

BOOKS

Actors lending their voices to audio books.

13
13
16

MUSIC

Milwaukee archbishop reaches the top and keeps reaching.

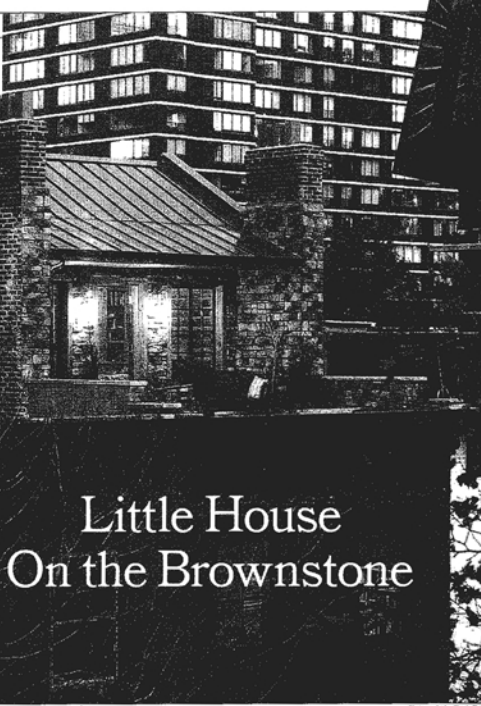
POP

Pop and jazz critics choose their favorite albums of 1995.



L C1

HOUSE PROUD



Little House On the Brownstone

Far from the frontier: This one-room cabin sits astride a humble brownstone in the East 30's. Top right: Abigail Shacht, the designer, used log veneers to fake the old-time cabin look for a film maker in love with the Old West.

'Up country' is just upstairs.

By JULIE V. JOVINE

WITH name-brand folks like Tom Brokaw, Ralph Lauren and Jane Fonda all homesteading the wide open spaces of the Old West, what's a famous film maker in search of seclusion to do but put up his log cabin right in the heart of New York City?

"He wanted to be able to tell people he was going away to a weekend cabin without revealing that it was just upstairs," said Abigail Shacht, the designer of the 300-sq-ft-of-offer to who has been sworn to secrecy regarding her client's identity.

The one-room cabin, though located atop a brownstone in residential midtown, is invisible from below. Only four stories above the street, it feels as isolated as if it were on the frontier, not with expansive vistas of the plains and the boisterous but of the tarred roads and water towers of the East 30's.

The commission was deceptively simple: a one-room expansion to a four-through apartment on top of a grandiose brownstone. More specifically put, the clients wanted a Lilliputian-size place to write, to sleep and to dream; no more. Besides, the couple are expecting a child and needed more room than their modest two-bedroom apartment allowed. The reticent movie maker (known for highly stylized sets) and his wife did not dictate an overall concept or specific details to the designer, leaving her to conjure on her own whether this escaped dwelling should look more "Treasure of the Sierra Madre" or "Bonanza," or more "Walden Pond" than "Little House on the Prairie."

"They came to me with a hope chest of disparate ideas," Ms. Shacht said, recalling in particular a sketch for a carved bedstead featuring a bronco brandished with the film maker's initials, a desire for a crooked nook cut out of the bathroom door (a noxious odorous motif), and the dream of a wood-burning stove.

Ms. Shacht plunged into more in-depth research. Luckily, log cabins are in vogue right now and there are quite a few books on the subject covering everything from old Adirondack fishing camps to the stone and beaver lodges of Yellowstone Park, not to mention the monthly magazine *Log Home Living*.

"I knew I didn't want to design a modern log cabin," Ms.

Continued on Page C8

CONSUMER'S WORLD

An Organized Life, Byte by Megabyte

By MICHEL MARRIOTT

SO it's the first week of the new year, and you have resolved to get organized. Ready to organize this time.

If you are like millions of Americans, you probably have a desk drawer somewhere that is a mass of business cards, hastily written notes and telephone numbers. In all likelihood, there is also an age-worn date book around, its tattered pages as busy as a Jackson Pollock canvas.

What to do?

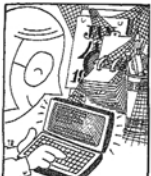
Well, the stress of the consumer electronics industry are offering their well-stocked, self-serving suggestions: Go digital.

One of the hottest gifts of the recent holiday season was the electronic personal organizer, many of which have evolved, seemingly overnight, into something called a "palmtop computer."

But can electronic organizers really help make life more organized? Do they even come close to all the hype? Like much of the late-20th-century popular technology, the verdict is frustratingly mixed.

Makers and retailers boast that these hand-held gizmos (when closed they resemble inelegant plastic versions of 1930's cigarette cases) can file and cross-index thousands of names, numbers, addresses, appointments, reminders and much more, thanks to a memory chip no larger than a nickel. And in a flash,

Continued on Page C2



Tom Spina

By ALEX WITCHEL

SHE had received more than 10,000 letters since April 13, even the ones addressed to "The Red-Headed Lady I Saw on TV" and "The Mother Whose Round Boys Were Killed in the Bombing." But not everyone knows Edye Smith.

"You don't know how many times in airports people say, 'Susan! How are you doing?' she says, laughing. Really? Meaning Susan Smith, the woman who drowned her sons? Don't they realize she's in prison?"

She shrugs. "I say: 'No, I'm not her. I loved my kids.' You know, Tony and I were supposed to do 'The Monte Williams Show' with David Smith. I sure do feel sorry for that guy. I saw him on TV talking about his boys and going things with them, and I thought about Tony. Chase loved to fish and camping. "We certainly have a lot to grieve."

Perhaps more than any of them would like. Since the bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City, in which Chase, 3, and Colton, 2, were killed in his day care center, their parents have become familiar figures in the news media. Especially their mother.

Edye Smith is 23. She married Tony when she was 18, after graduating from high school. The couple di-



J. Paul Carter for The New York Times

Edye and Tony Smith, whose sons died in Oklahoma City.

vided last December, following an argument about her visit to a male stripper's bar while he was on a camping trip. After the bombing, they discovered the incident as trivial, deciding to remarry and have more children, despite the fact that Mrs. Smith had undergone a tubal ligation, making future pregnancies impossible.

Last August, she had the pro-

cedure surgically reversed (she's not pregnant yet), and she and Mr. Smith were remarried on Sept. 18 in Hawaii, courtesy of The National Enquirer.

"A lady there said they'd pay for the honeymoon as a wedding present," Mrs. Smith says. "It was really nice, a more emotional wedding than our first one."

She is dressed in jeans, work boots

"The kids were dead. It was done."

and an oversize sweater, sitting in a leather recliner with a large glass of Dr. Pepper, looking nothing like a secretary for the Internal Revenue Service, which she was until the bombing. Her manner is unflinchingly polite and open; she displays the same disconcerting calm she did on television. It's hard to know why. She is either emotionally disconnected in some profound way or the strongest person on earth.

"The National Enquirer paid for our plane tickets and for our hotel room, and that was it," she says.

Continued on Page C7D

HOUSE PROUD



Little House on the Brownstone

Continued From Page C1

Shachat said. "They look so fake to me because even though they're made of real logs, the spaces are usually covered with the wood for the logs has been stripped of all its texture and personality."

"My clients were after something more primitive and old-fashioned, like Abe Lincoln's cabin or even the one shown on Log Cabin syrup." In other words, this was not about adopting a special variance and woe-begging of pioneers experiencing a strange new world.

"I seem to think of it, New York does a pretty good job of stimulating life in urban territories. In this project, the setback came when Mr. Shachat decided that no exterior in the city can be made of more than 20 percent wood, as a fire prevention. So six to the log half of the log-cabin equation. There came the realization that in order to have a wood-burning stove with the proper clearances the overall space would have to be much larger than planned. A certain square footage for additional, in this case 25 percent of the total square footage of the rooftop, is permitted to convert multiple dwellings. In this case a brownstone, but to exceed that requires a special variance and would have added \$50,000 to the cost of construction. Dreams of a wood-burning stove went up in smoke and the project shrank from 400 square feet to 280 square feet. (But rebounded to 400 with the front porch.)

Built off of an existing stairway to the roof, with its small landing incorporated into the bedroom, the so-called cabin is constructed of a steel-beam foundation with concrete block walls surfaced on the exterior with stucco and stone veneer and on the interior with hemlock log facings. The doors, window trim, rafters and floors are all of pine, oak and chestnut recycled from old barns in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

"Even though it's not a true log cabin, a tremendous amount of craft went into making it feel authentic," said Mr. Shachat, who was trained to appreciate craftsmanship at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., adding that the contractor, Ron Atkinson of Mon-



The flavor of Americana is reflected in the tiny cabin's design, from a newly carved bedstead to the picturesque crescent moon on the "outhouse" door, made of salvaged chestnut.

attached to the supporting wood and lath structure, it was with old-fashioned square nails. The roof beams were all hand-hewn and joined on the site.

The roof itself is made of standing-seam copper so that the sound of falling rain could sometimes block out the noise of drive-by stress coming up from the street. A crescent moon has been duly carved in the bathroom door, although the walls

inside are not of wood but China multicolored slate tiles (\$7.88 a square foot at retail). "To my mind wood and water don't mix," said Mr. Shachat, who chose the motley color of stone because it reminded her of rocks dredged up from a river bed. Lolling in the tub—a reproduction cast-iron foot from Waterworks in Manhattan, with all-sided fixtures—it is possible to see the Chrysler Building through a small window in a dormer.



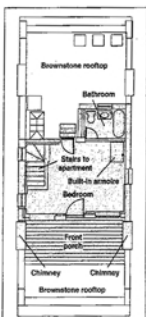
The size and placement of the windows are, in fact, a further instance of clever adaptation to Dominican conditions, New York City fire codes specify the relative size of windows. In addition, windows adjacent to other buildings' property lines cannot be operable. Undaunted—"log cabins always had tiny windows"—Mr. Shachat placed small wire-glass openings in each wall in addition to two larger working windows flanking

Backlot magic: "Porch" at left is really cedar pallets. Original chimney and new cabin facade are dressed for the part with stone veneer, laid with the rough-hewn look of yore. Dormer window, below, captures light and preserves peace.

Send in guests from Central Casting.

a door onto the small roof deck. "I warned the windows to function like an hourglass," she said, so that light would be thrown down in shafts to mark the movement of the sun as it travels across the floor from dawn to dusk. The bed is positioned to catch the first rays of early light and the windows on the north side are deliberately small to block views of various mechanical apparatuses sharing the roof.

Luckily, the project encountered no opposition from the neighbors or the tenants in the two other apartments in the brownstone co-op. In fact, the latter generously donated some of their potential square footage for expanding to allow the bathroom to exceed the allotted space. In turn, the building's entrance and stairwell were replastered and painted as the process of bringing electricity to the roof. Because it is a turn-of-the-century brownstone, today's stringent handicapped-access requirements did not apply. Even so, it took five months to obtain all the necessary permits for construction. In the end, the project was approximately on budget at \$274,000. Although it may be ersatz, this "log cabin" manages to convey the same kind of optimistic integrity and

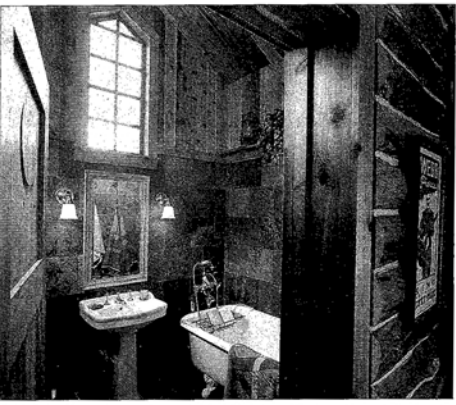


In the 280-square-foot addition, a staircase leads to the rest of the apartment below.

ingenuity that went into building the real thing. Access to the rest of the movie maker's wife. "No one knows this, but my husband spends all his time up there." No commuting distance and no Nony Partners: what more could you ask for a getaway?

Facing mean streets from a rooftop cabin.

task, L.L. is actually a cabinetmaker. A close friend of the clients, Mr. Atkinson lavished attention on the job as if it were a fine cabinet rather than a building. The hemlock facings, which normally would have been sliced off the logs and discarded, were preserved and cut carefully to scale for the project. A small amount of the wood was checked off by hand and stained with a water-based stain. The water was then finally



Bathroom wall tiles are China multicolored slate, recalling stones dredged from a river bed.

Specs: Building the 'Cabin'

By JULIE V. ROVINE

A NEW YORK rooftop addition qualifies as one of those daring, off-beat projects with bureaucratic diligence and a saint's patience. If it is possible, start early.

Obtaining permits, necessary before tracking a single tar-covered brick, can take at least six months.

In this case, securing air rights was not necessary. Each building has its own P.A. (per floor-area ratio) that defines its potential for expansion, but it is the individual co-op boards that decide if roof additions are occupying air-rights space. This down-to-earth brownstone (classified as a converted multiple dwelling and needed no variance for residents to build on 25 percent of the rooftop. (The owners obtained permission to use 20 percent of the roof, the additional 5 percent came from the tenants of the two other apartments.)

The designer, Abigail Shachat, chose the size of city permits and codes. Her fee: \$5,000.

Finis and oak rafters were salvaged from an old barn in Pennsylvania. The thick chestnut door leading onto the deck is not as solid as it appears: insulation material is sandwiched between layers of wood-paneled re-sawn from old barn beams of chestnut. "They're extremely stable," Mr. Atkinson explained. "They stay dead straight when you saw them, unlike newly dried wood, which can twist and more."

Because chestnut wood is no longer available, Mr. Atkinson pointed out, "the only place you can find it is in old supplies, or from people who salvage old barns and barns." Can't find Antique Lumber in Susquehanna, Pa., provide the barn beams and old pine flooring. (717) 465-3121. Mr. Atkinson made furniture to order, including the carved bedstead (\$2,800), an armoire (\$3,500) and medicine cabinets. He can be reached through Antonio Furniture in Montauk, L.I.; (516) 668-1110.