

CABIN

A GUIDE TO BUILDING THE PERFECT GETAWY



Matthew Kirchhoff
WITH DAVID AND JEANIE STILES

"Cabin: A Guide to Building the Perfect Getaway is a snug, tightly written book that informs and entertains. Kirchhoff's sentences are simple and pleasing like the structures he describes with such deep affection."

—Hank Lentfer,

author of Raven's Witness: The Alaska Life of Richard K. Nelson



If you dream of building a simple getaway cabin, here is a must-have for your bookshelf.

Cabin is filled with helpful tips to guide you on the way; this well-written and beautifully illustrated book is backed by decades of experience.

You'll discover how to find and evaluate a beautiful piece of land, and how to site, design, and construct a cabin that's distinctive and economical from foundation to roof. There is advice on heating, cooking, lighting, acquiring water, and dealing with waste—everything you need to make your simple off-grid cabin attractive, efficient, and comfortable. Finally, there's a guide to other valuable resources—the best books, suppliers, and on-line tools to help you.

Sprinkled among the chapters are anecdotes and lessons learned from the authors' many years of cabin living, from the Hamptons to Alaska. The writing informs, inspires, and delights, making this that rare how-to book that's hard to put down.



Simple structures like this one-room sauna hut, built by authors David and Jeanie Stiles, capture many of the elements of ideal getaways promoted in this, their latest cabin-building book.



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INTRODUCTION

“Let your capital be simplicity and contentment.”

— *Henry David Thoreau*

Henry David Thoreau is one of the first, and certainly the most famous, proponents of simple living. If he was feeling the need to escape the pressures of society in 1845, imagine how he might view modern life today. We cram ever more activity into our days, aided by technology that powers computers and phones, drives cars, tracks appointments, provides news feeds, pings with social media alerts and emails, and even responds to our spoken commands. We work more and sleep less than ever before. Time devoted to relaxation, or deep thought, falls to the bottom of most people's to-do list, if it's on there at all.

It doesn't have to be that way. There is a growing movement of simple-living advocates who want to slow down and live more intentionally. Without question, some physical separation from the trappings of modern society helps in this pursuit—and that's where retreating to a cabin comes in. Thoreau lived in his one-room cabin on Walden Pond for

two years—a devotion that feels extreme today. Perhaps we can compromise and aim for two weekends a month, or two months a summer, in a cabin with a tad more elbow room.

A cabin is not strictly necessary to get away. You can enjoy nature quite well on foot and can carry a tent on your back for overnights. But a cabin adds immeasurably to your comfort and enjoyment, especially for families with young and old. You can extend your away time. You can do more outside knowing there is a warm, dry place waiting when darkness falls or the weather turns sour. You can cook on a counter, dine at a table, read in a comfortable chair, and sleep on a mattress.

But if all you do is recreate *inside* your cabin, it has partly failed in its purpose. It is a base for getting outside. To that end, the cabins we promote have limited amenities. We won't be describing how to build septic systems, drill a well, or install wiring and plumbing. There is no bathroom, no separate bedrooms, and no electricity in our ideal. If you are lucky, your cabin will also be without cell phone service.

You may suffer a day or two of withdrawal. . . but then you'll then find new bounty in good conversation, group-prepared meals, outdoor adventure, shared memories with friends and family, and even solitude if that's your goal. A getaway cabin makes all this possible.

We can't tell you exactly where to build or exactly what to build. But we can provide advice based on years of experience with our own cabin projects.

To us, an ideal getaway cabin has the following characteristics:

It is versatile. The cabin can sleep 2 to 10 without view-robbing interior walls. It can serve

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for a weekend or for weeks on end, providing both security and comfort.

It is easy to build. The cabin can be constructed, start to finish, by one or two people in a month's time (or longer, if the cabin is built with logs). No one piece of building material is too heavy, too costly, or too hard to find. Most everything you need can be found at the nearest big-box building supply store or the local lumberyard.

It is attractive. The cabin reflects the builder's forethought and pride of ownership. The design is demonstrably strong, with the building's structural bones on display. The cabin feels cozy by night and expansive by day. And it's easy to keep looking nice. Wood is sheltered from the elements, promoting longevity without relying on chemicals or paint—and your precious time.

It is economical. The cabin should require no special orders, no heavy equipment, no subcontractors. . . and no bank loan. Materials are simple. Where possible, they do double duty, as structure and finish, saving you money. Those savings can be used to add details that delight the senses, like a stained-glass window, an over-stuffed reading chair, a wood-fired hot tub, or a zip line for the kids.

This book is organized into four parts:

Part 1 will help you find that place on the land that has magical qualities to you. If you are going to invest all of the time, effort, and money that a cabin requires, there is no more important decision. We will help you find that spot, evaluate it, and make sure it satisfies your needs.

Part 2 covers cabin construction, describing building principles and practices—from founda-

tion to roof—with a slant toward simple cabins constructed by hand and off the grid. These tips and practices apply to cabins of all types, including log, timber-frame and conventional stick-built structures.

Part 3 covers cabin living: the systems you need to deliver drinking water and remove waste, and to efficiently heat, light, cook in, and enjoy your cabin. Our solutions are decidedly low-tech and dependable.

Part 4 provides additional information and resources, including a curated list of the best books and websites that have informed our own thinking. No single source can tell you how to do it all, this book included. These resources will help make your building efforts a success and will set you up for creating a cabin getaway that is enjoyable and satisfying.

Interspersed throughout the book are a number of pages, with shading, that offer short stories and lessons learned. They come from cabin life as we've lived it, over many decades. If you follow the path of this book, you will accumulate your own library of rich memories, built around nature, family, and friends.

A life-changing adventure lies ahead. Let's get started!

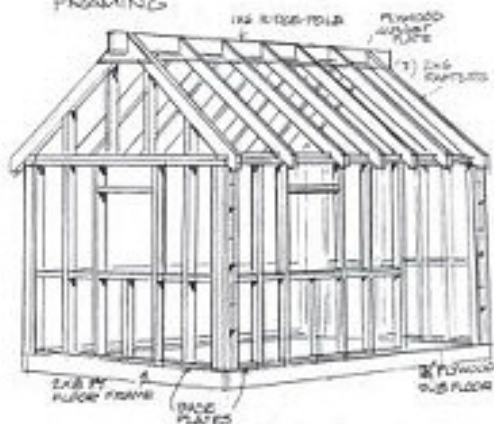


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Thoreau's one-room cabin

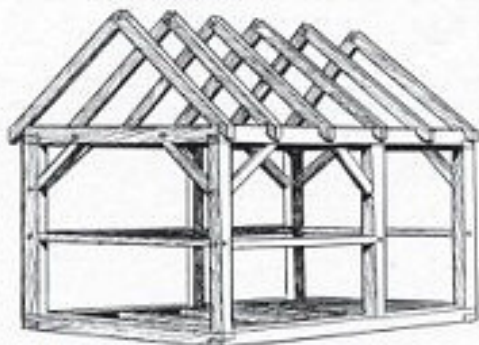
STICK BUILT
2x4
FRAMING



Stick-built



Log



Timber Frame