

JIM'S BEST STORY – THE ROCKTON RETREAT

Jim Schulte loves hunting and loves telling stories about his hunting experiences. Wisconsin has public hunting land and that had been okay but was getting more and more crowded. He wanted his own property to hunt on and owned land in Northern Wisconsin near Philips. He was unhappy after 5 years of not seeing many deer in the area and harvesting only one among himself, his brother, Bud and friend, Pat Murphy, who drove up and stayed in the small trailer he provided. There were beavers building dams and evidence of bears in the area as well. He was close to retirement age and in a position to start looking for other property that was large enough for more than one hunter since he had been hunting with Bud and Murph for a number of years and liked the camaraderie. In 1997, his brother-in-law, Gary Lunde, also a hunter, had just purchased a home on 56 acres near Westby because he and his wife, Carol, liked the area where his parents grew up, in the Driftless part of western Wisconsin with it's hills and valleys on land undisturbed by the glacier rolling through millenia ago. He also found out that the area was abundant with deer who had worked their way south over the years. When Gary's parents were growing up, they never saw deer in the Westby area. Gary Pillard, a good friend who lives next door in Oconomowoc, had also acquired a large parcel of land near Gays Mills, about 30 miles south of Westby. Gary's wife, Nancy, and Jim's wife, Pat, shared Norwegian heritage so liked the part of Wisconsin where Norwegian immigrants had settled in the hills and valleys that reminded them of Norway. Gary P. grew up in McGregor, Iowa, just across the Mississippi River from Prairie du Chien so knew the area very well.

Jim started looking in the Driftless area for land and eventually settled on 51 acres in Vernon County near Wildcat Mountain State Park. The closest towns are LaFarge to the south and Ontario to the north and the unincorporated village of Rockton, about 3 miles west. When Jim walked in to the Rockton Bar and saw multiple mounted heads of deer and other western animals that reminded him of the trips he had taken to Montana, Wyoming and Colorado to hunt elk, antelope, mule deer as well as pheasants and grouse, he thought "this is good". The idea of building a cabin on hunting land had moved him to develop a great plan for a cabin with amenities that would make it appealing to Pat, as well as nice for the hunters. She was swayed by the area as well as the plans for a cabin with the comforts of home.

He found a spot on Winchel Valley Road that had everything he was looking for. In 1998, the saga of building the "Rockton Retreat" had begun. One of the other attractions of the area was that it was 135 miles west from his home in Oconomowoc, rather than 250 miles north. The land had been planted in the 1950s with thousands of tiny white pines and spruce by a former owner. Their intent was to gradually thin the trees but that never happened so the evergreens grew up and were a complete barrier along the roadside part of the property. Jim decided on the spot for a cabin and began the process of clearing what seemed like hundreds of trees to make room for the building and the necessary septic field. The land was mostly hills that went up to a right-of-way across the top of the ridge. A local excavator was hired to make a workable driveway and dig out an area for the basement. The top of the back of the basement was at the level of the hill so the mason who was hired to put up a cement block basement needed to make it taller than standard and did extra work on the hill side to be sure it was strong enough. The northern land was sold for quite a bit more than Jim paid for it and provided some capital to put into the construction of the things that had to be done by those with the expertise he didn't have. The amount of slope was an issue for putting in a conventional septic system but turned out to be just low enough to qualify. The electric service was installed at the top of the driveway to accommodate all the tools that need electricity to work.

Jim provided the trailer that was moved on to the property from the northern location and also his home-built travel camper affectionately known as the mushroom for sleeping and eating. He took over

the construction after the basement was finished and hired his business partner, Gary Leverenz to come for a week and help Jim and Bud go as far as getting the roof covered. Gary Lunde and his son, Paul, also came over and helped. It was June and warm but the week was rainy. The guys decided that if this was going to get done, they'd better work in the rain. This is tricky with tools that are plugged in to electricity. Gary L. recalls losing his footing on the slippery roof and landing in the basement area during that week without getting hurt since the basement floor was still dirt. Jim had arranged for the lumber yard in Oconomowoc where he once worked as the yard foreman to deliver the materials to the cabin site. The sawing and pounding went on all week and by the last day, the plywood covered the roof. Jim started shingling the roof and Gary and Paul finished it.

The other thing that Jim had been doing for some time was accumulating materials at the farm in Concord that were considered too good to go in the dumpster at the jobs he was working on. The farm had been the Fred Schulte home until he died in 1986. At that time, Jim and Pat purchased the shares from his brother and sister and continued to store his treasures, not knowing exactly how they would be re-used until building the cabin became a reality. He made ingenious uses of windows, doors, plumbing fixtures, discarded appliances, etc. and lovingly refers to his "recycled cabin". He tells the story of the two stained glass windows installed on either side of the fireplace that came from his grandfather's house in Wauwatosa. His dad, who lived in the house after the grandfather passed, removed the windows from the living room to let in more light. He stored them and they traveled from there to two places ending up at the farm in Concord. Jim found them in the upstairs of the garage after he bought the farm where they'd been for about 30 years. Being there caused the lead in the windows to soften and sag so Jim turned them over and they sagged back into place. He decided then to use them somewhere, sometime.

Because Pat worked for the Pabst family, Jim was able to cut down some trees on Pabst Farms property that were ultimately cut into boards and used as window trim in the cabin. His initial contact to make boards refused it because there was no way of knowing if there was any metal in the wood that would damage their saws. Gary Lunde found someone that would do it. The boards were stored to dry and were to be used for trim. Jim's work included jobs for Hans Weissgerber at the Golden Mast Restaurant and his new home on Oconomowoc Lake and it was due to Hans's design of trim that he chose the design of the trim used in the cabin. The other Pabst connection was the demolition of David Pabst's home on Oconomowoc Lake. David Pabst, Jr offered him the fireplace surround from the library and a large piece of butcher block from the kitchen. Jim happened to know the carpenter who originally built the surround for David and Yvonne Pabst. Doors came from Jim's stash as well as from a mansion in Oconomowoc that was being demolished and Hans was buying a stairway to put in his house so Jim was helping to move it. In the process, he came across some doors in a room and asked if they were available. They were, so became part of the recycle program. One of the neighbors on Mary Lane moved to a condo and hired Jim to do some updating there. They removed cabinets made from barn wood and offered them to Jim and his partner. Jim used one long lower cabinet in the dining area and put the butcher block on it as a counter top and the two pieces fit together like they were made for each other.

The cabin was to have an open porch along one side. That changed when his sister-in-law, Liz, said it would be nice to close that in. He looked at his window stash and realized he had just enough windows to close in the porch. They came from a remodeling job on Okauchee Lake and were an early design of slider made by his favorite window company, Andersen. All of the trim was there. They even came with copper screens. The porch was the only place in the cabin where a new window had to be purchased to finish it out. It has become a favorite place to sit no matter what the weather and no bugs! He had acquired used sliding doors for the living area and bought one for the porch for \$100. A large

picture window in the dining area came from George Weiler's house on Lake LaBelle when he remodeled that. George was the long time farm manager at Pabst Farms and was a hunter. He was instrumental in Jim's purchase of the northern property because he had a large parcel of land there and a cabin on the west fork of the Flambeau River. He traded 2 acres of river property for remodeling at his cabin and advised Jim to buy acreage in the area for hunting so that was how he acquired that 80 acres. Plumbing was another thing that required more knowledge than Jim or his helpers had. It happened that the neighbor, Will, across the road from where the cabin was being built did plumbing as well as other odd jobs around the area. When asked about plumbing the cabin, he was interested in doing it. It turned out to be more than he bargained for so got help from a local plumber and the two of them did the job. The labor on the bill was \$10.00 per hour for each person. It became apparent later that something was amiss since there were leaks. The drywall that had been installed had to be removed and showed that the pipe joints hadn't been glued together so Bud did all that, not an easy job after the pipes are put together. Bernie Motl, a plumber Jim used regularly in his work, was told the story and remarked that maybe for \$20.00 per hour the plumbers would have glued the pipes. He got a laugh for that one. The original plan did not call for a second bathroom in the basement but at Pat's suggestion, it was added and has been very handy. The stash included a washer, dryer and laundry sink and all these were installed in the basement.

Bud had retired from his job with an HVAC company and was willing to do whatever he could on the cabin since he was going benefit from the comfort it would provide during the hunting seasons. The furnace and duct materials were gotten from cousin Rich Schulte's HVAC company and Bud installed it. He also did all the wiring. He also decided the cabin should have air conditioning and obtained and installed that. One bedroom has a gold plaque on the door declaring it "Bud's Room". The deck that ran the length of the house on the west side was completed with railings and an outside stairway led to the porch. Vinyl siding was installed with some help from another hunting friend, Harvey Buske. Harvey and his wife, Jean, had made a trip to the cabin with stones from their farm that Pat used to make a path from the driveway up to the deck.

Interior work included insulating and installing drywall. Pat helped with insulating and Jim got some help installing drywall on the ceilings when Tim Pinter came up to hunt turkeys. It was a job that needed someone to hold the sheets up so they could be fastened and Tim came in handy. Jim's vision included a cathedral ceiling in the living area covered with what's called car siding. It gives the affect of single boards but is actually two boards per strip. He hand picked the strips, brought them to his home in Oconomowoc and stained them in the garage and made sure the pieces were completely dry before being trucked to the cabin by Gary Lunde. Scaffolding was installed and the pieces were applied one weekend when Bud was there to help. It turned out beautifully and the pieces left over were enough to make wainscoting for the porch. Bud and Pat Murphy installed the wainscoting on a hunting weekend after their deer were harvested and they asked if there was something they could do.

The upstairs loft was open to the living area and needed a railing. This turned out to be the coup d'gras as Jim might say, because it looked fantastic with slats that were cut out to form an evergreen with every two slats across the opening and down the stairway. Jim also built all the cabinetry for the kitchen and bathrooms. The kitchen appliances were initially brought from Oconomowoc but eventually replaced with new refrigerator, stove, microwave and dishwasher. The original stove and refrigerator were 1970's olive green from Jim and Pat's first house in Concord. No one was too sad when they finally gave out. There were some tense moments when Jim required Pat's help to install the formica counter top in the kitchen. It was a large piece and the seams had to be perfect. It worked out and the open concept is perfect for keeping everyone involved when cooking and cleanup are going on. Once dryall was installed, the option of smooth walls made perfect taping critical. Jim was very good

at it and the smooth finish was noticed by Hans Weissgerber who stopped in unexpectedly and ended up staying over night with his new wife, Mary Jo, a few years after the cabin was finished. Pat did a lot of painting. After the initial push to get the building covered, the work progressed more slowly with Jim and Bud doing their things. Jim had acquired some left over grey floor tile from a job and that was installed in front of the living area patio door. The Heatilator fire place insert was acquired from Brittigham & Hixon Lumber Co. in Sparta and a grey stone hearth was brought up from Lannon Stone Co. The Pabst surround was slightly larger than the insert so Jim used more grey tiles to finish it. It all looks like that was the plan. Bud had gone on some more exotic hunting trips and had African animal heads he didn't have room for so one of them, a Kudu, was hung on the fireplace wall at the cabin. Later, he wanted it back so brought up a Caribou to replace it and that's now a permanent fixture. There are a number of plaques on the walls with antlers that reflect deer bagged on the cabin property and photos of the smiling hunters.

Furnishings had also been accumulating in the stash. A set of 2 couches, 1 chair and 2 tables was donated from a job on North Lake. The pillow coverings were not appropriate so Pat bought fabric and recovered all the pillows. Jim refinished some of the arms which had been carved into by the former owner as a kid and also built a coffee table from scraps to match the color and style of this furniture. It all fits together very well. Other furnishings were provided by Brett Pabst, who was redecorating and included twin beds for the loft, 2 rattan couches, a glass topped table and 2 coffee tables, all of which are being used on the porch or in the loft. Another set of twin mattresses that make up a king size bed were obtained from a job when a cottage was being emptied to be demolished. Jim and Pat bought a queen sized mattress and spring for themselves and brought a double bed from their house to put into Bud's room. Pat Murphy and his wife, Blondie, made a gift of a canoe that had been fashioned into a book case. It is a nice remembrance of Blondie, who loved to come to the cabin and has since died and it just fits in a corner of the living area. Another gift from friends and neighbors Linda and John Hecher was a king size quilt that Linda had made for the loft bed that they slept in when they visited. It's also a nice remembrance of them since John died several years ago. The dining room table came from Jim's dad's house and had been stashed at the farm. An old TV that had been replaced in Oconomowoc was brought up and worked (sort of) with an old antenna that was installed on the roof. The local telephone co-op received a government grant and eventually installed fiber optic cable on Winchell Valley Road that improved reception and internet service 100%. The last big project was to tile the porch floor and Jim did that on a weekend.

It turned out to be a good thing that a lot of the stash was used in construction of the cabin. The opportunity to sell the Concord farm came up in 2002 so everything that was stored had to be moved out. Some was sold and other things were given away. The amount that had to be put in a dumpster was greatly reduced by Jim's use of everything he could re-cycle into the cabin. The cost of the building was reduced by at least half due to using these materials and donated labor. The amount of work provided by family and friends and the pleasure that it has provided over all the years since 1997 can't be measured in dollars. Jim enjoys talking about how it came about and just looking at his good work and remembering how it all happened.

Compiled by Pat
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