



“Heavy winds come off the Continental Divide, and **this house never shudders.** It feels really tucked in.”

Massive beams made of beetle-kill pine radiate from a silo constructed from recycled bricks, which acts as the home's main structural post and also as a chimney and vent for solar heat. Susan found the 1930s stove through the classifieds.

rooms are 15 feet underground, while 4 feet of earth cover the roof in the very back of the house. Huge skylights bathe the bedrooms in friendly, warming light. “The nice thing about underground rooms is that you really feel snuggled in,” Susan says. “There are often heavy winds coming off the Continental Divide, and the house never shudders. It feels really tucked in.”

In contrast to all that earth, the home's entire south side opens up with a grand sweep of floor-to-ceiling paned windows made of glass salvaged from an old greenhouse. Sunshine pours into those windows from dawn to dusk in winter and makes an entire rotation around the living area. That sunlight not only warms the house but also provides a psychological boost, Susan says. “You don't go immediately to the thermostat and crank it up.”

Susan and Tom's home is equipped with heat-collecting panels on the south-facing roof, and a fan blows the hot air down to storage in 4 feet of river rock under a 6-inch-thick concrete floor. This system, with a little boost now and then from a super-efficient gas propane stove in the kitchen and a huge river rock Russian-style fireplace in the living area, keeps Susan and Tom and their two children toasty all winter long. They spend only about \$800 in propane and electricity each year for a 3200 square-foot home.

The cornerstone of the home is the huge brick silo that acts as its structural basis; 8-inch by 8-inch beams made of beetle-killed pine radiate from its center like the spokes of a huge umbrella. Built of slightly pie-shaped recycled bricks from old grain silos, the structure also serves as the nerve center for ducts and chimneys, providing vent space for the kitchen's propane stove, the fireplace, and heat collected from the solar panels.

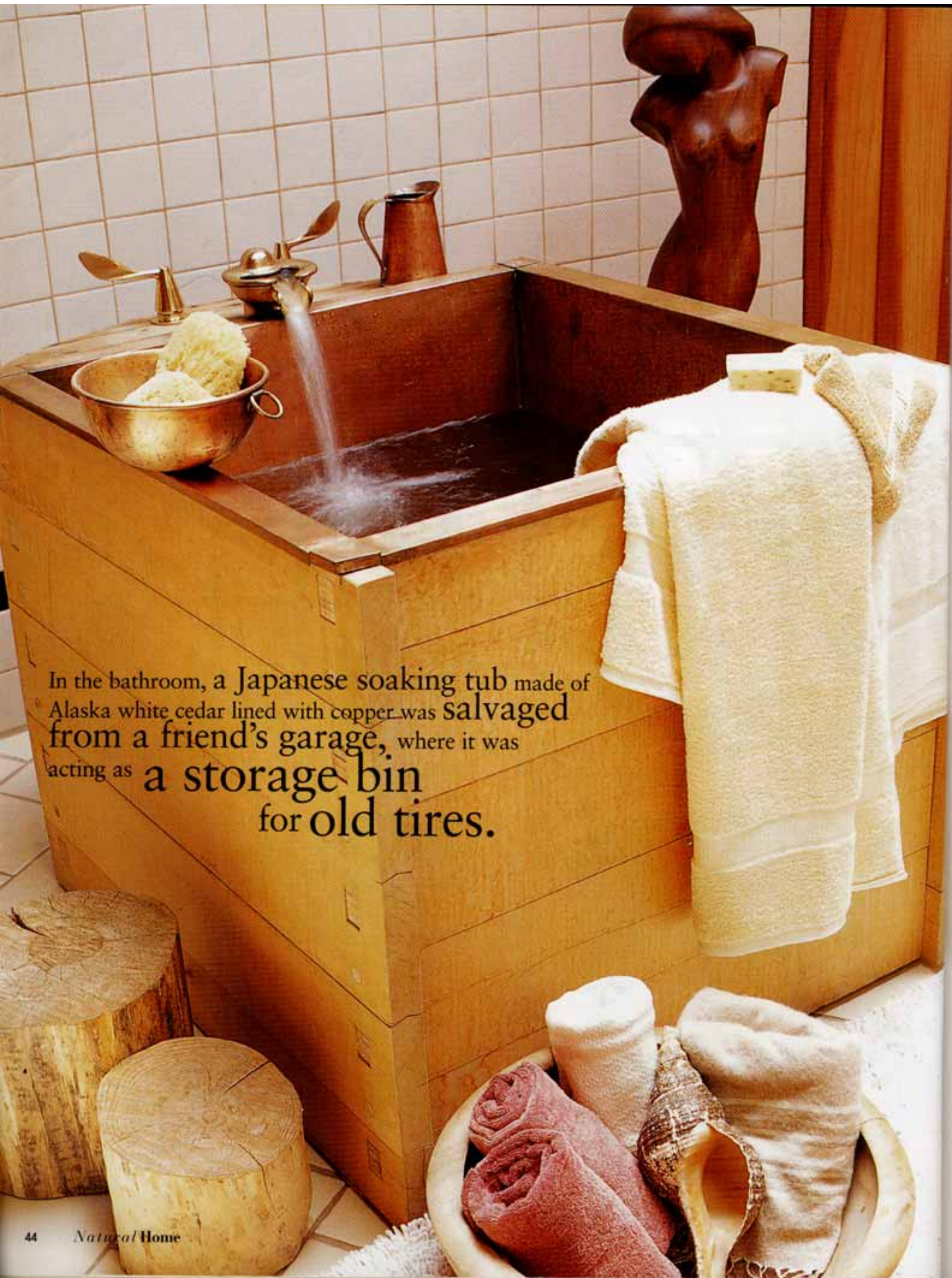
With two children and two careers to look after, Tom and Susan love that their home requires so little maintenance. Brick and tile floors ask only for a quick sweep and

The Sugarloaf Mountain fire destroyed some 1,000 trees, a turn-of-the-century log cabin, and an old caboose on Susan and Tom's 5-acre property, but it spared their 3,200-square-foot concrete-block solar home. After the fire, officials told the couple that the home's siting—in a natural depression with the north side snuggled up against 15 feet of earth—is probably what saved it.

That careful siting provides more than just fire protection; it is part of a solar design that allows for cozy winter comfort and a cool, cavelike summer retreat. The home's three bed-







In the bathroom, a Japanese soaking tub made of Alaska white cedar lined with copper was salvaged from a friend's garage, where it was acting as a storage bin for old tires.



perhaps a coat of linseed oil now and then, and stucco walls never require repainting. "These materials absorb the wear and tear of life in a graceful way and look better with age," Susan says.

The interiors are elegant without being pretentious, and many of the furnishings were chosen with children in mind. Susan found two side chairs with curved arms at the Sugarloaf Volunteer Fire Department's annual garage sale for \$5. "They're exceedingly funky, but they have incredible personality," she says. "And something about the curve of them is just right for the curve of that room." The maple coffee table was another \$5 garage sale find; the sofa and oversized armchair were advertised in the newspaper. Susan also found her 1930s kitchen stove through the classifieds; it doesn't use a pilot, so saves that extra energy and eliminates the out-gassing effects.

In the bathroom, a Japanese soaking tub made of Alaska white cedar lined with copper was salvaged from a friend's garage, where it was acting as a storage bin for old tires. The wood and copper keep

bath water hot for long periods, and the tub's high sides keep bathers warm even when the tub isn't filled to the top. Susan and Tom's young children love to bathe under streams of sunlight from the skylights overhead during the day; Susan and Tom enjoy stargazing from the tub at night.

The home and its contents exude a welcoming, nurturing aura. Visitors are likely to linger, and the homeowners count their blessings. "It's a wonderful house to live in," Susan says. "You wake up in the morning, and things are delighting the eye in every direction—the warm wood, the stove—it harkens back to old European buildings. It feels like it's going to be here for centuries. It has a nice, rooted feeling."

Susan and Tom used aspen and pine trees that had lost their lives to the fire to build the sides and legs of their dining room table. The top is beetle-kill pine.

A headstone over the door of a cabin Susan and Tom built after the fire, below, means "After the fire, rebirth."

