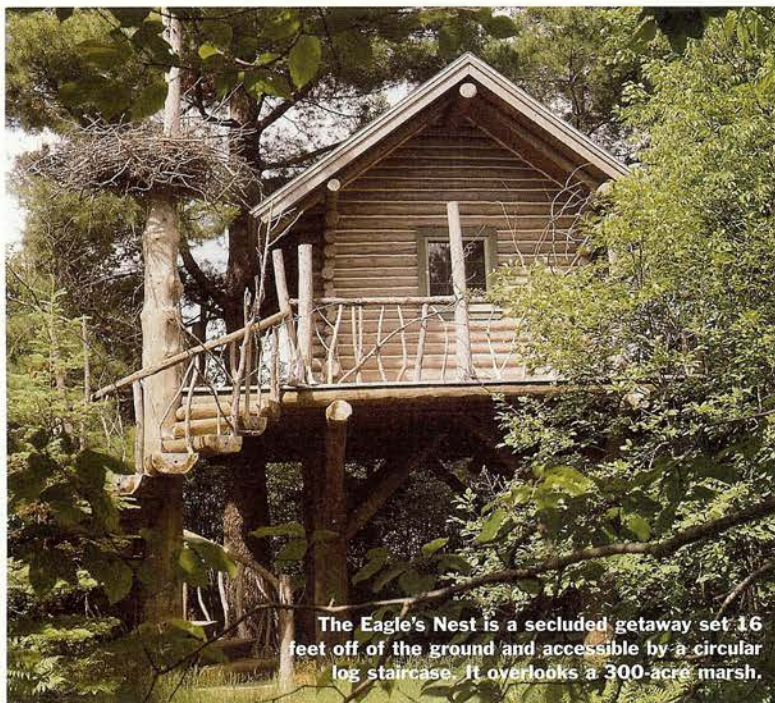
A maintenance building boasts a total of 7,000 square feet, enough for a workshop. Its attic can hold 125 tons of grain, which can be loaded onto a trailer and fed to the white-tailed deer on the ranch. Two guest cabins, Dave's personal cabin, a hay barn and the Eagle's Nest complete the ranch's structures.

"My favorite place on the ranch is the Eagle's Nest, which is located about two miles away from any other structure on the property," Dave says. "The only way to access it is to walk. You cannot hear any engines or motors at the Eagle's Nest, but the frogs and wildlife at night are so noisy it is overwhelming.

All of the materials to construct the Eagle's Nest were hauled in during the winter. That way, the crew didn't have to construct any new roads, just slide the materials across the frozen marsh. Dave remarks that it looks as if the building had been set down by a helicopter.

Not every guest at Deer Tracks Ranch is a hunter. Dave also offers fawn-tagging searches each spring. He and his guests seek out the newborn fawns and place a small tag in the animal's ear for identification. Any fawns that appear unhealthy are given vitamins or antibiotics. Another spring activity is the shed hunt, where the deer's shed antlers are collected. Many people come just to view the animals; to accommodate them, Dave constructed four log blinds on stilts.

As if being the owner of Maple Island Log Homes and Deer Tracks Ranch didn't keep Dave busy, he also owns two other businesses. Timeless Wood Care Products Inc. manufactures foam that is placed between the logs in a chink-style home. In his role at American Log Restoration, Dave has been involved with state and federal restoration projects, including the renovation of the Post Cereal Great Camps that were built in the 1920s. "All of these endeavors have helped me meld my love of wood and working outside," he relates. "I find the building and restoration of log homes have their own physical and mental challenges. You have to know how to construct a log home if you are going



The Eagle's Nest is a secluded getaway set 16 feet off of the ground and accessible by a circular log staircase. It overlooks a 300-acre marsh.

For the Eagle Nest's kitchen, carpenters carved silhouettes of trees into the white cabinets doors and installed wide-plank pine flooring to complement the red pine wall logs.



Dave built the exterior deck of the Eagle's Nest around two existing trees, one on each end. The random-trim saddle-notch corners create a more rustic look.



to repair one. Plus, I am always looking for ways to build a more unique log home."

For all his activity, Dave finds plenty of time to escape. "Some people just come here for the quiet. For me, it is terrific to be away from the rush of my businesses," he explains. "A three-mile run through the Deer Tracks Ranch woods, sharing the space with the wildlife, restores my peace of mind." **LMI**

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For information about Deer Tracks Ranch, visit www.deertracksranch.com.

