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## Lot to be desired

By Melody Hennessee



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We've all heard the admonition not to build a house upon the sand. The foolish man built his house there, and the wise man built his house upon the rock. So, what kind of man would build his two-story, timber-frame house over a creek, securing it with steel girders that extend 12 feet to 16 feet into the ground?



Staff photos by David Holston

### A creek runs under the deck of this 3,550-square-foot house on Woodbrook Drive

A creative – some would add wealthy – man. A man who doesn't see obstacles, only challenges.

Three years ago, Terry Seitz heard about a third-acre lot on Woodbrook Drive in the old Emerywood neighborhood of High Point. The lot had been considered unsuitable for construction since development began in the neighborhood in 1929. That's not to say people hadn't considered it. Through the years, local architect Gary Haynes had shown it to several people.

"The 'For Sale' sign has gone up and come down periodically," he said.



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**Each of the four upstairs bedrooms has double French doors offering a view of the great room below**

Yet, everyone else in the history of the exclusive neighborhood had viewed the lot as having insurmountable restrictions, he said.



**Terry Seitz stands beneath the rough-hewn logs, which lend a rustic charm to the house's interior**

For one, the lot sits below the 100-year flood plain, so anything built on it would have to be raised above that point to pass inspection. For another, there's a creek that meanders diagonally through the lot and a utility easement that crosses the lot near the midway point. So, no permanent structure, especially not a house, could be built on the utility easement. If the owner decided to build on the rear of the lot, he'd have to construct a removable bridge over the utility easement so utility trucks could do repair work, if necessary.

"Even with the limitations of the lot, it would still take a very special client to want to build here," Haynes said.

The heavily wooded lot would not allow for much of a yard and no outdoor amenities, such as a garage or swimming pool.

None of those things fazed Seitz, who is owner of Terry Seitz and Associates, a representative firm for International Furniture Marketing.

He lives on Boca Grande, a barrier island off the west coast of Florida, and is accustomed to building "on stilts," he said. "It looked like a wonderful

opportunity to build a house over a creek. I didn't expect even to find an empty lot in Emerywood."



**Owner Terry Seitz can see and hear creek below from the deck of his home**



**Front door opens into foyer with black walnut spiral staircase**

He decided to build on the front of the lot, leaving the rear portion densely wooded. Since he only comes to High Point for the International Home Furnishings Market twice a year, two premarkets and a few other private showings, the house would not be his primary residence. A low- to no-maintenance yard with wildflowers would be perfect.

"I knew it would be challenging, but obviously, I fell in love with the neighborhood," he said. "What's not to love? I've met many of the neighbors, and they're all delightful people. I'm pleased to be here."

Seitz hired Haynes and told him of his vision to build a timber-frame home, using an ancient technique of cutting large, heavy timbers and incorporating wooden dowels instead of nails in the construction. It's a building technique Seitz



**Local chef Tony Stevens designed kitchen**

used on the construction of a commercial building in Florida.

"I fell in love with it the first day I saw them bring in those huge timbers and piece them together with wooden dowels," Seitz said. "It's all about character and aesthetics."

Watching the construction of a heavy timber house is something to behold, Haynes said. Without the use of nails, the crews drive dowels into the framing with rubber mallets. The rough-hewn logs are left exposed on the interior to give the house a rustic charm and aesthetic edge.

"When the house was under construction, people would drive by and gather around to watch," Haynes said. "It was almost like theater; it was a show."

Although the exterior of the house resembles a classic revival style, it incorporates a contemporary stucco facade, two-tiered copper roof and traditional brick accents. Brick columns under the house camouflage the steel and concrete girders that raise the house at least six feet above the flood plain.

"This house is not going anywhere," Seitz said.

There's plenty of room beneath the 3,550-square-foot house to park two to three cars. A semi-circular brick and cement drive lends room for another four to six cars.

As an agent for manufacturers in China, Indonesia, Italy and South Africa, Seitz has been a frequent visitor to High Point markets for more than a decade. In the past, he and his employees rented a house on Gatewood Avenue. Now, he will have a place to hang his coat for weeks at a time, bring his employees for business trips and entertain his clients during markets.

"For people in the furniture industry, it seems, we spend two or three months of our lives every year in High Point, if we do it all," Seitz said. For him, "doing it all" means attending International Home Furnishings Markets in April and October for at least three weeks at a stretch, two premarkets in March and September for five days each and several private shows during the year.

Seitz bought the property in 1997 and began devising plans for the house. Selecting Haynes as primary architect, Seitz also chose Dreaming Creek Timber Frame Homes, based in Powhatan, Va., and the company's consulting architect, Henry Brown, for the construction.

Knowing what the house construction would be was only the beginning. The three hammered out architectural drawings for the unusual house, as well.

Seitz had a few priorities in mind. First, it had to have six bedrooms and at least six bathrooms.

"We needed a separate bathroom for every bedroom because everyone gets ready for market at the same time in the morning," he said. "We have to be at the showrooms downtown at 8 o'clock in the morning, and (bathroom) schedules don't work."

It would have a large library connected to one of the downstairs bedrooms, where Seitz would stay. It would have a commercial-grade kitchen for entertaining up to 35 guests a night during markets; a great room that would accommodate 12 dining-room tables; a decking system that would take full advantage of the bubbling creek below; a ceiling in the great room that would soar 24 feet to the second-story bedrooms and showcase the exposed, rough beams; double French doors in each of the four upstairs bedrooms that would allow a view of the great room below; and a spiral staircase made of black walnut.

Local chef Tony Stevens designed the kitchen, adding maple cabinetry, as well as restaurant-quality equipment such as a bun warmer, two dishwashers, two sub-zero refrigerators, a six-burner stove, ice makers and a rotisserie. Stevens will prepare gourmet dinners for up to 35 guests during markets, and "during the off-season" Stevens and his wife will be house sitters for the new construction.

Seitz added other details such as contemporary, metal track lighting that snakes midway between the ceiling and the floor of the great room; a fireplace in the great room with copper mantel that mimics the roofing and a matching copper-topped fireplace in the library; and the distinctive African slate of purplish-black, copper and bronze in all the

bathrooms. The slate, which is sold most often in occasional and dining-room tables, is marketed by one of Seitz's companies, Slate Vision of South Africa.

"Of course, the dining room furniture will be (from Slate Vision of South Africa) because I will not seat my clients at our competitors' tables," he said.

"This won't be a showroom. My main showroom is downtown, but since we'll be entertaining here, we certainly won't have them sitting in my competitors' furniture."

All of the decor reflects Seitz's personal tastes – a mix of traditional, antique pieces and contemporary designs.

"It all evolved," he said. "The vision was to have a timber-frame house, and then everything else evolved around that and what would match well with the raw, exposed timbers."

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