

**DEN**

**Built in Nature**

For Lizzie, Fox and Paloma





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# 1

“You have 90 days.”

## Intro

A year earlier, my wife and I had bought eight acres of mountain top glory in the Catskill mountains of New York with dreams of building a cabin and living closer to nature. So far, the dream hadn't panned out. We'd visited the property here or there, but the place was still a potential future, not yet our present.

I had spent a year dwelling in the dream part of the cabin project, but only dabbling in action. I had designed cabin after cabin, only to abandon each one because they weren't quite right.

Designing any home is difficult, but designing a cabin that is less than 400 square foot is a particularly wicked game of Tetris. Every inch matters immensely. One had too few windows, another too many. In another, I optimized for efficiency to the point that one could barely slide a leg past the mattress. Efficient and cramped are not, I've learned, synonyms. In several early and failed sketches, a set of stairs so unwieldy only Labyrinth-era David Bowie could have scaled them led to an ill-conceived loft.

I knew the 'right' blueprints would come along — I just hadn't drawn them yet.

I started the cabin project as a software designer. I was not an architect nor a builder nor a craftsman. I was learning with each fresh attempt, copying and integrating ideas I'd seen in magazines and on the internet. "I'll know it when I see it," I told myself, "and then the time will be right."

Until it felt "right," limiting my cabin dreams to paper felt like necessary mitigation of risk. No money had been spent (except for the acreage), no ground had been broken (except by our tent poles), and it showed. We weren't any further along.

Fed up with the lack of progress, my wife decided to light a fire under my butt with a deadline. If I didn't break ground within 90 days, my dreamy eight acres would be back on the market to become someone else's potential future.

As if I needed more pressure, our family was progressing more quickly than my cabin project. I was about to become a father. All of my one-bedroom designs were suddenly obsolete in our impending two-bedroom world!

With the 90-day clock ticking, I stopped letting perfect be the enemy of done and pulled the most promising design from my teeming village of virtual cabins. I quickly added another bedroom and had an engineer convert my drawings into a complete set of plans. I pulled together permits, materials, and tools, recruited a team of skilled craftspeople and enthusiastic friends, and broke ground — three days before my 90-day deadline. Our son Fox was born later that month.

Even before we raised a single wall, I knew that I wanted to help others build their own cabins in the woods. I started selling my cabin plans and trading advice with anyone who would listen. Many did, and my small project in the Catskill mountains became Den.

Den offers you the plans for cabins and furniture that empower a modern outdoor lifestyle. They are meant to be folded, crumpled, bent over, and scribbled on as you construct a new, outdoor future. As you build alongside family and friends, you'll learn that you are capable, collaborative, and self-reliant. Zero experience necessary.

Countless people have started and completed cabin projects with the help of Den, and we've learned a thing or two along the way. Now we've put this booklet together to help you join our ranks.

Den began because you can't beat a night under the stars and a meal cooked with fire among friends. We believe that's where the magic happens.

New energy is found building a fire;  
New relationships are forged in a cabin kitchen;  
New identities are discovered in the outdoors  
— all of it, in and of the moment.

Our team of outstanding designers, engineers, and architects helps more people get to that moment.

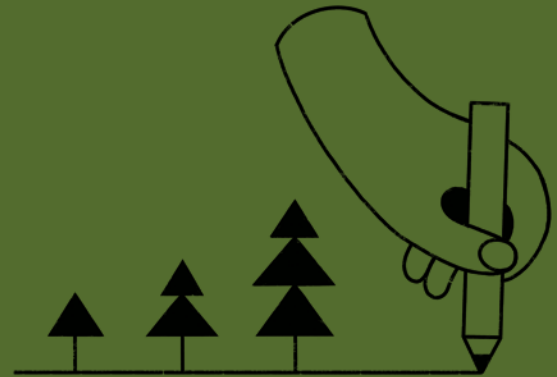
Building a cabin changes who you are, and having a cabin changes how you live, so this isn't a construction manual. This is a guide towards the cabin that is waiting for you *if* you are willing to work for it. You won't learn how to pour a foundation or frame a wall – although we've provided a list of recommended resources that can teach you how to do just that.

I hope you'll join me in addressing the big picture parts of cabin building and the overarching questions that form a canopy over the entire process. Why build a cabin in the first place? And how can you make it happen before being given 90 days and a baby's due date as a deadline?

In these pages, I hope to inspire you, ignite you, and drive you towards your own little cabin in the woods.

Let's build together.

# 2



## Finding Your Frontier

If you've ever flipped through a travel magazine, you've no doubt paused for a few moments, eyes wide, after spying your dream cabin. We all have one, even if we don't know we want a cabin yet. If you aren't quite sure *where* your dream cabin should be, you'll need to narrow down your options. This quiz will help guide you to your perfect frontier.

## So you need a place to put a cabin (circle one item on each line)

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Lush Forests

Grassy Fields

Majestic Mountains

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Lakes

Rivers

Streams

---

Road Access

Hike In

Soar or Skim

---

Close-To-Home

Short Drive

Major Escape

## If you picked

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Lush Forests Rivers Hike In

→ take a look at the Adirondacks

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Lakes Soar or Skim

→ consider Northern Ontario, Canada

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Grassy Fields Lakes Road Access

→ try northern Minnesota

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Majestic Mountains Streams Road Access

→ join us in the Catskills

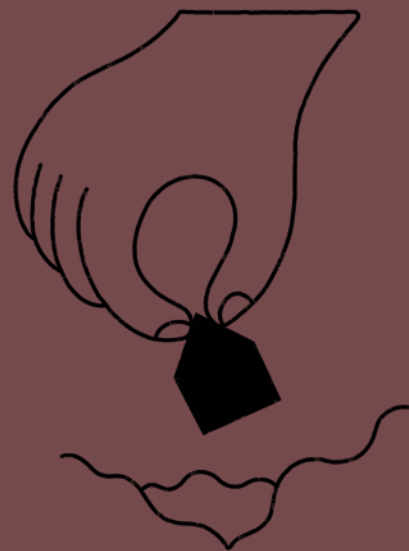
# 3

Once you know the type of place you want to be, how you want to get there, and how far you are willing to travel, it's time to start searching for land. The world is covered in outstanding vistas, but there are a few practical considerations you'll have to take into account when picking a parcel.

Setting and sticking to a budget that is realistic *for you* is critically important. Insane views come with equally crazy price tags. You may find that you need to adjust your expectations to fit what's financially feasible for you — and, remember, after you have the land, you still need to build the cabin.

You'll also need to look into local laws and regulations *before* purchasing a property. I am a strong proponent of the “ask for forgiveness, not permission,” way of doing things. However, that doesn't hold water here. You really don't want to be begging your Zoning Board or Building Department for a variance they're unlikely to grant after you've already bought the land.

Look out for key phrases like **minimum build size**, regulations on **tiny homes**, and limitations on **off-grid** living. If you are considering using your cabin as a short-term rental property to offset the cost, look into whether there are any current or pending limitations on things like Airbnb. If a property doesn't allow what you need for your project to be successful, it isn't the one for you.



## Picking a Site



When you go camping, choosing where to set up your tent is a make-or-break moment. Will you be dry through the morning or wake up in a puddle? Will you need a chiropractic adjustment when you get home, or did a pine bough for your bed (idea courtesy of classic campfire song “On the Loose”) work just fine? Inexperienced campers often won’t know if they’ve picked the right campsite until long after they’ve committed to their decision, while those with experience under their belt seem like they can smell a flat, dry, and cushiony clearing from a hundred yards away.

Picking where to place your cabin on your perfect piece of land is nearly the same as setting up a tent except that if your partner shakes you awake in the middle of the night to point out that you f\*cked up, you can’t do anything to fix it. You’re stuck (see **p.36, A Solid Foundation**).

This is why you need to get to know your land before setting your heart on a site for your cabin. Camp out on your property to try different areas. Watch how the sun moves across the land, feel where wind whips and where the air is calm, discover where water collects, and take note of the high ground. If you don’t have time to spend a week or so moving a tent around, spend a few hours picnicking in each spot. You’ll know pretty quickly if you’re in a calm oasis or a mosquito-infested swamp.

As you become acquainted with your land, you’ll notice things you didn’t necessarily consider when you decided to purchase it — especially as the seasons change. Flow with this.

Keep an eye out for areas with natural protection from the elements, keep road access in mind, and look into local regulations on required setbacks\*.

Homes *can* be built nearly anywhere. If you want a house on the side of a cliff, it can be done. However, our cabins perform best on even ground — flat or a gentle slope — with some natural tree protection and lots of natural light.

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\* **Setback:** The distance between a building and any property line, road, or other notable feature (such as a river). Many municipalities have minimum setbacks baked into their zoning regulations, so be sure to check before setting your heart on a building site right up against a neighbor.

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**Keep tabs on your favorite potential cabin sites by answering these questions:**

Is the ground wet or dry after a heavy rain?

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How many trees would you need to cut down to make space?

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Is the site sunny in the summer? What about in winter?

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Is the ground flat or sloped?

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How far is it from the closest access point (road, dock, etc.)?

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When there is a storm, do you feel cozy and protected or exposed and at risk?

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# 4



## Setting a Budget

It's fun to dream about what you could do without any restrictions, but, eventually, you're going to have to set a budget.

Try not to think of your budget as a shackle. Rather, think of it as a way of setting yourself free to make better decisions.

One of the biggest misconceptions people have about building a small home is that it is less expensive than building a large house. The overall cost may indeed be lower for a cabin than a mini-mansion, but the price per square foot is often higher.

There are ways to mitigate this (see **p.46, To Grid or Not to Grid**), but if you plan on having all the bells and whistles of a conventional house in a smaller package, you're paying for the same conveniences spread over fewer square feet. I built our cabin using simple materials and readily available brands to prove that it is possible to create something beautiful *and* functional without breaking the bank.

There are three ways to finance your cabin:

- Cash
- Debt (Mortgage, Construction Loan, etc.)
- A mix of cash and debt

You will need to pick the financing method that works best for you, but remember that the more debt you take on, the more you'll have to work to pay it off and the less time you'll have to enjoy your cabin. This is why I am such a big proponent of being cost-conscious. If the purpose of building a cabin is to enjoy it, you need to make sure you'll get to do that!

Setting a project budget is complicated, but figuring out where the money needs to go is even trickier. We like to use the **bucket method**. In the bucket method, each bucket represents a chunk of your project. We've based the percentage of your total budget that goes into each bucket, from land to splurges, on our past cabin projects.

Speaking of splurges, it's important to fill all the buckets with the resources you need *before* you put money aside for splurges. However, it's good to have some wiggle room for things you certainly don't need, but you definitely do want. Even before we had finished blueprints, my wife and I knew that we wanted to have a striking wood stove. The one we fell in love with was a stretch for us, but we adjusted the budget to accommodate it. Because we planned in advance, we weren't bitten in the butt when the bill was due, and watching money burn has never been more satisfying.

## Allocating Your Budget



Land  
32%



\_\_\_\_\_ \$

Materials  
30%



\_\_\_\_\_ \$

Tools  
2%



\_\_\_\_\_ \$

Clearing / Site Prep  
20%



\_\_\_\_\_ \$

Expert Assistance  
12%



\_\_\_\_\_ \$

Splurges  
4%



\_\_\_\_\_ \$

# 5



## Teaming & Tooling Up

In the words of every high school coach: teamwork makes the dream work.

Having a team makes everything easier, and that is especially true when you're building a cabin. At Den, our plans are designed to empower DIYers to find joy in the process of building a home alongside family and friends — but that doesn't mean an expert pair of hands won't help.

When I was ready to break ground on my cabin project, I took a quick inventory of my strengths and weaknesses. While I was bringing enthusiasm, passion, and an aesthetic vision to the project, I was starting from close-to zero on technical know-how. If the cabin was going to be built well, efficiently, and on budget, I needed a team. I gathered family and friends around me, but my most important recruit was a carpenter (and the tools he brought with him).

Good saws aren't cheap! If you think hiring a carpenter is beyond your budget and you don't already have a well-appointed workshop, try pricing out the cost of buying or renting all the tools you will need, from a few measuring tapes to an impact driver. Subtract that total from the carpenter's quote and then reassess the feasibility of bringing them on.

You will probably spend most days working alone or with a small group, but you may discover a small village of family and friends who want to spend their weekends clearing brush and cutting 2×4s.

As you assemble your team, it's essential to keep in mind what each person brings to the build. If your brother-in-law spent a summer painting houses, don't wear him out with requests before you get around to that part of the project. If your best friend did landscaping work during the summers in high school, try bringing them in early on. Some help will come free, some will cost a case or two of beer, and some will send you a bill. All help is good help if it is the right help at the right time.

## Build your Team

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**1** Name

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Superpower or Skill

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Method of payment

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**2** Name

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Superpower or Skill

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Method of payment

---

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**3** Name

---

Superpower or Skill

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Method of payment

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**4** Name

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Superpower or Skill

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Method of payment

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# 6



## Playing it Safe

Building a cabin does pose some risks. Once, I nearly broke both my thumbs at once when a ladder collapsed into itself as I was a third of the way up. Another time, I cut a coil of plastic plumbing tubing from the wrong end, resulting in a Bruce Lee-style chop to my face. Luckily, I was wearing my glasses. Both events were close calls, but more serious accidents can be avoided if you take the right precautions.

Before you start passing around a bucket of hammers, remember that everyone needs to be suited up for safety. Every member of your team should have a pair of safety glasses (no, not just sunglasses) and gloves. Anyone who will be working with or near chemicals or dust needs to have a construction-grade facemask. You should know where the nearest hospital is and have the directions saved in a few different places. If something happens, you don't want to be screaming at your phone for not having service.

If you haven't budgeted for an emergency helicopter medevac, we also highly recommend putting together a 'better-than-average' first aid kit. There aren't just knee scratches and blisters I'm worried about. Standard bandaids and moleskin won't do much for you in severed appendages, falling off roofs, or losing an eye territory.

If you feel like being a high achiever, you may even want to take a first aid class before you trek out into the woods to start cutting down trees with your shiny new chainsaw. I'm a big fan of wilderness first aid courses, in particular, because you'll learn how to use what's already around you in an emergency. They may eat up a weekend and a few hundred dollars, but you'll learn the basic skills to not, ahem, *die* should you accidentally chop your shin instead of that branch you could have easily cut with pruning shears.

## Your much needed, well-stocked first aid kit\*

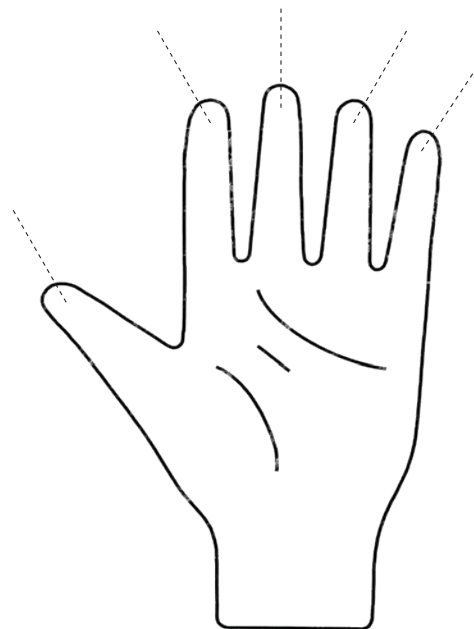
Any kit you buy or self-assemble *must* include the following basics:

- Rolled gauze
- Individually-sealed moistened towelettes for cleaning wounds
- Antibiotic ointment
- Dressing gauze
- Large, non-adhesive gauze pads
- Adhesive bandages in various sizes
- Triangular bandage
- Elastic bandage
- Medical tape
- Nitrile gloves
- Flexible splint
- Burn gel
- Scissors
- A wilderness or outdoor first aid handbook

\* We hope you never need your first aid kit, but, if you do, always remember to replace what you use!

Throughout your cabin project, take safety seriously and require others to do the same. Mistakes happen, and even the most skilled person on site can slip up, so prepare in advance for a bad situation. Take your time, never rush, and always stop for the day before you feel like you have to.

**Name each finger on your hand.**



**Now protect them like family.**



# 7



## Making Room

The best cabins engage with the space they sit in, becoming one with the natural setting. The best builders amplify this effect by connecting the cabin interior with the outdoors to tell one cohesive story. This is why we take an au natural perspective when it comes to making room for a new home.

When we built our cabin, I knew I wanted the structure to fit into the forest seamlessly, so I took tree preservation on as a challenge. I selectively cut only what was absolutely necessary, and today we have pitch pine trees just a few inches away from our exterior walls. I can touch them from bed, and they provide protection from the sun, wind, and rain. We are in nature, and we are of nature.

Precisely what type of work you will need to do to prep your site will depend on where you choose to settle down.

If you are partial to grassy fields, you may not have to do much. If you bought a few acres of thick forest, as I did, you have your work cut out for you. Before you clear-cut a perfect rectangle out of your untouched acreage, consider which trees truly need to go and whether any could be scooted around just fine. If you aren't confident in your tree knowledge, this is a really good time to call in a pro.

An arborist is going to find something that needs work. It's their job. Instead of nodding along, ask them *why* they are insisting a particular tree is dangerous. Keep in mind that dead trees near your house are always dangerous unless you're okay with an abrupt roof remodel.

If the spot you're set on is uneven, you may need to do some grading. However, ornamental lawns are for the suburbs, not your cabin site, so don't go too crazy. Our plans work well on that ground or a gentle, even slope. If you want an expanse of flat green lawn, now would be a good time to look elsewhere.

Throughout your project, remember to tidy up the build site as you go. Your goal should be to **leave no trace** except for the cabin itself. Like an unkempt room, a dirty build site will wear you down. Reuse what you can, recycle what you can, challenge yourself to use your dumpster as little as possible, and look into local burn laws.

As you build, you may feel like you're permanently scaring the land. When that happens, pause. Reflect on the actions that led you to that feeling. Did you have to put in a narrow road for grading equipment? Did a big tree actually need to come down? Did you find a burrow or birds nest right where you thought something essential would fit best? Remember the purpose of the practice. You are building a cabin. You want those birds and that burrow. You can plant a new tree. You can let nature fill in the gaps you had to create.

Keep it wild.

**Name five things that you are passionate about preserving around your cabin.**

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**1**

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**2**

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**3**

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**4**

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**5**

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# 8

## A Solid Foundation

Once you've prepped your site, it's time to start building. Before you can erect walls or install windows, there are three critical concepts you need to become best friends with.

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**Level:** A flat or even surface where no part is higher than another.

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**Plumb:** When things go straight up and down.

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**Square:** To bring things to a right (90°) angle.

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A beautiful cabin starts with a solid foundation, and a solid foundation requires the builders to fully embrace (nay, swear by) the laws of level, plumb, and square. We strongly advise not rushing through this bit to get back to the fun, creative stuff. If you mess up, your house *will* be crooked.

If you don't think you are properly obsessive about details, this may be somewhere else to bring a few experts in, in addition to the engineer who should be signing off on your project along the way. Our plans are fully approved for safety and engineering soundness. Still, every application and build site is different, and you may need to make small tweaks to accommodate for the unique attributes of your location.



Den began because we know that building a cabin changes who you are, having a cabin changes how you live, and sharing a cabin changes how you engage with others. Today, we serve a diverse global community of dreamers, DIYers, and doers who are as enthusiastic as we are about bringing the outdoors in. Together, we trust in the power of communal construction, we embrace the uncertainty of pushing our limits, and

we  
believe:

# We live in the natural world

We strive to be aware of the daily details that connect us with the world. We notice sunlight dappling a sidewalk, the taste of a bite of ripe berry, the smell of fall, the feeling of dewy grass on bare feet. These things remind us that we are immersed in nature, no matter where we are.

# We are custodians of the land

Den projects are designed to protect green space with minimal impact on the spaces they occupy. We encourage our builders to do the same and are committed to helping our community form stronger connections with the outdoors while ensuring the longevity of the landscapes they fall in love with.

# The woods are open to all

We believe that all humans have the right to live a healthier, more-fulfilling, outdoor-oriented lifestyle. We are committed to management practices that affirm the equality of every person on planet earth, and we strive to make nature more accessible to those who are historically disadvantaged or marginalized.

# We can't escape the present

We exist in the now, but we can create a new future. We don't design escape pods, and we don't believe in disconnecting to recharge. Instead, we help people shift towards ways of living that are rejuvenating. You have always had this spirit; you have never been depleted.

Den plans and products are designed to be built in nature, for people seeking built-in nature. Our team knows no borders, participating from Brazil, both coasts of the United States, and Germany. We work from apartments, farmhouses, and, yes, cabins. We bring the outdoors in, and we send it off to you.

# 9



## To Grid or Not to Grid

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**The Grid:** A network for delivering electrical power from producers to consumers. The term is often used to refer to any utility (water, gas, waste, or electric) that is wired or piped into a home from a shared network.

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When you are on the grid, your electricity may come from a power line, your water may come from a city water system, your human waste may go into a sewer, and your gas may come in through a gas line. Whether you have access to all of these systems or only one, they make life pretty damn easy. You don't need to worry about whether your rainwater collection tanks will run dry or your electric will burn out, or your propane will run out in the middle of baking a cake. You don't even need to think about where your poop goes.

Some areas require all homeowners (yes, even cabins in the woods if they are the primary structure) to use the grid. Many, though, don't, which means that you have the opportunity to separate yourself, even just a little, from the megalthic and massively destructive system that keeps many humans comfy cozy year-round.

Depending on what is permissible and possible on your land, you may be able to harvest your electricity from the sun, drill a well (\$\$\$\$) or collect rainwater (\$), and take care of your own human waste.





# 10



## Fast Framing

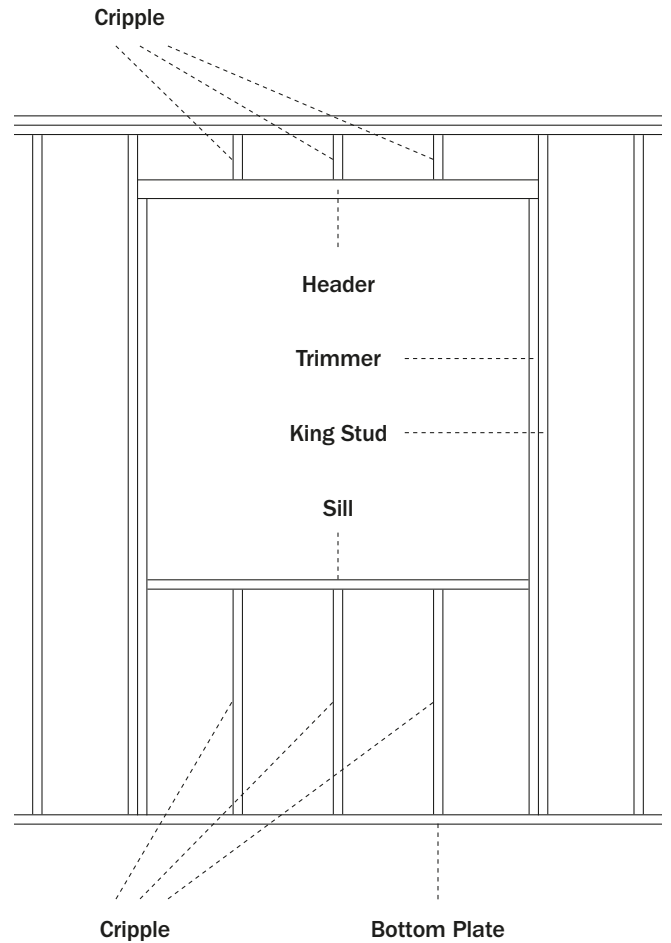
When I built my first cabin, I watched in amazement as a two-dimensional pile of possibilities scattered across the job site transformed into a three-dimensional structure. The walls were up and, suddenly, there in front of me was the skeleton of a cabin.

Despite the wonder of that moment, walls are often quite contentious. Not so much the exterior ones that keep the cold out and hold the roof up. Nearly everyone can get behind those. The controversial walls are the ones on the inside, the ones that divide our homes into rooms, closets, bathrooms, and kitchens.

Some people are decidedly anti-wall. They want an open box with a smaller box somewhere off to the side for a bathroom, and that's about it. Others won't feel at home without a cozy corner nook, a dedicated bedroom, and a play space for the kids. At Den, we fall somewhere in-between. Our plans provide dedicated areas for sleeping, going to the bathroom, and lounging around, without needlessly segmenting a home. Our spaces are close and cozy, as a cabin should be, while simultaneously feeling much larger than they are.

As you raise your walls, you'll learn that the process comes with its own language. There are studs, headers, sills, cripples, and trimmers. As you learn these terms, you'll get to know your cabin walls better than any walls you've ever lived within. You'll notice how walls direct the flow of human life like rocks in a river, guiding you along your daily journeys. Walls absorb our energy, and they radiate it back. What we give them is what we receive in return. Treat them well.

## Anatomy of a Wall



# 11



## Keeping Cozy

There is something uniquely fulfilling about cuddling up next to a fire while snow gently drifts to the forest floor. Remember that wood stove I mentioned? This is why we bought it. For my family, feeling cozy might as well require watching logs burn.

However, designing for cozy is about more than a wood stove and some good kindling. There are practical considerations to take into account if you want your cabin to keep you warm on a winter day. House wrap is like a raincoat for your cabin. Invest in a good one. High R-value insulation is to your cabin as a wool sweater is to your torso: indispensable when the going gets tough.

This isn't just about winter, either. When you're building a (very) small home, and you intend to use it for more than a few months each year, it's important to invest time, energy, and money into keeping things comfortable year-round.





# 12

## Views For Days

Did you know that the most flattering light in the northern hemisphere comes through north-facing windows? It's called painter's light, and it makes everything look good. It's soft, subtle, and doesn't change much throughout the day. It also happens to be terrible if you want your windows to help you stay warm.

We designed our cabins to allow you, the builder, to pick your view. You have final say on where to place the windows and how many to incorporate, so it's essential to consider what you want out of those panes of glass. North-facing windows are flattering and soft. South or west-facing windows are great for plants, but bright direct light through much of the day can turn a small home into a solar cooker. East-facing windows funnel morning light, which is excellent if you want to get on a circadian rhythm. If you aren't a morning person, consider this your warning.

And, of course, windows aren't just about light. Different window styles enable different looks and functions. Personally, I like oversized windows that don't obstruct the view. Give me expansive swaths of glass, and I'm a happy camper (or, well, cabin-er. If that were to be a word).

Just as they let you see out into the world, windows bring the outside in, circulating air and welcoming what's beyond into your space. With this in mind, it would be best if you liked looking at what is outside of them. My favorite window in my home frames the mountains. Watching them change with the weather and the season is better than any television program.

## The Types of Windows We Work With Most

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**Awning:** Open just as the name would suggest, like an awning. These windows don't let rain in, but they also aren't ideal if you're trying to invite a breeze.

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**Casement:** Open like a book standing on its spine. Casement windows act as a sail, catching the wind and funneling it into your home. Place them on the opposite sides of the cabin to create a cooling cross breeze. They don't stop working when it rains, though, so you'll have to swing them shut if you don't want to break out the mop.

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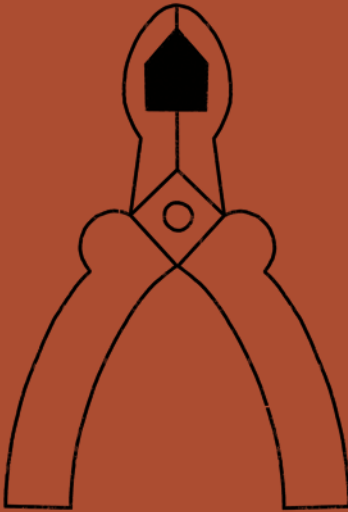
**Sliding:** Slide horizontally to open and come in all shapes and sizes.

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**Picture:** Good for letting in light and looking out at the view, but these windows can't be opened.

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# 13



## Lights, Water, Action

If you want your cabin to be more than a box in the woods (or valley, or field, or wherever), you are going to need some equipment. These are the bells and whistles that turn a pretty pile of sticks into a functional place to live. How many bells and whistles you need to survive is up to you, so you'll have to decide whether you want to cook on electric, gas, or — if you are super brave and local laws allow it — wood, and if a dishwasher truly qualifies as a necessity.

Air conditioning is optional, but most people (including myself) can agree on the need for ample hot water if you intend to stay in your cabin for more than a weekend at a time. This is your opportunity to geek out on flow rates, pressure, voltage, and all the other fun stuff that goes into selecting the right gear for your cabin.

As you get into the weeds, remember that beauty and functionality are closely linked. Don't buy an appliance just because it's pretty, but you may struggle to appreciate an ugly appliance even if it does its job.



If you are getting electricity from the grid and your water is coming from a well, you should consider:

- Well pump
- Electric on-demand water heater
- Electric stove/oven
- Electric air conditioner with heat pump

If you are harvesting rainwater and solar, and believe that cooking without gas isn't even cooking, you'll need:

- Submersible pump for the water tank
- Propane on-demand water heater
- Propane stove/oven
- Woodstove

If you pair your resources with the right equipment for the job, you'll be good to go.

**What are your resources?  
What equipment do you need  
to make the most of them?**

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# 14



## Finishing Touches

There is an enchanting and magical time between when a cabin is “livable” and when it is done. The walls are up, the electric and water and whatever else is in, and the insulation is packed into place. The appliances have been installed, and you may have even already spent a night in sleeping bags on the floor — but it isn’t actually *done* yet, and nearly anything is possible.

What you do in this transitional time will determine how you, your friends, and your family interact with the space you’ve created for years to come.

The materials you choose for the floor, walls, and ceiling are the canvas for the cocoon you are creating. When I was finishing our cabin, I wanted to combine sparse minimalism with textured warmth, so I settled on using furniture-grade plywood for the walls, and drywall for the ceiling. The plywood required a lot of prep work, and we were covered in dust for an entire weekend, but it was worth it. The intricacies of the grain were brought out as we sanded and stained, and I love watching my son trace the tree rings, his fingers sliding smoothly across the walls as he stares, transfixed.

I made an aesthetic choice without knowing precisely how it would turn out, and it’s changed how we engage with, and within a space we love.

On the exterior of our cabin, we finished pine siding with a mixture of linseed oil and pine tar. Combined, they create a patina that looks something like charred wood. It's striking, but it's not harsh. Instead, it feels timeless. The cabin could have just been finished, or be 200 years old. It could have been passed down in our family for generations, or built with my own two hands.

As it ages, the natural finishes I applied will develop and change. The cabin will never look exactly as it did when I first built it, and it never should. It is not static, because neither are we.

I love our plywood walls and our black siding, but I know they aren't for everyone. Some people want a more traditional look. Luckily, it's your cabin, and it's your cocoon. You get to decide how to decorate the canvas.

## What finishing details do you want to include?

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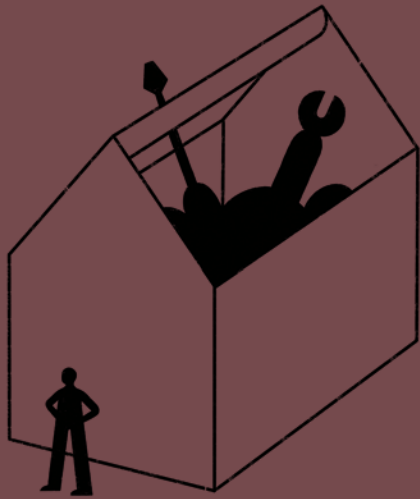
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# 15



## Moving In

You finished your cabin!

Ok, probably not. But you have a dream and a vision, and hopefully more of a plan for how you're going to make it happen. There was an entire year between when I first stepped onto our land (before it was even our land!) and the day we broke ground. Once we started building, it was another eight months before we were moved in.

At the time of writing this, there are light fixtures I have yet to install fully, and the coat hooks have been languishing in a corner for months. This is okay — and I'm not just saying that because I'm procrastinating.

Projects take the time they need, not necessarily the time we want them to take. If yours is moving more slowly than you'd like, that's just fine. If you feel twisted into knots, you are allowed to take a step back. You'll have more room to imagine, more time to consider, and your cabin will be better for it.

There are very few times in our lives when we get to work with a truly blank slate. This is one of them. Take advantage of it. Don't fill your cabin with furniture on day one. Watch how light moves across the walls before hanging art. Feel the floors against your feet before buying a rug. Be selective as you curate a space that is fully reflective of you and how you want to live from this day forward. If that means waiting six months to find the perfect seating, so be it.

If you're still looking for the perfect plot of land, curate your life with the same thoughtfulness, precision, and enthusiasm. If you're not sure if you want woods or meadowland, try woodworking, fly fishing, or rock climbing to learn more about how you engage with the natural world. If you're struggling to get the walls up, become a master of campfire cooking. If the fridge is back-ordered, try foraging. Enjoy the mindfulness that a den in the woods allows before you even have it, and continue to shift your foundation towards feeling charged. You have always had this spirit; you have never been depleted.

# Our Bookshelf

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## **The Complete Visual Guide to Building a House** by John Carrol

If you only want to read one book, this is the one. It's our go-to source for clear and reliable instruction on everything from foundations to finishing touches.

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## **New Nordic Houses** by Dominic Bradbury

This book is beautiful, featuring modern architecture and interiors that blend seamlessly with the outdoors. Look to it for visual inspiration ranging from a tear drop-shaped cabin that blends into a hillside to sprawling geometric homes that stand out in any landscape.

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## **Hide and Seek: The Architecture of Cabins and Hideouts** published by Gestalten

At Den, we appreciate that our designs are just one way of living in the woods. This book is perfect for exploring the diversity of styles that have been born from the same inspiration: getting outdoors.

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## **A Place of My Own: The Architecture of Daydreams** by Michael Pollan

Read this book for an intellectual adventure into what it means to build a place of one's own.

# About the Author

## Michael Romanowicz

I'm a software guy who feels most at home in the mountains. I've always been drawn to architecture and design, and I set an arbitrary goal for myself to design and build a home in the mountains before I turned 40. I did it, and I didn't want to stop. Den is my way of continuing the cabin-building process by passing it along to you. I did it, and I had never built anything more complex than a bookshelf, so you can too. And if you can rope some family in on the adventure, I highly advise it. Luckily, I've had the support of a fantastic partner who's spent countless hours listening to my ideas, looking at my models, generously watching our son when I worked on the cabin. This would not have been possible without her. Thank you.





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**DEN**

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Building a cabin changes who you are, and having a cabin changes how you live, so this isn't a construction manual. This is a guide towards the cabin that is waiting for you if you are willing to work for it.

