



A window seat, bookshelves and built-in furnishings made from salvage woods help make the new library/workspace/guest bedroom a favorite getaway for Chris Berner at his Eugene home.

# Cozy space between the timbers

Designers create new second-floor living areas between hefty posts, beams of a timber-frame home.

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FOR THE REGISTER-GUARD  
**Photos by Collin Andrew**  
THE REGISTER-GUARD

Even though he's originally from St. Louis, Mo., Chris Berner definitely has the Northwest forest running through his veins.

When a friend in Washington inherited more than 200 acres of timber, he offered Berner six trees for building a home and furnishings. Berner researched various building methods, settling on a traditional timber frame for what was then a modest, 1,100-square-foot saltbox design with steep roof.

But with time, Berner, a senior graphic designer at Funk/Levis & Associates in Eugene, became dissatisfied with the home's second floor.

"The upstairs was very open, kind of like a barn," he says. "It really wasn't laid out properly."

That became apparent when lifestyle changes brought overnight guests to

the home. Unfortunately, everyone had to traipse through the master bedroom to reach the bathroom. Because of the layout, furniture was scattered about inefficiently. And privacy was out the window.

"I wanted to enclose all that space and make the upstairs areas (master bedroom, library/guest sleeping quarters and studio) separate from each other and move that darn bathroom to a better location," Berner says. Otherwise, the home functioned well.

## Troubleshooting

For the upstairs reclamation project, Berner enlisted the help of Alec Dakers, a designer and partner at Rainbow Valley Design & Construction in Eugene. Dakers specializes in and very much enjoys this kind of challenge.



“Often in their desire to improve their home, people accidentally disrupt some of the beauty and character of the original,” Daker emphasizes. “We love it when we can help save space and improve functionality but still maintain the aesthetics of a structure. And Chris’ home is a very elegant structure.”

But working within the parameters of a traditional timber-frame home has its challenges. “In a true timber frame, the structure all works together,” Dakers explains. “You can’t change a portion of it without considering how all those beams and posts support the entire home.”

Then there was the major challenge of what to do with that upstairs bathroom.

“Typically you have a floor cavity to run the drain in, but not here,” Dakers says. “The floor upstairs was exposed below. So we had to run all the plumbing — toilet, sink and shower — down the chase for the chimney. There was nowhere else to run it. Likewise,” he adds, “we had to go to a wall-hung toilet. It doesn’t sit on the floor because the drain would stick out of the ceiling below.”

With plumbing worked out, the Rainbow Valley crew was able to free up extra space to remake the master bedroom from long and skinny to a much better proportioned size.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Berner chose green for the hallway because it plays off a forest scene showing outside the window seat in background.



Plumbing for the new upstairs bathroom was an issue because there was no room for drain lines in the open timber-frame structure. The solution was to run drainage down the chimney chase.



Rainbow Valley Design & Construction crews worked around existing timber framing.



The master bedroom suite is a much more private retreat now that guests have separate access to the upstairs bathroom.



**Fresh spaces**

A special jewel upstairs is the new, all-in-one library/workspace/guest bedroom with a beautiful window seat positioned to let the outside stream in and flow down the striking green hallway.

“I chose this shade because it reminds me of the forest outside,” Berner says.

Built-in furniture created more room. “That not only saves space, but it adds a special beauty,” Dakers says.

For the bookcase and window seat, for example, Berner chose reclaimed materials: redwood that had been encased under mud for hundreds of years, and bleacher seats from the Cuthbert Amphitheater. “There’s a handcrafted and historic nature to it that’s different than store-bought furniture,” Dakers says.

Berner now has much more usable space, with a large corner desk and plenty of storage cabinets. He has new shelving for his beloved collection of books.

“I often find myself coming to this space to unwind after a stressful day at work,” he says. “It’s a calm, wonderful respite from my professional life. I love how the outside and inside harmonize together.”

**Disaster averted?**

An unexpected side benefit of the

project might actually have prevented a disaster when the Rainbow Valley team discovered a severely scarred portion of the chimney chase caused by wood framing that was built too close to the chimney flue.

“That really could have turned into a nightmare,” Berner says. “I probably would have never known about this potential catastrophe had I not done this remodel.”

With a wry grin, he adds, “A tip to other homeowners who are considering a remodel: you never know what you might find. But what you find could be a lifesaver.”

Daker’s advice is, “You don’t necessarily need to build bigger to get more. Use good design, fine craftsmanship and aesthetic materials. You’ll never regret it.”

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**At the home show**

Home designers, builders and remodelers may be consulted at the Good Earth Home, Garden & Living Show this weekend at the Lane Events Center in Eugene. Rainbow Valley Design & Construction Co., the company featured in the story here, will be in booth number 218 in the Good HOME pavilion.



**Remodeling tips**

Alek Dakers of Rainbow Valley Design & Construction in Eugene offers insights for making an interior remodeling project a success:

Make a list of everything you hope to achieve with your project, including style, schedule and costs, then prioritize the list.

Accurately measure and document the existing spaces and elements that will be affected, including structure, heating systems, plumbing, electrical, etc.

Focus on the big picture first. Work on the relationships between larger pieces of the program — for example, which rooms you want to

be next to each other. Often it's helpful to use bubble diagrams at this stage to keep from getting too caught up in the details.

Develop a style or look for what you are trying to achieve, and use that as a guide when selecting materials and fixtures. Consider starting with something you love about the home, then build around that.

Choose two or three options for each material and look at samples of them in the space where they will be used and with the other materials that will be in the space. What looks good in the showroom by itself may not look as good in your space or with the other materials you have selected.