

A modern rustic masterpiece, built on top of one of North Carolina's highest peaks, offers sweeping 360-degree views while blurring the lines between what's inside and outside.

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PHOTOS BY HEIDI A. LONG



Mountaintop **COMFORT & JOY**

A large pivot front door on the uphill side of the home opens to a glass forest wall in the main living area and great room. Floor-to-ceiling windows flanked by floor-to-ceiling cedar tree trunks add a magical quality to the home. Awe-inspiring, floor-to-ceiling views of the Elk River Valley, Grandfather Mountain, and the Blue Ridge Mountain range enchant visitors.



THE MAIN LIVING AREA FEATURES A GLASS FOREST DESIGN, WITH VIEWS IN THREE CARDINAL DIRECTIONS OVERLOOKING ELK RIVER VALLEY, BEECH MOUNTAIN SKI RESORT, THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAIN RANGE, AND TENNESSEE (on the left). OPPOSITE: THE FRONT ENTRANCE FEATURES LARGE DIAMETER CEDAR POSTS AND A CROSS BEAM SUPPORTING THE FRONT PORCH ROOF.

This custom home sleeps 12, with four beds, 3.5 baths, a custom kitchen, two decks, an outdoor hot tub, and a fire pit. If visitors are looking for entertainment, they can watch a movie or their favorite streaming shows, play pool, or take in the views from the decks and outdoor areas.

Who was behind this architectural masterpiece set on a mountaintop with a community that boasts a laundry list of fun amenities? Meet Dr. Rachid Idrissi and his fiancé Holly DeBeck. The couple knew they wanted to build a rustic get-away in the northwest corner of North Carolina's High Country. The couple's exhaustive search led them to a gated, master-planned mountain community called The Lodges at Eagles Nest.

When they were looking at different parcels in the community, Rachid and Holly were drawn to the very top of the mountain. "When Rachid and I would visit the empty lot and sit upon the rock that is now inside our indoor sauna, enjoying our wine and cheese, watching many sunsets, and appreciating the breathtaking views of Grandfather Mountain and adjacent Blue Ridge mountains. The eagles soaring during sunsets were the pinnacle of God's beauty," recalls Holly. "That was the moment when we both knew where we wanted our home to be. Hence, the birth of 'The Flying Eagle.' It was truly a unique project and masterpiece for all involved."

While some contractors and homebuyers saw difficulty with the parcel, Rachid and Holly only saw promise. A vision



OPPOSITE: BY CHANGING THE ORIENTATION OF THE GREAT ROOM TO FACE WEST, THE GLASS FOREST PROVIDES SCENIC VIEWS TO THE WHOLE MAIN FLOOR LIVING SPACE. **TOP:** THE TREE TRUNKS IN THE GLASS FOREST WINDOW/WALL MASTERFULLY HIDE THE EDGES OF THE GLASS. **ABOVE:** A CUSTOM FOUNTAIN IS BUILT INTO THE BEDROCK. **LEFT:** THE CUSTOM-MADE PIVOT DOOR ADDS AN ADDITIONAL DRAMATIC FLAIR TO THE FRONT ENTRANCE.





ABOVE: THE DINING TABLE WAS HANDMADE BY BRIAN SCHAFFER OF EDGEWOOD LOG STRUCTURES WHO STUDIED FOR 10 YEARS IN JAPAN, APPRENTICING WITH MASTER JAPANESE ARTISAN WOODWORKERS. THE TABLE IS TWO SIDES OF THE SAME CEDAR TREE SPLIT IN HALF, WITH A MEANDERING "RIVER" OF GLASS SEPARATING THEM.

BELOW: ONE OF TWO DECKS, THIS DECK HAS LARGE WOODEN GLIDER CHAIRS TO SIT AND ENJOY THE GORGEOUS MOUNTAIN VIEWS IN THREE DIRECTIONS.

OPPOSITE: THE MAIN FLOOR HAS A LIVING ROOM, DINING SPACE WITH A TABLE FOR TEN, AND A GOURMET KITCHEN. THE KITCHEN HAS A LARGE GRANITE ISLAND, WINE COOLER, AND A LARGE RANGE TO COOK FOR A SIZEABLE GROUP.



began to take shape. "We wanted to emphasize the natural beauty of the mountaintop," Rachid recalls. "We also wanted to merge the design of the inside and the outside of the home as seamlessly as possible."

The couple took their ideas to Matthew Paul Pavelchak, principal at Pavelchak Architecture P.A. in Banner Elk, North Carolina.

Matthew's first meeting with Rachid and Holly was at the mountaintop property. He immediately fell in love with the site and saw the potential for a home set amongst the boulders and cliffs. Rachid and Holly recognized Matthew's passion for their project and thus began a five-year working relationship.

Matthew first presented Rachid and Holly with two initial designs, one that was more traditional with the gable facing the view. A second design was far more radical—it included an entirely glass-walled main floor interspersed with log columns set between a lower floor that hugged the existing cliff and an upper floor that floated above. The design with a 60' long wall of glass and columns allows views in three cardinal directions including views of the setting sun. "That took a lot of trust from Rachid and Holly," Matthew recalls. "They were very passionate about the design, and the site, and allowing me to push boundaries that most clients wouldn't."

Once the primary design was completed Matthew reached out to Brian Schaffer at Edgewood Log Structures, McCall, Idaho to discuss incorporating Edgewood's Glass Forest system in the project. The Glass Forest incorporates Western red cedar tree trunks encapsulating the steel structure of the frame of the home, designed, and engineered by Matthew. The walls of the first floor are crafted with tree trunks and oversized architectural glass manufactured by AGNORA in Canada. Onsite glazing ensures that the system is fully sealed and waterproof.

The Glass Forest maximizes the view through the elimination of visible mullions—those vertical and horizontal supports that separate conventional windows. AGNORA manufactures windows in a wide range of sizes up to 130x300". This glass is low-E, double-or triple-glazed to meet the local area's energy, structural, and wind-load building codes.

Traveling from Idaho, Brian was able to visit the building site where he admired the structural engineering that Matthew created for the foundation and steel skeleton of the home. "We were building on a cliff," Brian recalls. "When taking on such a project, it is guaranteed that there will be unexpected variables and delays. Because a project like this will run into challenges that were not expected or obvious when you first started."

After considering several general contractors in the area, Rachid and Holly chose Alex Johnson Construction. They were impressed by his quiet confidence in dealing with the challenges of this project, as well as the artistry of the craftsmen's work. "Rachid and Holly had three other builders tell them the site was unbuildable. I took



ABOVE: THE HALF BATH IS ELEGANTLY RUSTIC WITH ANTLER SCONCES, ANTLER CABINET DOORKNOS, A VESSEL SINK VANITY, AND A TREE TRUNK MIRROR.

BELOW: THE STEAM ROOM IS BUILT AROUND BEDROCK, YET ANOTHER ARCHITECTURAL FEAT OF THE HOME.

LEFT: THE ENTIRE THIRD FLOOR IS A MASTER BEDROOM WITH A KING-SIZED BED, A GAS FIREPLACE, AND AN ADJOINING SITTING ROOM FOR RELAXING AWAY FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY. THE SITTING ROOM IS EQUIPPED WITH A TV AND ACCESS TO A PRIVATE DECK ON THE THIRD FLOOR.

RIGHT: WITH THE LOWER FLOOR FOUNDATION SCRIBED DIRECTLY INTO THE BEDROCK OF THE BUILDING SITE, THE DRY SAUNA FEATURES THE LARGE ROCK RACHID AND HOLLY USE TO SIT ON WITH WINE, CHEESE, AND CRACKERS WHILE DREAMING OF MAKING THEIR MASTERPIECE OF A HOME.



a look at the site and concluded, well, this will be interesting," says Alex, who earned his general contractor's license in the early 1990s, and who has been working construction since high school summer breaks. When complimented by his unflappable demeanor, Alex says, "There's no sense in spending your energy getting upset. Best to concentrate on figuring out solutions instead."

One of Alex's strongest recollections from the construction of The Flying Eagle was when they dynamited the cliff to create a 14' wide base for the foundation. "Huge boulders flying into the air. I have a video of it," Alex recalls. With extensive experience in steel building, Alex's crew handled the construction of the steel frame in-house.

Because the home is such an unusual design, the building site so unique, and the building materials engineered to withstand the hurricane-force winds on top of a mountain, the project took four years to finish. The project got underway in 2016 and finished in March of 2020. "It took a lot of patience from us and the whole team," Rachid says. "But it was so worth the wait."

Rachid and Holly enjoy sharing the beauty of The Flying Eagle at Eagles Nest and rent their beloved home on various platforms. Not surprisingly, the home consistently earns five stars from visitors. 🌿

Log and Timber Producer: Edgewood Log Structures, McCall, Idaho

General Contractor: Alex Johnson Construction Company Inc., Newland, North Carolina

Architect: Matthew Paul Pavelchak, Pavelchak Architecture P.A., Banner Elk, North Carolina

Interior Designer: Holly DeBeck

Three-story home 🌿 Square footage: 4,800

Beds: 4 🌿 Baths: 3.5

