

# HOMES

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FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

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## Elaborating a log cabin



**BEFORE:** The Thorntons had been pursuing their respective hobbies – woodworking and glass fusion – in a windowless loft above the garage that offered zero natural light.



PHOTOS BY LARRY GOLFER

When the Thorntons learned that plans for a front porch spanning the entire front elevation could not be executed, Foster Remodeling developed a novel architectural solution: a faux peak on the main house reinforced by a front-facing archway that defines the ground-level entrance to the porch. The visual rhythms of the two roof lines introduce a vertical thrust that draws the eye upwards, away from the “incomplete” right side of the porch.

■ **Retirees finds special satisfaction in a pair of art studios, and a beautiful front porch with a view**

BY JOHN BYRD  
SPECIAL TO THE FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

Blissful retirement often validates the old homily: “Busy hands mean happy hearts.”

On this point, it is hard to imagine a more fruitful environment than the home of Kirby and Helen Thornton, two 70-something retirees who recently completed focused renovations to a log cabin style home in Lorton they

have occupied for over 20 years.

The changes were all about tweaking to even higher relevance aspects of the home that had gradually become sources of distinctively personal satisfaction to both seniors.

More precisely, Kirby – a former electrical engineer – has been exploring his passion for woodworking for many years. Helen – a onetime research analyst – revels in creating shimmering objets d’arte from fused glass. When not pursuing their hobbies, the couple might otherwise be found taking in the scenery from the wide, rustic-style front porch that now graces the home’s front elevation.

For all the quiet simplicity that abounds in every direction though, the Thorntons’ lifestyle accommodation has been decades in the making, beginning with purchasing the 2,900-square-foot house

and garage in the late 1990s.

“We were attracted to the relaxed ambiance of a log home,” Kirby recalls. “There were changes we wanted to make from the first, but since we were both busy, modifications would have to occur in phases.”

The first step was acquiring

more storage space.

As Kirby tells it, the couple hired Foster Remodeling Solutions of Lorton to remove an unneeded balcony, add a floor above the open garage, and apportion the space for storage and other uses to be determined.

Soon Kirby decided that the

windowless garage loft would work fine as a place to take up woodworking. (He had actually purchased a lathe from the home’s previous owner). Helen, seeing the loft’s potential as a studio, acquired a kiln and began fusing glass.

The pursuit of one’s muse be-

ing all-absorbing, the pair spent little time worrying about the fact that the workspace provided zero natural light, or that it was hard to stand erect under the four-foot-high ceiling that dominated much of the floor space.

In fact, about the only change

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\$1,310,000  
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**VIENNA**  
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VIENNA, VA 22180  
\$781,500  
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**VIENNA**  
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NW, VIENNA, VA 22180  
\$1,150,000  
6 bed, 5 bath



**RESTON**  
11747 MOSSY CREEK LN,  
RESTON, VA 20191  
\$380,000  
3 bed, 2 bath



**RESTON**  
2425 BRAMBLEBUSH CT,  
RESTON, VA 20191  
\$690,000  
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\$360,000  
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## HOMES

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to the physical space in this interval was the introduction of a partition designed to keep wood dust on Kirby's side of the studio.

Even so, as full retirement dawned, both saw there was time now to reconsider the larger "wish list" of remodeling preferences.

"We knew we would have to change the studio roof line to get the head room and natural light we wanted," Thornton says. "About this time, Helen was looking into front porch ideas in log home magazines. We sketched out several designs of what we thought we wanted. That's when we called Foster Remodeling back in."

But the first surprise inspired another pause. It turned out that a front porch spanning the entire front elevation couldn't be built

because of its proximity to a part of the home's septic system.

"The symmetry - the curb appeal - was important to us," Helen says. "We wanted a balanced facade on both the house and the garage. We were kind of at a loss. Fortunately, Foster's team, led by Chris Arnold, came up with a really innovative solution that works quite well."

Specifically, Foster's novel architectural concept called for a faux peak on the main house at exactly the same pitch as the one above the garage which is, in turn, reinforced by the peak of a front-facing archway that defines the ground-level entrance to the porch.

The visual rhythm of the two roof lines in combination introduces a vertical thrust that draws the eye upwards, away from the "incomplete" right side of the porch.

A porch swing occupying the far corner now fleshes out the portrait of a restful carefree idyll

amidst flowers and trees. For an expanded view, there's even a 21-by-46-inch Velux skylight overhead.

Underfoot, a 25-by-7 flagstone patio lends color and texture - a natural tonal complement to the dark-stained log siding. Kirby says the couple selected the color palates at a nearby stone yard over several days, and played with combinations until they found what they wanted.

Rough-hewn timbers - the handiwork of Foster master carpenter Mike Borman - are also integral to the aesthetics of a new front elevation that is both warmly inviting and whimsical. Red cedar trim and molding, meanwhile, provide sympathetic color accents.

To fashion studio space useful to all, Foster found a way to fully elevate the headroom to six feet, freeing up all 770 square feet of floor space. A front-facing dormer featuring a pair of double hung windows invites generous southerly light. Kirby's wood shop - equipped with a lathe, a drill press and table saw - is tucked snugly behind a new partition. Helen uses two kilns to produce her work.

Matching the logs needed to "pop up" the second level also entailed a close examination of existing details.

"We spent quite a while researching options with various vendors - which is a challenge when you're working with a 30-year-old exterior," says project manager Chris Arnold.

Summarizing the well-planned lifestyle shift, Kirby says the couple is frequently in the studio at the same time. A window in the interior partition allows each spouse to witness the other's progress - if so inclined. It's a working environment, but also a place of



**BEFORE:** Despite the lack of headroom, the Thorntons diligently practiced their chosen crafts in the space above the garage for 14 years.

interaction and play.

The distinctive byproducts of the Thorntons' labors are mostly donated to friends, children and grandchildren. Kirby is keen on picture frames and book cases; Helen recently completed a glass bird bath.

"This is a very sweet place to be spending this time in our lives; perfect, in fact," Kirby says.

Foster Remodeling Solutions periodically offers workshops on home remodeling topics. For information call (703) 550-1371, or visit [www.fosterremodeling.com](http://www.fosterremodeling.com).

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By raising the roof above the garage studio six feet (right) and adding windows, the remodeler freed up 770 square feet of floor space which is now used to support two art studios and storage space. The Thorntons use their independent work rooms several times a week. Chris Arnold, a Foster partner, found matching logs for the second-level "pop-up" by researching available options with a variety of vendors.



Underfoot, a 25-by-7 flagstone patio lends setting-appropriate color and texture. The 21-by-46-inch Velux skylight allows needed available light.

## Tips for buying a new furnace

Whether you're snagging a new furnace for your just-purchased home or replacing your old clunker with an updated option, below are some top tips for those looking into a new furnace for their home:

only include the purchase agreement and warranty information but also explain exactly what you are getting. If you feel confused or unsure about anything don't be afraid to ask.

**Correct installation and maintenance** - Furnace installation should be done by a trained professional as not only can it be a safety hazard, but if anything is off it can severely impact your efficiency and therefore your heating bill. Regular maintenance, generally in the fall, will keep the furnace performing like it should, keeping your family warm and your wallet a little fuller.

**Size matters** - One of the most important factors when buying a furnace is to have a professional installer examine the size of the house and then determine the size of the furnace necessary for the space. A furnace that is too large leaves gaps in temperature as it turns on until it overwhelms the thermostat. The house ends up cooling down until the next cycle and creates an inconsistent temperature. A furnace that is the right size for the space, however, will be able to better regulate a constant temperature.

**Don't buy based on price alone** - Always be sure to ask a professional installer, contractor or reputable salesperson about annual operating costs for whatever furnaces you may be looking at. While there are a variety of factors to consider, price should not necessarily be number one. Efficiencies, however, can vary drastically depending on price, which means that if you pay more upfront now, you'll still enjoy lower heating bills 10 or 15 years later.

**Get the right documentation** - Any reputable installer or manufacturer will be sure to not

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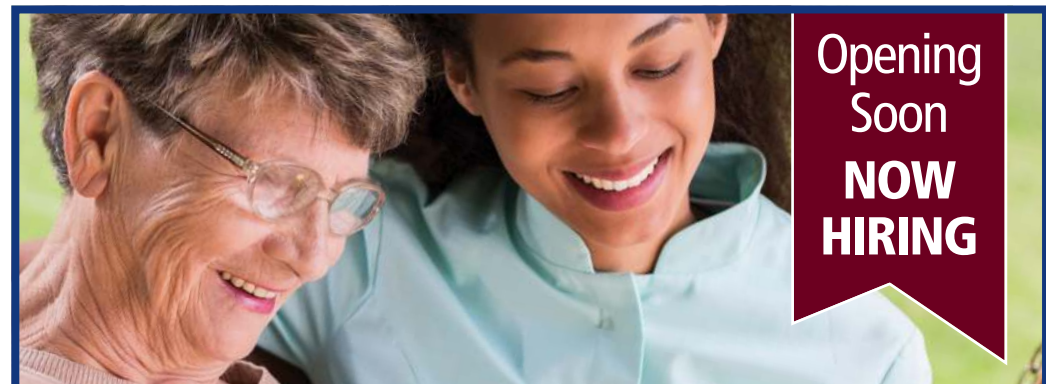
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Rough-hewn timbers - the handiwork of Foster master carpenter Mike Borman - are integral to the aesthetics of a new front elevation that is both warmly inviting and whimsical. Red cedar trim and molding provides sympathetic color accents.



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