

Not Your Run-of-the-Mill House

After completing a long, tedious and physically demanding project, some folks might kick back and relax, toast the occasion, or go out for dinner. But when Jackie Brown finished hand-staining the wood siding of her 4,000-square-foot home near Rayville, La., she built a fire and burned her work clothes.



Jackie and her sister, Rayelene McNaughton, had spent a month brushing dark brown stain on every door, window frame, railing and board on the exterior of the all-wooden, two-story house.

"I'd wear the same clothes every day,"

she says. "And when we finished it, I went in and threw them on the fire."

Eight Different Species

Fortunately, she didn't attempt to stain the inside of the house. That might have cost her several outfits, considering that the entire house, from wall to wall and floor to ceiling, is made of wood — eight different species, to be exact. They include red oak, honey locust, sassafras, cypress, white pine, willow, pecan and cedar.

Jackie and her husband, Jerry, can proudly say, however, that they handled every board in the house.

The couple, who are longtime Louisiana Land Bank customers, planned every detail of the home, from the design to the materials. They located all of the wood themselves, worked with the local sawmill that milled it, and even stored and dried it in their own shop for a year.

For the Browns, who own Brown Realty Company, a rural real estate firm based in Rayville, completing the home was a dream-come-true. They had lived most of their married lives in a much smaller

house on the 14-acre property, which they purchased in 1975.

"I saw a wooden house on the Mississippi River in Madison Parish years ago that inspired me. They had cut all the lumber from trees on their own land, and I thought that was so neat. I had always wanted to build one, and so we finally did it," Jerry says.

A Story Behind Each Wood

Construction took place in 2002, but the project began two years earlier, when Jerry started researching and collecting different species of wood. As one who buys and sells timber property for real estate clients and owns timberland himself, he has a deep appreciation for wood. Both he and Jackie wanted to use local species that would be meaningful, as well as attractive and functional.

As it turns out, there's a story behind almost every wood they chose.

The cherry-bark red oak in the floors came from Jackie's mother's property beside the Boeuf River, west of Rayville. Because the oak logs were all 44 to 48 inches at the butt, only seven or eight trees were needed.

Cypress used on the exterior of the home as well as in the master bedroom was harvested from the Browns' own property in Morehouse Parish. The same land produced the "pecky" cypress that panels the kitchen and dining room.

The Browns chose honey locust, harvested from private land near the Tensas National Wildlife Refuge in Madison Parish, for the walls in the living room, hallways and foyer. The tongue and groove panels, cut in 3-, 5-, 7- or 9-inch widths, will expand and contract.

Honey Locust Their Favorite

From a construction standpoint, honey locust is challenging to work with, according to Jerry. Once used for truck beds, it is now used in railway ties. "It's as hard as any wood you'll find," he says. "We had to drive pilot holes when we put in the windows, because screws would break off in

the wood." But it was worth the effort — it is the Browns' favorite wood, because of its warm golden color and unusual grain.

Willow, cut from Alligator Break in Madison Parish, was selected for the bathroom walls. Naturally darker than the other wood species in the house, willow is more porous and absorbs moisture.

White pine was chosen for Jerry's "get-away" room over the garage, as well as for all of the doors in the house, while cedar was the obvious choice to use in the closets. Both the pine and cedar were grown locally and supplied by the Browns' miller.

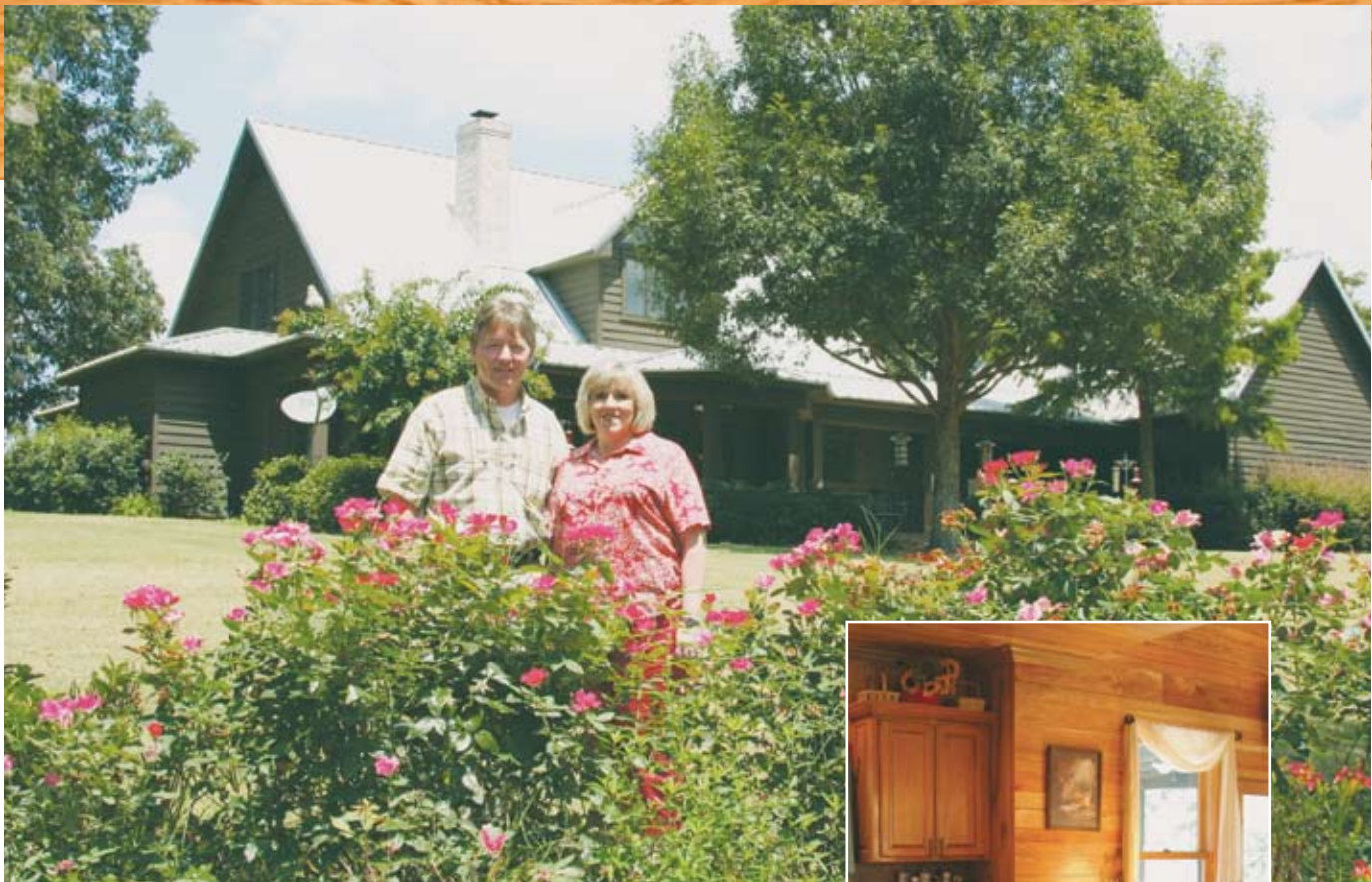
One of the upstairs bedrooms is paneled with pecan wood harvested from Stubbs' pecan orchard in Ouachita Parish. The guest bedroom is paneled with sassafras, which also came from Jackie's mother's property. "Until we put clear-coat on it, you could rub the wood and smell its aromatic scent," Jackie says.

Throughout the entire house, nearly all of the wood — floors, walls, ceilings and doors — is finished with clear-coat to bring out its natural color and grain. Only the kitchen cabinets and doors are lightly stained. The Browns credit their builder, Tim Odom, for custom touches, such as the way he strategically placed the best-grained boards to be most visible.

Hands-On Involvement

"It took our builder seven-and-a-half months to complete the house, instead of his usual six months," Jerry says — and that was with the couple helping daily. Each night they would stack the boards needed for the next day's construction work, and every day they ran errands. "I think we went to Lowe's or Home Depot every day for six months," Jerry says.

Their close involvement in the project saved the Browns thousands of dollars in expenses. On one order of wood alone they saved \$4,500 on what would have been a \$13,500 order. And because there is no drywall in the house, that saving helped offset the cost of custom-milling the wood



The back of Jerry and Jackie Brown's home, above, overlooks a rose garden and cypress break.

paneling. In addition, the couple regularly shopped close-out sales for light fixtures, ceiling fans and hardware items.

“The double-insulated windows are about the only thing we splurged on,” says Jerry.

Insulated with two-inch isoboard under blown or rolled insulation, the all-electric home had summer energy bills totaling about \$250 per month this year.

No Carpet or Paint to Choose

There was one other advantage to building with all wood, Jackie notes. “We had no carpet to choose and no paint colors to pick out, so there was nothing to disagree on,” she says, laughing.

It's been five years since the Browns moved into the home, and it seems that their two grown children and extended family members also have developed an appreciation for the warmth and scent of the wood.

“When we built the house, all the family holidays got transferred to our place,” Jackie says. ■ JH

The kitchen cabinets are made of cypress with a cherry stain.



Honey locust walls and cherry-bark red oak floors create a warm glow in the house, which features wood from eight species of trees.