

For the love of Norway

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Building a classic stabbur under the big skies of Montana



Photo: Ron Loge

For Ron Loge, with its mountains and open skies, Montana was about as close as he could get to Norway, yet something was missing: a genuine Norwegian stabbur. He traveled to Norway to do his homework and even learned to carve to make his dream come true.

ERIC STAVNEY

Mukilteo, Wash.

As Ron Loge looked out over his mountain property in the hills of western Montana after a long day of cross-country skiing, he reflected on what was missing. “This is about as close to Norway as you can get, in terms of terrain,” he thought. If only one could return to a little log cabin, instead of driving all the way back down the mountain.

That got Ron and his wife, Charlene, thinking about log cabins, especially those Ron remembered seeing in the Oslo Norsk Folkemuseum. Ron was fixated on a particular one described in a book about old Scandinavian storehouses—a stabbur.

The stabbur in Norway, also called a “loft” or a “stoplebo,” dates back at least to A.D. 900, a building to store grain, vegetables, and dried meat to survive the long, cold winters. The name stabbur (or stavbur) is probably derived from the stav or stolpe poles

that hold the building off the ground and are found at the corners of the upper story. “Bur” is another form of the word “bo,” or “dwelling place.”



Photo: Ron Loge

The corner posts were the only part of the stabbur that Loge didn't carve himself, but he was able to find an experienced Norwegian carver to help.

Because the building is raised off the ground, the wind can blow under the building and carry away the moisture that might rot the boards. The cantilevered second story overhangs the ground floor, protecting the logs from rain. From a mouse's point of view, the log pedestals holding up the building are almost impossible to climb, and the traditional gap left between the steps and the front door is too far to jump. So the stabbur was designed to keep out moisture and rodents.

Ron wanted to build a stabbur as a “getaway residence,” and he wanted to be as authentic as possible. So around 2001, he and Charlene took a trip to Rollag, Norway, where a well-photographed and famous stabbur still stands. It is Ron's favorite among all of those pictured in their book on stabbur.

They drove around the rural Rollag area, about three hours northwest of Oslo, and found several stabbur in the area, as well as stav churches. But they finally spotted the famed stabbur at the Stærnes farm. After asking permission, in Norwegian, from the

amused farmer, Ron started taking pictures. “I wanted to get the details of the carving ... and then took measurements so I could get everything as accurate as possible,” he said.

After returning home, the next challenge was to find someone who could draw up the plans for what he envisioned. He found a builder-architect who appreciated Ron’s dedication to authenticity and appearance and could still adapt the design to the building site and the hillside in Montana. That meant they would be adding windows to take in the view and would pour a standard foundation to allow for a crawl space to install water pipes and heating.

After finding an experienced builder of log cabins who was willing to follow the plans, the next step was finding the materials. Ron wanted to be sure to use ovoid logs like those used for stabburs built in the 1600s and 1700s. But nearly every supplier of logs for cabins tried to convince him to use round logs. “I had to tell them, ‘you don’t get it, sorry.’” Round logs just weren’t authentic and didn’t fit together as well as ovoid ones. He finally found an ovoid log supplier. Next, he sought someone to carve the decorative parts of the stabbur, especially the fluted, spindle-like staves on the corners. The corner posts had to be ready during construction, while other carvings could be added later. He found an experienced Norwegian-American carver who would carve the posts and also offered workshops on Scandinavian carving.



Photo: Ron Loge

The Loge stabbur was designed as closely as possible to the Stærnes stabbur, allowing for a few modernizations,

like windows. It took years to build, but today the stabbur is the ultimate Norwegian-American getaway for the Loge family and their friends— including the doggies!

Ron signed up and found himself bitten by the carving bug. He attended another workshop in a subsequent year and ultimately carved all the other decorations and parts of the stabbur, including the gracefully curved acanthus leaves on an interior cabinet, the designs on the furniture inside, the many staves at intervals around the second story, and the portals around the doors.

Thinking back on his carving, Ron said, “It’s been a great hobby over the years. I carved ale hens and kubbestoler [too], the chairs made of a hollowed-out tree trunk. I’ve carved nine of those.” And he has several log “blanks” for kubbestoler in his shed for future endeavors.

In all, it took three years to get the stabbur built. The little stabbur on the mountain has become a focal point and gathering place for family and visitors to celebrate their Norwegian heritage. Each Midsommer they build a big bonfire outside, just as they do in Norway. In the winter, the stabbur serves as a warm and cozy hytte, where they can retire after a long day of skiing in the winter—just as he envisioned.

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