



LIVING DELIBERATELY: Alexandra and Mark Fabbi will spend the holidays in their newly finished log cabin, located on a hectare of land near Little Glamour Lake, south of Haliburton.

As the new century approaches, one couple has taken the old and melded it, deliberately, with the new

Millennium cabin

BY DIANE HART
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's not quite *Little House On The Prairie*. But when you're hauling up water from a spring, drilling a well, chasing pesky mice from the floorboards and reading books by candlelight, it comes pretty darn close.

That's what life was like for Alexandra Fabbi, a 36-year-old computer sales consultant, when she spent six months in cottage country building a dream millennium project, a log cabin in the woods.

Was it worth trading in her downtown power suits and palm top for jeans and a hammer? You bet.

This New Year's Eve, she and her husband Mark, 38, will ring in the millennium from the comfort of their cavernous great room with floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace, complete with a European-styled oven to bake bread.

They'll toss a log on the fire, take a soak in the wood-burning hot tub or just sit outside on the beach in front of a roaring bonfire.

The Stouffville couple may even talk about the time capsule they buried deep within the foundation of their stone fireplace, filled with the memories of the past three years spent building the cabin with its jaunty red metal roof: some sand from the beach, a piece of their dog's fur, a poignant sketch of the place by her niece with "beware of mice" scrawled above.

Should temporary brownouts from Y2K or a fierce winter storm wreak havoc, they're more than ready: their deep-bored artisan well will give them water and they'll be able to light up the place with bright kerosene lamps. A cosy fire will keep the place warm.

Whatever they do, they'll take great satisfaction in enjoying their 960-square-foot labour of love, which peeks out among cedar, birch and maple trees on Little Glamour Lake, just south of Haliburton.

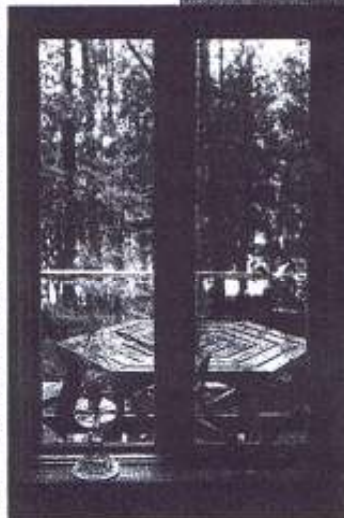
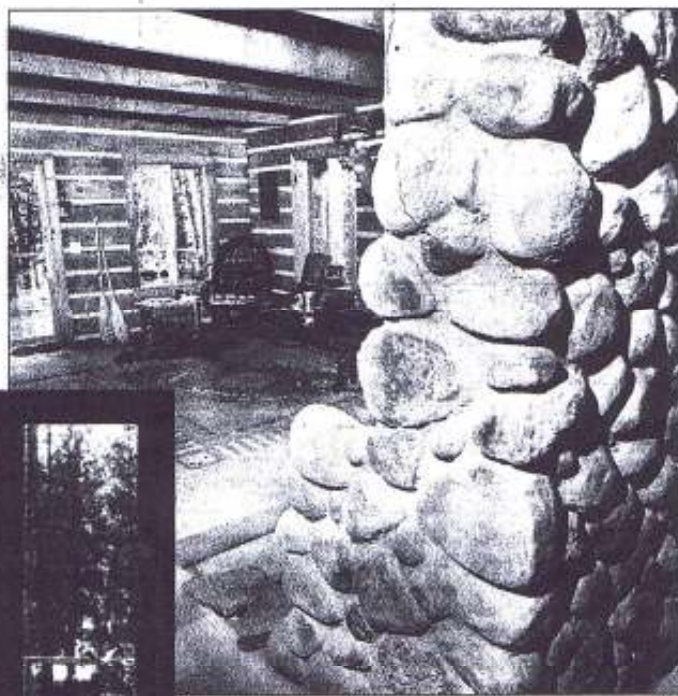
The hilly road leading to the hemlock log cabin can be treacherous in the winter, but it doesn't seem to faze the couple. "We love it up here at this time of year because it's so quiet," Mark explains.

He spends much of the year away on business as a computer specialist with the U.S.-based global information technology advisory firm the Gartner Group. The cabin, for him, is a much needed refuge.

Eventually, he hopes to join the trend of baby boomers in the next millennium and move his office right into the guest cabin on the property.

"Because of technology, we no longer have to tie ourselves to an office or a geographical location but we can do it from a log cabin in the woods," says Alexandra, describing the extra phone lines they placed in the ground when the cabin's infrastructure was built, enough for a fax modem, two phone lines and a data line.

In no way, says the techie couple, is their log cabin in the woods a rejection of technology. As



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ALEXANDRA FABBİ
Computer sales consultant



THE TORONTO STAR
at HOME

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Couple builds a millennial dream

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN WALKER/TORONTO STAR

they approach a new century, they have taken the old and melded it, deliberately, with the new.

The result is, truly, a log cabin for the millennium: comfortable enough to relax in, but with all the future needs of a fully equipped high-tech office at their fingertips.

Not that they ever thought about building a log cabin. In fact, until they went for a Sunday drive three years ago "on a lark" and spotted the nearly 1-hectare parcel of dense forest, it hadn't crossed their minds.

Neither had taking a six-month leave of absence from her demanding work as a sales consultant. Jokes Alexandra, a self-confessed planning fanatic: "It was so unlike us. We're in the I.T. industry. We're methodical."

They fell in love with the place and started to think about the first step — clearing the land. They camped on weekends the first summer and watched their dog spend hours sniff about and play in the water. All the while they talked of their dream — the cabin — and its design.

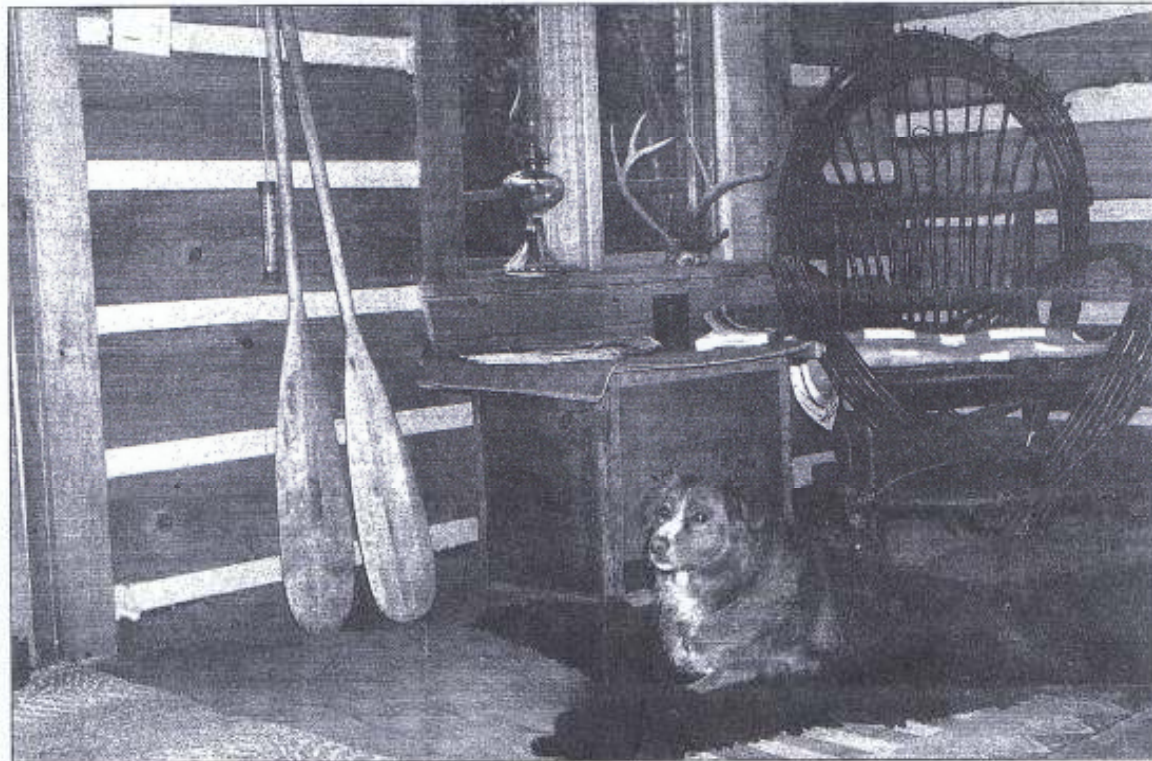
'I remember one day I was watching one of the guys lift one of these logs bare-handed and I told him I had some gardening gloves he could borrow'

— ALEXANDRA FABBI, joking about the steep learning curve when building a home

adults in another.

The solution was one large living space with a stone fireplace that goes right through the rafters. Off the large room are two tiny bedrooms with an overhanging loft and a small bathroom. In the guest cabin, they installed a composting toilet, which does exactly what it sounds like — recycles human waste cleanly.

With plans drawn, they were ready to begin. The next summer, the work on the cabin began. Eco-Log of Haliburton cut the 20-centimetre square hemlock logs — some



RUSTIC CHARM: Mark and Alexandra Fabbi's dog rests inside the couple's log cabin as they prepare for winter by stacking firewood. The cabin is a labour of love for the couple.

as long as 8 metres — from the nearby Haliburton Forest.

Contractor Vince Lancia came on board to oversee the building of the shell along with a number of forestry students working at the Haliburton Forest. Restrictions set out in a covenant owner Molly Ferguson placed on the land insisted the Fabbis build 33 metres from the water to protect the look of the shoreline, and use local labour and materials.

Jet skis and snowmobiles don't interest the couple and they were more than happy to go along with

the restrictions.

Once the shell done, Alexandra went into action. She spent April to September, 1999, drilling a well, hauling water in 10-litre containers from a nearby spring, building a woodpile, putting finishing touches on logs, hammering together a deck and building an interior wall.

She had no phone, electricity or running water. But she had plenty of quiet. Phone calls were made from a telephone booth on the highway in nearby Gooderham; car trips were made to the Lucky Dollar General Store in Gooderham, the closest town, for forgotten nails or 2-by-4s. Any reading was done when the sun was in the sky or by candlelight late at night. A composting toilet was the only "powder room" on the premises.

She learned to keep her palm top tucked away in a corner of her drawer and that weather was often the determining factor in what got done that day. Personal hygiene rather than fashion governed her days for those six months. The learning curve, for her, was steep indeed.

"I remember one day I was watching one of the guys lift one of these logs bare-handed and I told him I had some gardening gloves he could borrow." She shakes her head, remembering the laughter that greeted her suggestion.

Then there was the time she asked if the price of the wood she



had ordered included having it stacked up neatly in a corner. That time, she said, the man just looked at her, mouth agape.

There were many more awkward moments, she says. "But I'd do it again, no question."

When he was home, Mark would work beside the contractor, hammering and building well into the evening. He loved it; it was a refreshing change from his weekday work immersed in Y2K research.

The techie couple admit they were teased by friends as they approach the year 2000. "People would say, 'Well, if you guys bought a cabin in the woods way up north, what's going to happen?' But it really is just a coincidence."

These same friends are lulled by

the serenity of the cabin. They bring lap tops and books but end up sleeping the day away in ham mocks.

For the Fabbis it was a labour of love, every last minute of it. Filling it with their own treasures — an antique cupboard, a sink from En gland — has made it even more special.

The loft still has to be complete and maple floors have yet to be installed. But, for now, they're happy with running water and enough wood to get them through the hot days.

With a millennium project the took shape before their very eyes it'll be a New Year's to remember.

Diane Hart is a freelance writer.

NATURE'S BEAUTY:

A waterfall rushes near the Fabbis' property in Haliburton. The solitude of the cabin provides a needed respite for the busy computer professionals.

