

# Time now for top notch construction

by Harry Williamson

There is little doubt the recent growth cycle has brought more business to Grand County — more construction, increased material sales and busier general and subcontractors.

Another change has been the well recorded trend toward larger homes. Four and five thousand square foot houses are now becoming commonplace. A so-called "big" house today — especially in the east end of the county — is upwards of nine and 10 thousand square feet.

The boom has also brought something else — an increasing trend toward a new high end of construction quality.

Buyers have always wanted the very best in their new homes. But many of these newcomers in the past few years have raised the quality bar several notches.

They have the money and the desire for what one general contractor, John Berendes of Icebox Builders, Inc., refers to as the "super custom home."

Berendes is typical of the local general contractors — those who have long enjoyed good reputations — who are

now being given the opportunity to stretch their skills.

Today, they are being given the time and the money to produce the very best.

"I have always liked to do the highest end of custom work. This boom has allowed me to do it," Berendes said.

The home he has been building since June of last year is also typical of this new high end type of construction. It is being built as a second home by Nancy and Rick Patch of Louisville. It is located in an area developed by Young Life's Crooked Creek Camp. Six small acreages, bounded by more than 100 acres of open space, purchased by supporters of Young Life.

The Patch family includes three children who have been actively involved with the camp.

Berendes feels the percentage of the highest end homes still accounts for less than five percent of all the construction under way. It is, however, an increasing trend.

"It used to be that there were no jobs like this," Berendes said.

"You've always had people who

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**HIGH TIME FOR HIGH-END** — The recent construction boom has brought more than lots of work for local builders. New quality conscious homeowners, with the money to buy what they want, have also given builders opportunities to do their very best work, as demonstrated in the log prow above.



# Berendes is typical of local builders

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wanted top notch quality, but they weren't able to pay for it. Now you have buyers who know exactly what they want. First they want it to be nice. Then they worry about the cost," he said.

These are the houses which contain the very best of materials, and the highest attention to detail.

These are the slow builds, often taking up to two years to finish.

And the method of costing out these homes is also different.

Before, a general contractor would give a solid bid, setting an exact figure for what the house would cost before construction began. If the unexpected occurred, then a change order would be done.

Today, more and more, general contractors are being given the luxury of more open-ended contracts. These are the costing methods based on the time and materials used. Berendes also refers to this method as "cost plus" — the actual cost of the constructing the home, plus a profit percentage which usually ranges from approximately 12 to 15 percent.

This gives the general contractor and his subs the time and the money to do the top notch, to be creative in building a home which moves from the ordinary to the unusual.

Many general contractors feel that doing the solid bid method on these types of homes would likely result in an even higher cost.

"If I bid a house such as this, I would have to bid it extremely high just to make sure I had the money to cover all the expenses," he said.

And even with that, there would probably also be a sea of change orders.

"I would have a stack of change

orders 10 feet high," Berendes said, explaining that with all the special full-scribed log work in the Patch house, it would have been especially difficult to set a final number.

"For example, there would have been no way I could have put a number on that log prow," he added, pointing to the glassed-in area of the great room.

Berendes said that under this more open ended system, subcontractors do give a bid before they start work, but it is not necessarily a hard and fast, final number.

"Making sure that the customer gets exactly what they want is still the overriding concern," Berendes said.

Rick Demarest and his crew did the stonework in the home, both on the outside and the inside. A massive stone chimney serves two fireplaces — a Rumford style wood burner on the main floor, and a gas fireplace in the basement. Demarest estimates that approximately 15 tons of stone and concrete was used in the fireplace construction.

He said that while cost is not necessarily the overriding concern in these homes, it is still a major consideration.

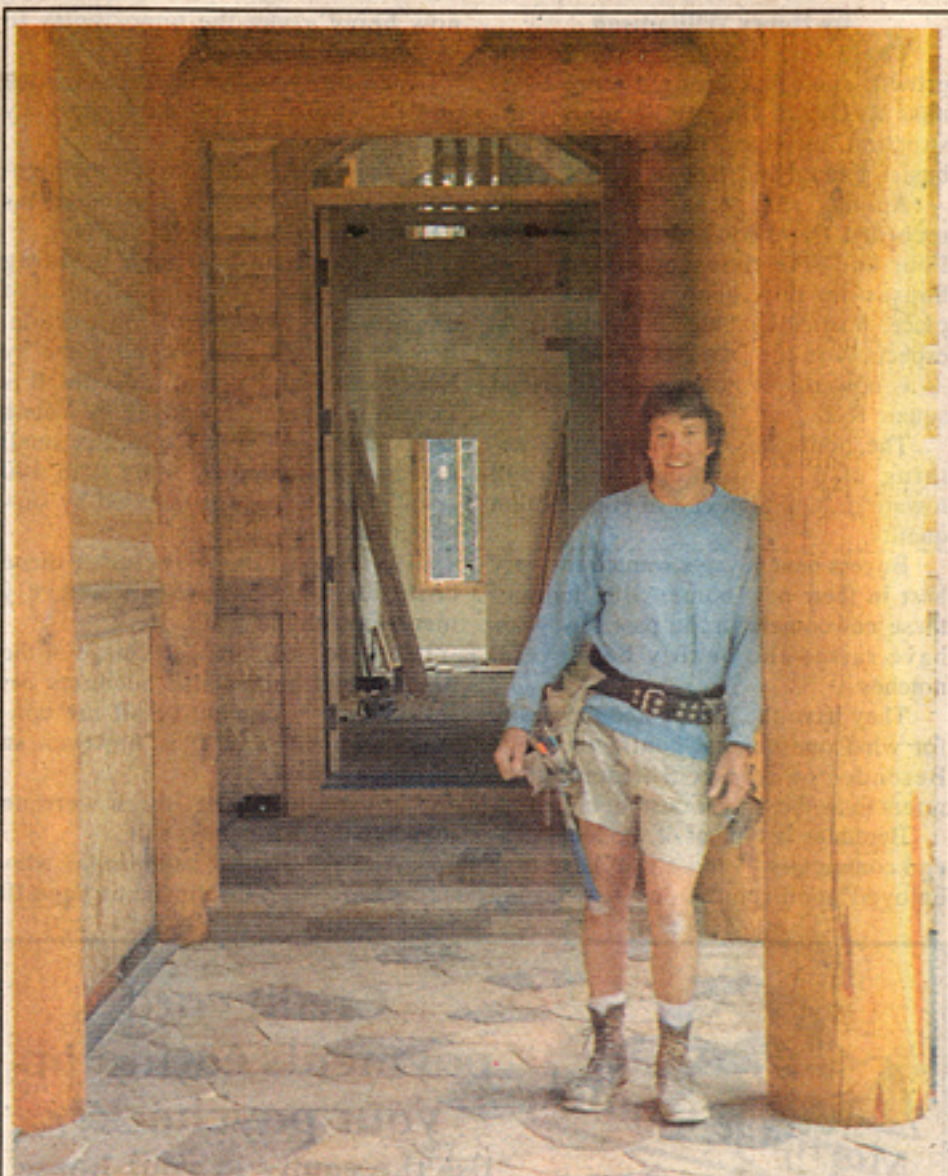
"The owners first wanted me to use synthetic stone in the fireplace. I built two 12 foot test panels, and when you see just how good the real stone looks there is no comparison. They were also surprised that the real stone did not increase the cost that much," Demarest said.

"You can also be a lot more creative with the real stone, since you can't really cut the synthetic," he added.

As far as the materials used, Berendes said that "things used to be a whole lot simpler."

"A few years ago the choices were

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**ENTRYWAY INTO QUALITY** — More and more local builders are getting the time and money to do topnotch construction work, as demonstrated by John Berendes of Icebox Builders, Inc., as he stands here in the entryway of a home he is constructing for a Lewisville family.



# Who have built a quality reputation

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carpet on the floors and formica on the countertops. Now it's granite and hickory and a whole lot more," he said.

The Patch home features a wide range of woods, ranging from the large Douglas fir logs used in the full scribed, post and beam type of construction, to walnut, pine and the hickory used in the floors and some of the ceilings. Lodgepole pine, taken from the standing dead on the property was used for all of the railings and banisters.

Keith Bergen, one of Berendes' six employees on the job, has fashioned much of this work with a draw knife, carefully leaving knots and other "imperfections" in the wood. Berendes' lead

carpenter is Jim Beck, a trusted employee who has worked for John, on and off, over the past 15 years.

"Mrs. Patch especially likes that the trees came from the property," Berendes said.

He said that the house was designed with the Patch's children and their friends in mind. The downstairs is "kid territory," including all of the audio and video equipment in a family room and two bedrooms, each containing three sets of bunk beds. The downstairs also includes a "hidden door," which leads to a special kid room, Berendes said.

Special cabinet construction, done by Grand Woodworks in Tabernash, abounds. The house has two master bed-

room layouts — one for guests — with the bedroom upstairs including a steam shower, complete with five separate water heads. A small bathroom off the great room features a gorgeous hand-fashioned cooper sink.

The home is what is what is referred to as a "smart house," wired with a huge amount of controls which allows it, in effect, to be operated from the Patch home in Loisville. Lights and appliances can be turned on and off, doors locked and unlocked, and the temperature set. The system also has a video capability, so pictures can be sent.

Berendes said he also likes this type of home construction because it gives him a chance to learn and try new things.

"There are at least a dozen things in this house which I have never done before. It keeps it interesting," he added.

He said that this more open-ended type of cost construction demands that there is a high degree of trust between the builder and the owners.

"There are a number of excellent builders up here who over the years have developed an excellent reputation simply by word of mouth. We have earned a excellent set of references, which we are going to protect by doing the highest quality work, and charge a fair price," Berendes said. "With this new type of customers, it's a win-win situation for both of us," he added. The phone number for Icebox Builders, Inc. is 726-5098.



**STONEMAN** — Rick Demarest, pictured above right on the scaffolding, and his crew work on the exterior of the Patch home, which overall will probably consist of more than 40 tons of rock and stone.