

# — The Giant in our Midst —

by K.B. Laugheed



The "Giant" is almost invisible in dense forest area where it is located; this drawing by architect Robert McG. portion of the house rises up from the ground like the tip of an iceberg.

If you're looking for an unusual way to spend an hour or two over the weekend, consider driving up to Pendleton to tour a unique home known as "the Giant." Artist, composer, and wood-worker Vic Cook built "the Giant" with his own two hands, using materials scavenged from the surrounding woods. Not everyone would want to live in a house like "the Giant," but everyone can find something interesting to think about in the construction and underlying philosophy that helped to create this one-of-a-kind dwelling.

Before Vic Cook bought his three acres of woods in 1979, he thought he would have to move to Canada to find the kind of unspoiled landscape he was looking for. But when he first saw the rolling hills beside Fall Creek, he fell in love with the location. Some of the magnificent old trees on this property are truly amazing-giants in their own right. The setting was enough to inspire Cook to try to create a "giant" of his own.

Having been a music teacher in Anderson for many years, this son of Hoosier artist Frank Cook would seem to be an unlikely candidate to build a house out of hand-hewn lumber, yet Cook's artistic qualifications are precisely what were needed to create this environmental work of art. Half of the house is underground, nestled in the thick humus of the hillside, while the other half juts sharply skyward exactly like the enormous trees which surround it. In fact, the basic structure was formed from dead or dying trees that Cook

found in his woods. In a way, the house has brought the fallen trees back to life.

Similarly, the floor of the house was made from stones laboriously lifted from the small creek that runs through the property and into Fall Creek. The stones make the passageway through the home seem almost like a dry creek-bed-intriguing in its texture and variety, compelling and inviting examination. This is a house in which every detail is a new discovery.

Yet "the Giant" is not a primitive log cabin like the ones the pioneers used to make. The power for this house is produced by the sun and stored in the Delco S2000 solar battery. Cook enjoys all the modern conveniences of running water, a telephone, a television, a washing machine, and power tools. He even has an impressive music studio with state of the art electronic equipment, including a computer. Part of his objective has been to blend technology with environmental awareness, to use the best of the world of science as well as the world of nature. Toward this end, he had made his own refrigerator out of an old beech tree trunk, the interior of which is cooled by both underground air and solar power. Everything about this house has been carefully designed to make visitors think about things we usually take for granted.

In recent years, Cook has inspired corporate sponsors to become interested in his project. Both A.C. Delco and Delco-Remy have provided support, as have smaller companies such as Music Today of

Anderson and Fall Creek Hardware. Pendleton. Thousands of students have toured "the Giant" on field trips, and this project has been covered by most Indianapolis tv stations as well as several area newspapers. The September 14, 1991 episode of Peanut Butter Press Reports on WISH-TV 8 (11:00 a.m.) will include a segment on "the Giant." If you can't make it to Pendleton for a personal tour, you can learn more about the project from this children's news show.

Reservations for tours of "the Giant" must be made at least 24 hours in advance by calling Sue Blakely at 778-2757. Blakely, a former music student of Cook's, is an enthusiastic tour guide whose convictions are almost contagious. At present she is busy developing a non-profit organization called the Earthship Corporation to sponsor the tours, concerts, and seminars which will be held at "the Giant". Already a portion of the proceeds from the tours goes to the Non-Game Wildlife Association. Cost for a tour is \$6.00 for adults, \$4.00 for children under 18.

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this incredible project is that it has been going on for years practically in our back yard and yet few area residents are even aware of it. Many of us travel regularly to Indianapolis to tour historic homes or museums while one of the most ambitious works of modern art in Indiana sits unassumingly in a local woods we might pass by regularly. Even if the house were

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nothing more than a simple trailer, the many paintings, sketches, and carvings would make the tour an art-lover's delight. It's enough to make you stop and think about all the things around us we fail to see while we're hurrying off to see other things elsewhere. And this, too, is a part of Vic Cook's plan.

So whether you go to see the amazing house, the artwork, the woods, or the solar energy system, you should go to "the Giant" just to see how "alternative" an alternative lifestyle can be. Vic Cook and his unique project will give you a lot to think about, not the least of which is that there's more to central Indiana than meets the eye.