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Cragside Revisited

A born Brit and her husband realize their castle in the sky



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By Gretchen Bergen

Photography by Jason McConathy

Driving through the small town of Tabernash, one would never guess the area had something in common with northern English moorland. But high on a stony perch outside of town stands a house modeled after Cragside, Lord Armstrong's 19th-century country house near Rothbury, England.

The modern-day house belongs to Bill and Joyce Carpenter, whose primary residence is an ornate Victorian in Tampa, Florida. Joyce grew up in England and often visited the stately Cragside mansion when she was young. Years later, she brought husband Bill to see her craggy homeland. When the couple bought their property near Tabernash, they were struck by its similarities to Rothbury and decided to build a house similar to Cragside.

"Cragside was built on rocky moorland where no one thought you could build," Joyce says, "but Lord Armstrong turned it into a phenomenal house with gardens."

The Carpenters' version of Cragside retains a stately,



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tower-like feel, but with rustic Colorado touches. Completed two years ago, the Carpenters' 5,900-square-foot home overlooks a valley on 70 acres of land eight miles north of Winter Park.

"When we decided we wanted something in Colorado, we looked for an area that wasn't touristy. We had been taking our kids to Winter Park to ski for years," Joyce says. (Bill, chairman of the civil engineering department at the University of South Florida in Tampa, had spent a sabbatical leave in Boulder.)

In 1995 the Carpenters began searching for an architect who could make their Cragside dream come true. They found David Elfring of Castle Rock after seeing photographs of his work in a magazine. David had studied architecture in London, and understood that Europeans like doors and closed-off spaces. "We knew he was right for us from the start by the way he listened," Joyce smiles.

David worked closely with the Carpenters, exchanging photographs of everything from Cragside to old lodges in the Adirondacks to generate ideas. "It needed to be a place for friends and family to gather, since the Carpenters have a tradition of getting together," the architect explains. "And I also wanted to take advantage of the views." David found that the rough, craggy landscape helped to determine the design. "The idea of making the house appear as if it was coming out of those rocks gives it the feeling of a turn-of-the-century resort," he says.

Joyce adds that they weren't looking for a perfect replica of Cragside. "Nothing could look like Cragside," she notes. "It was the *feel* of Cragside we were after."

One of the biggest challenges was imitating the appearance

of a 19th-century residence without using 19th-century materials. Contractor Bill Vickroy captured the "old" look David and the Carpenters were after. "There's nothing really unusual about the materials," says Bill, who has collaborated with David on many projects. "But we put the materials together in such a way that the house doesn't look like a new house." Another challenge was the site itself. The road winding up to the Carpenters' land is steep, and tons of rock had to be blasted for the foundation.

Native rock makes up much of the exterior, including the massive pillars supporting the balconies—towers of dry-stacked rock about four feet in diameter. Bill says that the pillars were made by his request. "I wanted balconies that are substantial, not something held up by two-by-fours," he explains.

The rock is again visible on the walls of the kitchen and spa and in a sunburst design above the fireplace in the upstairs sitting room. Bill achieved an antiquated look by applying a rough skim coat on the walls and using a Craftsman-style of construction wherever possible. The doors and cabinets are fashioned of distressed alder; the doors and windows are trimmed in post-and-lintel style. Whenever possible, Bill incorporated aged materials, such as 100-year-old southern yellow pine for the floors and staircase. The yellow hues give the house an added warmth, a feeling of something old and remembered.

To truly appreciate how the house rises from the rocks, it should be viewed from the valley 300 feet below. From that vantage point, the house glows with the last bit of sunlight, appearing like a fairy tale castle. While the 38-foot-high fortress

This page: The location of the master bedroom—anchored by an Arts and Crafts-tiled fireplace—takes advantage of the spectacular views of the surrounding valley and mountain peaks. *Opposite, top:* The spacious, rock-walled kitchen is the scene of many large dinner parties. Burgundy appliances, granite countertops, and a sturdy, 11-foot-long Irish servant's table prove the room is functional as well as fashionable. *Opposite, right:* Carved Peruvian doors hide the pass-through between the kitchen and dining room. *Opposite, left:* Large windows in the master bath allow bathers the luxury of losing themselves in the beauty of the majestic Front Range.



is daunting, the interior of the Carpenter home provides an inviting, eclectic collection of cultures and rambling spaces, as well as spectacular views of the valley and the distant mountain peaks.

Above the front door an arch made of moss rock echoes the arches depicted in illustrations of Cragside. The stone porch is one of many pleasing nooks, perfect for reading or just relaxing. Four decks accommodate different times of the day. Glass doors in the spa lead to a small balcony that faces east—consequently a great spot for catching the morning sun. The balcony that runs the length of the dining room captures the southern sun and overlooks the valley. Bill enjoys standing there to contemplate Byers Peak in the distance and the train winding its way through the countryside far below. “It’s good for seeing elk, coyotes, and other wildlife,” he says.

According to Joyce, the views and the river were two of the biggest reasons for buying the property. “I grew up near the coast and needed water I could look at,” she says. “That and the craggy rock reminds me of Northumberland.”

David also had to keep in mind the Carpenters’ three grown children when designing the house. The upstairs “adult” sitting room is designed for reading, working puzzles, and napping. Younger family members congregate in a similar room downstairs when they are not in the pool room or spa.

A collection of antiques and old light fixtures adds to the 19th-century-resort motif. A marble-topped bureau was converted into a sink vanity for a downstairs powder room. Griffin light fixtures stand guard on either side. Bill and Joyce’s collection of light fixtures, from Arts and Crafts to Art Deco, blend well with the bright Mexican rugs scattered on the tile floors.

Pre-Raphaelite prints and tapestries, also prevalent at Cragside, hang near Middle Eastern door surrounds converted to fireplace mantels with Arts and Crafts tiles. Carved Peruvian doors separate the dining room and kitchen. Built-in shelves

throughout the house display Joyce’s pieces of pottery and colorful Mexican figures.

How does such a heady mix of cultures and styles come together? David puts it this way: “The house illustrates how some design elements are universal and translate throughout the world. We are bringing together materials and things from different periods and different countries, but it just clicks somehow.”

The spacious, rectangular kitchen, where Joyce’s gourmet cooking sizzles, was designed around an antique, 11-foot-long Irish servant’s table. “I wanted an indestructible table that you didn’t have to worry about putting things on,” she explains. With its carved initials and other relics, the table reads like a storybook from another era. Joyce points out a pattern of tiny holes: “Most likely a child made those with a compass.” She describes her method of interior design as unique and funky, yet meant to be lived in. Gesturing to a green ceramic bowl on the table, she says, “I just buy things I like.”

The Carpenters often have 12 or more guests, including their children and friends from Florida and England, and rarely eat out. Many of their meals take place in the kitchen, which features granite countertops and burgundy Viking appliances. There are built-in shelves for pottery, including a spotted Gloucester pig, a new acquisition Joyce brought back from a recent trip to England.

The tower balcony off the master bedroom is one of the Carpenters’—and David’s—favorite features. “It feels like you could shoot arrows from up there,” Bill laughs. David, who loves medieval architecture and towers in particular, says, “A tower is something that often comes up on people’s wish lists, but gets eliminated during the first budget cut.”

Joyce and Bill attribute the success of their Colorado home to their close working relationship with their contractor and architect, and, most of all, David’s willingness to listen. ■



An old country house in northern England, *opposite left*, inspired the design of Bill and Joyce Carpenter's 5,900-square-foot cliffside house outside of Tabernash, *opposite right*. See Resources, p. 155.



While the Carpenters' 38-foot-tall fortress-like home looks daunting from the valley 300 feet below, the interior is inviting. Cozy Colorado touches such as century-old yellow pine wood and native rock lend the residence an old-fashioned, lived-in appearance.





Left: An opulent mansion in Northern England served as the model for Bill and Joyce Carpenter's second home in Tabernash, and even the diminutive powder room serves as a testament to its refinement and grandeur. Sconces, strongly reminiscent of medieval torches, flank the imposing hand-carved mirror, while small shelves hold milady's potions. An intricately carved, marble-topped chest of drawers, converted to serve as a vanity, embraces a porcelain sink. —Karen Z. Blaschke

J. CURTIS

CRAGLOUGH HOUSE

Craglough House, the home of Bill and Joyce Carpenter, is available for short term rental. Contact Angy Alexander, Coldwell Banker Saffell (800) 829.8831

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Builder: Bill Vickroy, Vickroy Custom Homes, Wheat Ridge 9303) 232-8025.