

Wrapped in WARMTH



An auction-loving North Carolina couple, whose custom-built log home is filled with primitives and vintage finds, go all out at the holidays with plenty of country Christmas decor.



LEFT: Everything in Barbara and Ray Vainwright's living room has been dressed in Christmas cheer, from the 9-foot prelit tree brimming with primitive ornaments to the quilt-topped Carolina pine trunk that serves as a coffee table. The soaring Tennessee flagstone fireplace is the focal point of the space and features a hearth made of one massive piece of stone. Rather than following tradition and hanging the stockings by the chimney with care, Barbara opted to string up a clothesline containing Santa's cap, socks and union suit.

ABOVE: For balance, Barbara surrounds a shelf in the downstairs hallway with a doll-size chair, a round sifter and an old box. On the shelf, Barbara tucked an assortment of small snowmen amid a forest of bottle-brush trees. A radio from the 1940s or 1950s—it actually plays a station or two!—an old phone and a vintage phonebook adorn a formerly wood-tone table that Barbara redid with a white crackle finish.



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Everything about Ray and Barbara Vainwright’s Macclesfield, North Carolina, log home bears a personal touch, from the years-in-the-making collections to the self-designed floor plan. The combination results in a home wrapped in warmth—especially during the holidays, when Barbara puts her seasonal stamp on the interior, decorating every last nook and cranny of the picture-perfect custom cabin.

The couple built their dream home 15 years ago, but when they started the process, it seemed like it would never become a reality. After paging through catalogs, poring over plans and visiting area log homes, they still hadn’t found the right design; so, they decided to come up with their own blueprint. “I basically drew a big rectangle and then started drawing in a room at a time, based on the sizes Barbara wanted,” recalls Ray, who relied on his background in drafting to create the initial floor plan. “There is not a lot of

wasted space in this house,” Barbara adds. “Every space is used—even the space under the stairs is a broom closet.”

The couple designed certain rooms to accommodate pre-existing furnishings and some they intended to purchase, such as a grandfather clock for the stair landing and a vintage-style stove for an arched alcove in the kitchen. They worked with a general contractor to finesse the plan and add special touches, such as cedar trim around the windows, a brick floor and wall in the kitchen, and a soaring flagstone fireplace.

Over the years, the Vainwrights have found much of their furniture and accessories at auctions. Attending these events, Barbara explains, has fed her growing interest in primitives. When they first moved into the house, she says, “I was into ruffled country curtains and all that.” However, ready for a change, she found inspiration in a friend’s home. “It was full of primitives, and I just fell in love.”

LEFT: Barbara filled the 1880s step-back cupboard in the dining room with old bowls; the open doors and the top provide additional display space. Pine ladder-back chairs get in the holiday spirit with red covers that resemble Santa hats. At each place setting, Barbara included an enamel plate, Bakelite-handled silverware and a colorful 1950s-era aluminum cup.

ABOVE: The kitchen gets its unique look from a floor and an interior wall made of salvaged Silas Lucas bricks, which date to the turn of the century. The wall includes an alcove to fit a vintage-style stove and a double-sided fireplace. Since moving into the home, Barbara has repainted all the cabinets with a crackle paint finish and replaced their punched-copper insets with gingham panels. She also added oak countertops and finished them to match the cabinets; a few coats of polyurethane protect the finish.

FAR RIGHT: Ray and Barbara put the finishing touches on a yuletide display, one of many vignettes that salute the season in their log-style North Carolina home.





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If Barbara can’t find a primitive piece to fit a certain spot, she’ll alter a newer one to look old, and she especially favors a crackled white finish. Adding painted pieces breaks up the home’s wood backdrop, she says, noting that, at first, many of the primitives she gathered tended to blend in with the oak floors and tongue-and-groove wall paneling. For contrast, the couple introduced (or re-introduced) weathered-finish white tables and cabinets that occupy the kitchen and breakfast area, and they painted the staircase railing white to stand out against the wood walls. “If something stands still long enough, I’ll put a crackle finish on it,” Barbara declares. “My husband says, ‘If I stood still long enough, you’d crackle me!’ ”

Plenty of smaller accessories pop against the wood backdrop, including collections of yellowware bowls, enamelware, vintage advertising tins, composition dolls, old toys, handcarved geese and more. Runners, dish towels and area rugs populate tables, cabinet doors, shelves and floors to help soften hard surfaces. Barbara also has a soft spot for Santas and snowmen—more than 100 of each, in fact, which inhabit nearly every corner at the holidays.

ABOVE: After applying her signature crackle finish to the old farm table in the breakfast room, Barbara paired it with old ladder-back chairs, which she gussied up for the season with handmade Santa hats stuffed with poinsettias, greens and wrapped packages. The hats are held in place with thumbtacks and are just for show, but Barbara says they could easily serve as a way to display party favors. During the holidays, she sets up a large porcelain nativity set flanked by potted poinsettias on the room’s bay window.

TOP RIGHT: When the couple first bought this Hoosier cabinet, they stripped away years of paint to reveal the natural wood finish; since then, Barbara has repainted it with a distressed finish. Inside, she keeps 1940s glassware, including Fire-King bowls in the Tulip pattern. Atop the cabinets, she’s arranged two Dazey butter churns, old flour tins, snowmen and a sign of her own making.

BOTTOM RIGHT: An old pie safe complete with the original finish and screen doors houses a mix of old treasures and newer items.



All Through the HOUSE

As someone who loves to spend weeks preparing her log-style home for the holidays, North Carolina collector Barbara Vainwright certainly has some great seasonal decorating ideas up her sleeve. Follow a few of her favorite tips to capture a Christmas-in-the-country spirit in your rooms.

*** Add interest under the Christmas tree.** Barbara especially enjoys trimming trees—“I have one in every room, if not two,” she says. For a finishing touch, she uses different materials to fashion tree skirts, such as a few yards of burlap or an old quilt. She also likes to incorporate old toys, such as a vintage rocking horse or a wood train set, beneath the tree.

*** Proclaim your holiday cheer with handmade signs.** Although she buys some of her decorative signs, Barbara makes a few of her own to round out the mix. She paints small scrap boards with a solid color, and then adds a sentiment, such as “Happy Holiday” or “And to All a Good Night,” before sanding the surface to distress the finish.

*** Fill an assortment of nontraditional containers with greens and berry sprays.** Barbara has used everything from firkins to teakettles to form the basis for arrangements both big and small. In the breakfast area, a wood dough bowl holds a bundle of evergreen sprigs on the distressed-finish white table; a large wood bucket serves up larger boughs and a few oversized faux candy canes at the base of the staircase.

*** Give in to garlands.** Barbara strings swags of greenery on shelves and mantels, along stair railings, atop cabinets, and over doors and windows; she also twines them through chandeliers and drapes them across headboards. Sometimes, as on the staircase and on a cabinet in the dining area, she dresses up garlands with wood cutouts, such as gingerbread and candy canes, tiny ornaments or bows made from torn strips of gingham with frayed edges.

*** Show your style in unexpected places.** Add seasonal flair to often-overlooked decorating real estate, such as stair steps or the backs of chairs. During the holidays, Barbara’s stairs hold poinsettia plants or wrapped packages; for a homespun touch, she wraps the plants in squares of burlap secured with ribbon. Barbara also likes to adorn her dining chairs with both store-bought and handmade Santa hats, some filled with even more decorations.



ABOVE: Barbara painted and distressed a pine four-poster bed they'd had for years to give it a more primitive feel. Ray made matching corner shelves for behind the bed, which is positioned at an angle to serve as a focal point.



LEFT: The couple designed the stairway to include a landing that would accommodate the grandfather clock they'd always wanted. Barbara replicated a stencil she saw while on vacation in Maine and applied the motif to each stair riser with custom-mixed paint colors. To give the staircase a more primitive look, she primed the wood railing, painted it, and then scuffed it up with a sander.

RIGHT: Designed on two levels, the master bathroom features a refurbished clawfoot bathtub on a brick platform that stands a step above the rest of the room, which also has a modern shower. Packed with holiday charm, including a swatch of plaid fabric, rusty bells and a few snowmen, the suitcase perched at the back of the tub was a gift from a friend.



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To show off their collections, Ray constructed numerous shelves for the home, not only for the walls but for over every door and window as well, often using barnwood or other salvaged wood. Although the built-ins are up year-round, they come in especially handy during the holiday season, when Barbara uses them to display her Santas and snowmen as she swaps out everything from the bed linens to the wall art during a month-long decorating blitz. From ornament-laden garland swooped over cabinets to Santa hats filled with yuletide goodies tacked to the backs of dining chairs, Barbara leaves no spot untouched during the Christmas season, a tactic that serves her well in continuing the cabin's warm, lived-in style.

Although she relishes her Christmas preparations, Barbara is happy with the inviting nature of the primitive style that's always in season in her home. “It's just a look that welcomes you right on in,” she says. “We're down-to-earth, good-old-fashioned people, and that's how we want our house to be.” ★

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