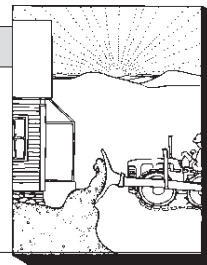


# Beam 'Em Up

by Wendy Talarico



Most of the materials needed to build this 2,800-square-foot house, situated 1/4 mile off the coast of Connecticut, were brought to the island by helicopter.

The logistics of using a helicopter to build a 2,800-square-foot house on a three-quarter-acre patch of land in the middle of Long Island Sound gives new meaning to the phrase "nerve wracking." But to contractor Ralph Indorf, president of Indorf Construction Company, Inc., of Yorktown Heights, N.Y., it was exciting, even kind of fun.

Indorf was hired by a New York businessman to build a summer home on Helix Felix, a small island off the Connecticut coast. Indorf opted to use a helicopter to not only deliver the supplies to the island, but also to do the work normally reserved for a crane.

Compared to the cost of handling and shipping the materials to the island, the helicopter actually proved economical. Typically, after a set-up charge of about \$2,000, the fee for flying materials is figured by the load, with distance and hover time added to the equation. A standard load on this job, which was fairly close to the mainland, started at \$70 before variables were considered.

The helicopter and the pilot were supplied by Joe Brigham, Inc. of Concord, N.H. The firm specializes in airlifting building supplies to remote or hard-to-reach places. Most of the pilots are former military flyers who "have a knack for this kind of work," says owner Joe Brigham. The company helps build about 12 island homes each year.

Designed by architect Duo Dickison, the house used post-and-beam construction and features one wall that is 25 feet tall and contains more than 30 casement windows. Erecting the massive wall on the island would have been difficult without the helicopter. Working with the architect, Indorf had the wall prefabricated into 3x5 foot sections.

One morning in early October, 1989, Indorf and part of his crew

stood at the appointed spot on the Connecticut shore surrounded by piles of building materials, 42-foot laminated beams, and sections of the prefab wall. The rest of the crew was waiting out at Helix Felix where the foundation and first floor deck were already in place.

The helicopter arrived on time, ready to start moving supplies. "First we sent out all the interior materials, the windows, the trim work, and the doors, and set them on the deck. Then we sent out the wall sections and the beams and set them in place," Indorf says. The progression may sound backward but with the approaching winter and the severe weather out on the island, it was imperative to keep all the supplies protected and get the house under a roof as quickly as possible.

Each of the wall modules were hoisted vertically and carried to the island. As the helicopter hovered overhead, the crew worked quickly to bolt the sections into five-inch-wide steel plates set into the foundation. The helicopter then released the wall and headed back to shore for the next section.

Each of the 42-foot beams was first airlifted to the island and set down adjacent to the home. The helicopter then lifted one end and dragged it into place on one wall. The crew bolted it into place while the helicopter lifted the other end and set it on the opposite wall.

By the end of one day with the helicopter, the walls and the beams were in place. The crew completed the roof within the next three days.

Indorf has six hours of video film covering the event. Every time he watches it he says he can't quite believe it really happened. "It was like being on M\*A\*S\*H\*," he says. "I have an idea how it must have felt to hear the helicopters approaching." ■



All of the 42-foot beams were airlifted to the island and set in place by the helicopter. While the helicopter held the beam (inset), the crew bolted it into place.



Considering the cost of getting a crane to the island, and the cost of double handling all the materials for the project if they were shipped out on barges, the helicopter, shown here lifting a cargo net full of shingles, was an economical choice.



The helicopter completed its task of shuttling materials and hoisting beams into place in the course of just one day. Here it is about to set down a cargo-net-load of plywood on the landing area nearby the house.