

What Remodeling Couples Need to Know Building "Old" in Corbett

FALL 1999

OREGON HOME

REMODELING & DECOR IN THE NORTHWEST

20 Most Common
**New Addition
Mistakes**

Back From the
ashes!

the reconstruction of the
Gov. Oswald West retreat

\$3.50



7 25274 94057 8



Reconstructing a Historic Retreat

For 55 years Governor Oswald West's 1913 cabin was the centerpiece of one family's Cannon Beach summers. Then an arsonist torched it. Here's how the Durfee and Neupert families rebuilt the retreat.

BY SHEILA DE LA ROSA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID PAPA ZIAN

She used to call it the Big House.

This was back when Ann Durfee was still Ann Neupert, when she and her four brothers—Karl, David, John and Peter—and sister, Marilyn, were still kids. She called the cabin the Big House because her great-grandmother lived a sand dollar's throw away in a house known as the Little House because—*think like a kid!*—it was littler.

The Big House was built in 1913 for Governor Oswald West, the fiery Democrat who masterminded the public's right of access to the ocean shore by declaring Oregon's beaches a public highway. West's 3,000-square-foot Adirondack-style log cabin was built on nearly an acre in the midst of tall stands of Sitka spruce trees on a bluff 80 feet above the beach, just southeast of Haystack Rock.

In 1936, Durfee's grandparents, Gladys and Harry Bouvy, M.D., an eye- and ear-nose-and-throat physician in Portland, purchased the property. Dr. Bouvy would head for the Coast on Thursdays during the summer, see Cannon Beach patients on Friday and Monday, and spend the rest of the time in the summer place with his family. For decades, the cabin was the perfect backdrop for Bouvy descendants to enjoy the beach.

Until, that is, May 30, 1991. Under the cloak of darkness that Thursday night, a 16-year-old arsonist set fire to a shed near the back door of what had been the centerpiece of the family's Cannon Beach summers.

By midnight, the cabin—and 55 years of a family's history—had gone up in smoke.



CLATSOP COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

What a difference a reconstruction makes: The Durfee and Neupert families rebuilt the historic cabin after an arsonist's fire in 1991 reduced it to a pile of rubble (right).

Ann Durfee remembers exactly what the Big House looked like before it burned down.

The logs had a patina that only decades of linseed oil can bring. A 9-foot-6-inch-wide basalt fireplace drew your eye to the heart of the cabin. A stone chiseled into the shape of Haystack Rock was centered above the mantel, the perfect miniature of what loomed so large just beyond the living room's picture windows. Navajo rugs—some made by a friend of Os West's, the rest collected by Ann's grandparents—muffled your footsteps. The walking canes that had belonged to her great-grandfather leaned against the wall.

Before the house burned down, your eyes would have taken in the Japanese floats—the thick, green-glass ones that long ago stopped washing up—that her great-grandmother took pride in retrieving. "My great-grandmother lived in the Little House year-round and when the storms came in, she would sit in front of her living room window looking through binoculars at the ocean," remembers Durfee, who with her husband, David, co-owns the cabin with Karl and Karolyn Neupert, John Neupert, Peter and Sheryl Neupert, and their niece, Mara. "When she saw a float coming in, she'd race down to the beach and—because her house was so close to the ocean—she'd get it."

Her grandfather's electric foghorn stood at the ready to summon visiting



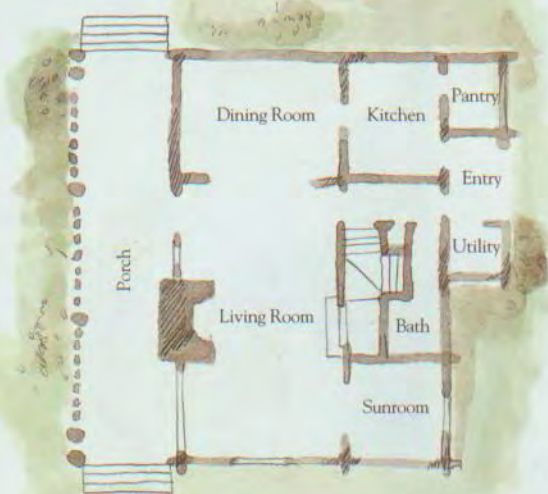
Cabin co-owner Ann Durfee with the family's furriest members, Dash and Crosby.

grandkids if they disregarded the dinner bell. Once they climbed the steps to the cabin, Durfee and her brothers ate their meals on Blue Willow china in the dining room, under the light of an old oxen yoke that their grandfather had turned into a rustic chandelier.

Outdoors, a pair of hammocks were

always strung between the massive (16 to 18 inches in diameter) Sitka spruce columns on the 11-foot-wide front porch. A wooden swing was suspended from the porch ceiling, awaiting the next challenger of the Swing Game: Whoever could go from a dead stop to touching the porch ceiling with their

FLOORPLAN



1ST FLOOR



2ND FLOOR



toes in the fewest swings, won. When that got old, the kids would be escorted down to the beach—cars used it as a road back then—and Ride the Pillow.

"Before there were boogie boards, my great-grandmother taught us how to Ride the Pillow," says Durfee. "You'd run near the water with a twin bedsheet that was sewn up like a giant pillowcase until it filled up with air, then you'd hold the ends closed, jump in the water, and lay on it and kick till a wave came in."

At night, you turned down a handmade blue seersucker blanket cover—two ribbons of white eyelet trim cascading down the cover from headboard to footboard—and settled into a

quilt-covered bed. Late risers could pull down the old black-painted roller blinds that had been up since World War II required them for blacking out the Coast. Through the logs' chinking came the roar of the ocean and the rush of the wind. The old cabin's creaks and groans lulled the household to sleep.

When I first pulled up to the site, I thought, *What are we going to do with this?*" remembers architect David Wark, an associate principal of Fletcher Farr Ayotte in Portland, whose firm the Durfee and Neupert families had retained before the fire to make a few improvements to the cabin.

A Haystack Rock-shaped stone is once again the focal point of the cabin's fireplace in the living room (above). On the mantel, which was pieced together from one of the few logs that survived the fire ("We purposely left some of the char from the fire on the log," says Durfee), is a green vase that belonged to Durfee's great-grandmother. The little black stove that used to provide heat in an upstairs bedroom also made it through the inferno. Durfee had it cleaned, rechromed and nicked, and took the stove to Naomi's Lampshades in Lake Oswego, where it was fashioned into a lamp. The coffee table was purchased at Portland Antiques. The Navajo rug is from Quintana Galleries in Portland.



(The family was in the process of getting the cabin onto the National Register of Historic Places; a structural engineer had been measuring the cabin just hours before the arsonist struck.)

Nobody wanted to say "bulldoze," but Wark admits that it crossed his mind. "Once you realized that Oswald West had built the cabin, and understood the history and importance of the cabin and what it represents—and I think the family felt

A new antique oxen yoke was turned into a lamp and hung in the dining room (above), where the original had always been.

that more than anyone—everyone had a strong desire to reunite the house and the site with its history," says Wark.

Unfortunately, floorplans for the cabin didn't exist. And so, a week after the fire, Wark donned a white hardhat and blue rainsuit and began sifting through

the building's sooty remains. He needed measurements of the original cabin in case the homeowners decided to reconstruct the dwelling. Though he'd worked on such historic projects as Multnomah Lodge and Crater Lake Lodge, and many houses that were "almost ruins," the Florida native had never worked on a house that had burned down.

"It was eerie to sift through the debris," remembers Wark. "To measure

Dealing With Disaster

Nobody imagines that *their* home will be the one to slide down a mountain or go up in flames. If you want to be better prepared to recover from house damage or loss, listen to what Ann and David Durfee, who had to deal with the aftermath of a cabin fire, advise.

Document your possessions. "We didn't have a good record of everything that was in the beach house," says Ann, who spent months and months going through old photographs and routing lists of belongings to the other cabin co-owners to amend. "It's better to spend half a day taking photographs of your belongings *before* something happens to them than it is to spend six months *after* a fire trying to figure out everything that you owned."

Revisit your insurance coverage from time to time. "Our insurance carrier—Chubb Insurance—was wonderful to work with after the fire," says Ann. Though the house was fully insured, some of the old Navajo rugs were not.

Take a little time to ponder all of your options after a home-related disaster. The Durfees' family cabin burned down in 1991 and wasn't reconstructed until 1995. "Time helped us as a group figure out what we wanted to do," says Ann.

Don't get caught up in replicating everything. Some things are best remembered as memories. "For example, we had a broken cuckoo clock downstairs," says David Durfee. "Should we buy a broken cuckoo clock just because before the fire there had always been one there? Those are the kinds of debates you end up having."

Use the aftermath of a home disaster as an opportunity to make changes that you wouldn't have made if the house was intact. The Durfees and Neuperts decided to add a large basement underneath the new cabin. They now have ample space for a small wine cellar and kids' toys, and, because the mechanical and electrical systems could be put in the basement, the living quarters of the cabin are free of modern trappings such as ductwork and electrical boxes.

—S.D.



The original Spring House (above) shelters a 3-foot circle of beach stones that edge a pool of water fed by a natural spring (inset). "When there were a lot of people at the beach, the Spring House was a cool spot to put pop and melons," remembers Durfee.

the shelves, I'd have to move burned Monopoly games and dice games—all these things that people who had lived in the cabin had touched. There were half-burned boardgames, burned books, shards of glass. I saw burned furniture and dishes, and an oxen yoke light that the family had a real connection with. The soot stayed on everything. There were piles and piles of burned wood. The Navajo rugs that I'd seen photographs of were gone. It was all gone—the rugs, the furniture, the mattresses. *Totaled.*"

Meanwhile, the Durfees and Neuperts held a family meeting to figure out the property's future. "My first thought was, *I don't want to rebuild,*" says Durfee.

"I didn't think you could get your memories back by rebuilding the same cabin, but two of my brothers wanted to rebuild so there was a lot of discussion." Briefly,

The only wooden door that survived the fire (left) now leads to a small wine cellar in the new basement.

the siblings discussed subdividing the land and building two houses, the other to accommodate another wing of the family who also owned shares in the cabin. After months of negotiations, the Durfees and Neuperts bought out the other co-owners and committed to rebuilding Os West's coastal retreat.

"It had become apparent that it was the best thing to do for all concerned," says Durfee. "The insurance was better if we rebuilt. Also, we heard from enough people, whether they knew us or not, who couldn't believe it when they went to Cannon Beach and the 'log house on the hill' wasn't there anymore."

The cabin's co-owners designated Ann to oversee the reconstruction. "They said that I had more time than anybody else, but I didn't have a clue about building a cabin," says Durfee. Along with Wark, the reconstruction team included Rich Elstrom, the owner of Rich Elstrom Construction Inc. in Gearhart, who was hired as the project's contractor. Elstrom has an 11-employee company that remodels and builds oceanfront residences up and down the Coast. Project manager Ken Walker

would oversee the many craftspeople who would work on the cabin. "This is the kind of project where if we'd had the wrong contractor, it would have been a nightmare," says David Durfee. "Rich and Ken were super. They had a good crew, and they all did a lot of thinking."

The family set about making a multitude of decisions. Should they build "green" or "dry"? Building with green logs would require Elstrom to accommodate as much as 8 percent shrinkage in the circumference of each log from the time the cabin was built until it dried out some three years later. Building with dry logs would cost more and would delay construction for as long as a two years while the logs were dried in a giant kiln. (They went "green.") Did the family want to replicate the 1913 cabin or did they want a house that looked like the old one on the outside, but that had modernized electrical and mechanical systems?

"The family was in agreement that they wanted the history that they had lost," says Wark, "but they had also put up with a lot of inconveniences with the old cabin. They wanted the exterior of the cabin to be exactly the same as the original, but inside they wanted a modern house that had the historic integrity of the original cabin. Deciding to reconstruct the cabin was 100 times harder than bulldozing and building a new house, but they just felt that it was worth it for their family."

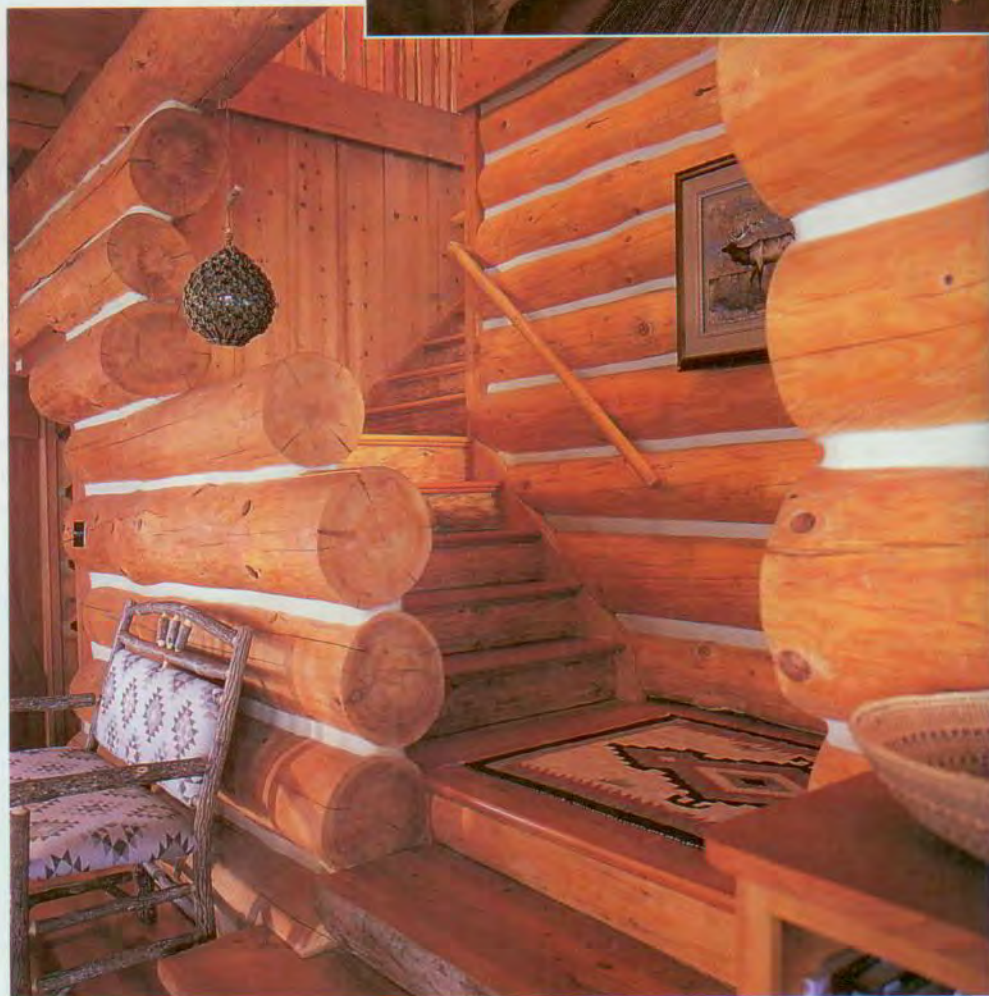
Because Wark had spent so much time measuring the cabin's ruins, he knew exactly how far each log would have to protrude from the original face of the cabin wall in order for the new cabin to have the character of the old. All he needed now were logs. Sitka spruce logs. And lots of them.

"We looked all over for Sitka spruce logs," says Wark. "A Place in the Sun Log Homes in Timber, Oregon, spearheaded the search. They checked Oregon, Washington and Alaska, finally finding logs near Tillamook that had been cut for another project. They assembled the logs under their covered area, then they disassembled them after we approved everything."

Now it was Elstrom's team's turn to get busy. The old cabin had to be torn

"We still call this Gran's room," says Durfee of the new bedroom (right) that's in the corner of the cabin where her great-grandmother's old bedroom was. The blue seersucker blanket covers are replicas of the old ones. "Everybody wanted exactly the same blanket covers," she says.

A hanging Japanese float keeps "the little people" from leaning over the new stairwell landing (below). The bench was purchased at the Pendleton store in Milwaukie.



down and all the debris hauled off. A 12-foot-deep hole—the new basement that the family desperately needed for multi-family storage and for modern mechanical and electrical systems—needed to be dug, and a new foundation poured before the first round of logs could rise on the property.

"The site was very challenging,"

remembers Elstrom. "We took down a log home that had a foundation of boulders placed upon earth of varying solidity. The original soil was partially built up with fill to create that commanding view site. Parts of it are natural, but where the porch of the house is, the ground is pretty unstable, and we had to auger in some deep concrete pilings that



Gov. Oswald West

1635 GOVERNOR WEST'S SUMMER COTTAGE, CANNON BEACH, OREGON.

OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORH187014 AND ORH16425

go 20-some feet deep. Spring water kept flooding into the basement area.”

The new log cabin was raised on the Cannon Beach site in just a day and a half. To meet seismic codes, the logs were reinforced with vertical steel rods that run the length of the wall. Interior fir board-and-batten walls and fir floors and ceilings gave the cabin an instant 1913-era look.

The replication of the details was challenging,” says Elstrom, “but we had charred house parts that we used to pattern our doors and trim. David Wark had done good architectural work and Ann had a lot of photos of the old cabin, so we had lots of information to work from.”

Ken Walker coordinated craftspeople such as stonemason Nikos Marikos who did the fireplace and blacksmiths from Royal Oak in Portland who recreated the door hardware and firescreen. Kathy Baines of Interior Fabrications

helped with the fabric selections.

The cabin was technically complete in 1995, but the fine-tuning continued. “It’s amazing the amount of maintenance that the cabin required the first couple of years,” says David Durfee. “Every few months, the builder would take off the cap pieces, adjust some bolts and lower the front end of the house and reline it up.” The house ended up shrinking about 5 percent. The final tune-up was made last fall.

Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the West-Bouvby cabin, the reconstructed house stands ready to usher in the next generation of Durfee and Neupert—and the generation or two after them. But it was the old guard that made Elstrom’s day when he attended the thank-you party that the Durfee-Neupert family threw for all the people who had helped reconstruct the cabin.

“Some family members who hadn’t seen the house during the course of construction were sitting in the living room,” he remembers, “and I heard them say, ‘You know, this cabin feels just the way the old cabin did.’”

The Big House was back. ☺



From the cabin's front porch, Haystack Rock is the perfect backdrop for a Durfee-Neupert family portrait. Ann Durfee (standing, in long-sleeved shirt) and her sister-in-law Karolyn Neupert (seated) visit with Karolyn's daughters Kristin Press (far left, holding Abby Press) and Karla Neupert Hockley (far right). In the hammock are Karolyn's grandchildren, Natalie Press, Blake Press, J.J. Hockley and Christopher Hockley.