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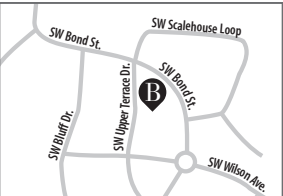
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LOCAL, STATE & REGION



Steiner log cabins were oriented toward the most scenic spot on the land.
Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian

SAVING STORYBOOK STRUCTURES

Restoring one-of-a-kind Steiner log cabins on Mount Hood takes time, talent and hand tools

BY JANET EASTMAN • The Oregonian

Depression-era log cabins handmade by the legendary Steiner family in Mount Hood are so prized that some original owners have passed them on to the next generation as they would other heirlooms.

The durable homes, made almost entirely of hand-cut wood, shaped for function and flare, and nestled among rhododendrons and ferns, were designed and built by Henry Steiner with help by his wife, Mollie, and 11 of their children.

The frugal Steiners had little money and no electricity, but plenty of resourcefulness. Douglas fir logs, manually cut with a crosscut saw, were hoisted into place with cranks and pulley systems. Stones, found on the land or in rivers, surround the fireplaces, and bent-wood handrails outline stairs to the bedrooms.

As sturdy as the storybook structures were constructed, over the decades, snow has pounded the pitched roofs, moisture has destroyed unprotected log siding and cosmetic changes, like vinyl counters and veneer paneling, have left some of the 100 documented Steiner cabins almost unrecognizable.

Others, boarded up and marketed for sale as tear-downs, have been rescued by people who appreciate the beauty of the craftsmanship, warmth of the old-growth wood and the Old World techniques Henry Steiner, who emigrated from Bavaria, used to shape natural materials to make everything fit together.

'I did it exactly as Henry would'

Like anything handmade, however, proper restoration requires time, talent and hand tools.

"I couldn't just go to Home Depot and order two dozen handmade Steiner half logs to replace sections of walls that had completely rotted away," said Ian McCluskey, who has spent two years restoring a 1930 Steiner cabin, from the foundation to the stone chimney. "So I did it exactly as Henry would."

McCluskey started by peeling bark off of logs and branches using a vintage draw knife to "give it a slightly scalloped look and texture," he explained.



Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian

Fireplaces are surrounded by basalt rock.

"Each cabin he built shares his common style, but each piece of each cabin is one of a kind," said McCluskey.

Henry Steiner, a self-taught designer and builder, worked in Government Camp, Welches, Brightwood and Rhododendron from 1927 to 1952. He died in 1953.

In addition, Steiner and sons John and Fred contributed to the construction of the 1936 Timberline Lodge, two churches and eight U.S. Forest Service summer homes in the area.

McCluskey, also a self-taught carpenter on a budget, let Steiner's vision of the 92-year-old cabin guide the renovation. The young woodworker's goal: To make his contribution invisible.

"The measure of my success in restoration, I decided, was in how little of my work could be noticed," he said.

After almost a century of private use, McCluskey's cabin near the Salmon River is listed on Airbnb (airbnb.com/h/steinercabin) as a vacation rental and it was one of four dwellings open during the 2022 Steiner Cabins Tour on Aug. 13.

Lloyd Musser, museum curator and longtime tour organizer, appreciates owners and volunteers who are helping to preserve historic cabins.

"Ian is typical of recent buyers who are restoring Steiner cabins with integrity," said Musser.

Interest in the cabins and values have soared, Musser said, making "teardowns a thing of the past. The problem now is finding craftsmen to work with log structures."

Restoring a treasure

Hands-on and hard work have always been the Steiner

said Steiner homes are part of a larger architectural movement in the rustic regionalism of Adirondack Camp of the early 20th Century, the National Parks in the 1920s and Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s.

In 2019, McCluskey discovered the cabin, dark and hidden by tall brush. Despite its cedar shingles camouflaged in green algae and moss, he could see signature Steiner features inside.

The longtime owners agreed to sell to McCluskey, who promised to return it to its original condition as he had done during a years-long restoration of a nearby 1922 cabin. Called Cedarwood, McCluskey bought it from the grandson of the original builder, who was not a Steiner, and now offers it as a short-term rental.

"I showed the owners the other cabin's rough-sawn cedar walls, milled locally from storm-downed trees, and the river-rock hearth I hand built, just as Steiner and his sons had done in their cabins," said McCluskey. "And, most importantly, I told them how I had made every decision along the way to honor the original intent of the builder

and preserve the special rustic spirit."

In March 2020, just as the coronavirus pandemic was forcing travel and unessential businesses to shut down, McCluskey started his painstaking restoration project.

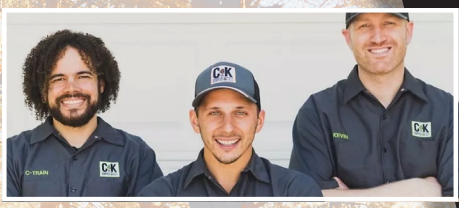
"The cabin became my quarantine and my refuge," said McCluskey, whose ancestors arrived.

Friends, some with construction experience, and a professional mason, plumber and electrician helped McCluskey on the most technical parts of the restoration.

He posted about his progress on the "little log cabin with a gable roof and porch of crooked logs" on Instagram at steiner.cabin. He wrote about the home's charm, its secret door and other "whimsical touches of the old cabin-maker's personality."

In the spring of 2022, he had refinished damaged wood, reproduced missing pieces and restored the storied cabin's "magic."

"I am very honored to be able to offer this home to folks who want to experience this endearing place, unplug from modern life and create their own wonderful memories," said McCluskey.



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“ I have been working with The Bulletin for over 3 months and they continue to impress me with their hard work, innovative ads, and amazing reels. I look forward to continuing work with The Bulletin and Makenna Cervelli in particular. In my opinion every company that’s wanting to grow and take their marketing to the next level should use their amazing services. ”

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