



Heaven Above

JACK LEVY AND HIS WIFE, Nancy, weren't planning to build a new home when they moved from Arlington to McLean so their son, Benjamin, 14, could walk to classes at the Potomac School. But then they saw a renovated house featuring custom woodwork designed by Falls Church architect Seth Ballard.

"My wife and I turned to each other and said, 'We need this guy. He gets us,'" recalls Levy, a trade attorney whose firm represents Western Forest Products in British Columbia. The couple asked Ballard to design a home incorporating the beautifully variegated hues of western red cedar, which Levy's client harvests on Vancouver Island. (Levy would later travel there to personally accompany the shipment across the U.S. border.)

The home's great room in particular is a celebration of that special delivery,

along with locally sourced walnut flooring and mahogany built-ins and trim. Ballard studied the interior architecture of Gilded-Age mansions for inspiration as he and Levy brainstormed how the double-story room would take shape. That's when they hit upon a ceiling design featuring hammer trusses, a decorative style that goes back centuries in which short exposed beams are braced with brackets instead of tie-rods. This approach keeps the vaulted center open and spacious.

"It's influenced by historical, grand-era timber frames," says Ballard, who designed and engineered the structure. "It's not quite Arts and Crafts; it's not quite farmhouse."

Ballard enlisted master framers at Streamline TimberFrame in Floyd, Virginia, to cut the huge beams and the

cedar paneling that covers the walls and ceiling, while father-and-son carpenters Gerald and Sam Staley of Round Hill, Virginia, installed it over seven weeks—much of that time spent on their backs on scaffolding to lay each ceiling panel. "It reminded me of Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel," Levy says.

Ballard used stone accents and prairie-style windows to finish the space, which is adjacent to the Levys' open kitchen.

"It's an ode to wood, is really what Seth created," Levy says. "I just look up to the ceiling and forget to turn on the TV—I just lose myself in the design." ■

PROJECT CREDITS

Ballard + Mensua Architecture
ballardmensua.com

Streamline TimberFrame
streamlinetimberframe.com

Gerald C. Staley Builders
Round Hill, Virginia (no website)