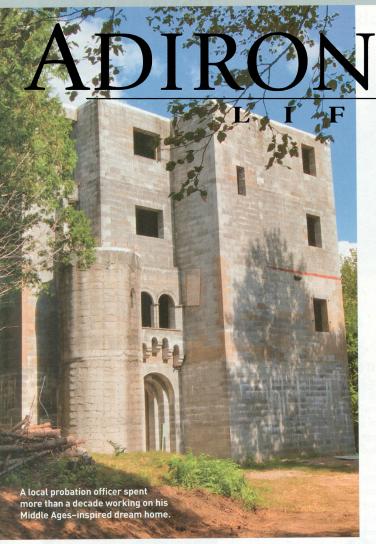
ADIRONDACK

LIFE





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GOING MEDIEVAL IN TUPPER LAKE

"EVERYBODY'S HOME IS THEIR CASTLE," says Andy mate would really mean a return to the Ramsgard. "This just happens to be a castle." Indeed, Dark Ages, Andy, whose firm built the Ramsgard and his wife Sherie's four-story, 6,000-square- first Leadership in Energy and Environfoot concrete-block colossus on Old Wawbeek Road mental Design (LEED)-certified gold pokes out of the Tupper Lake forest-and the twiggy house in New York State, is incorporatbirch-bark Adirondack architecture scene.

Last spring when the Skaneateles couple bought the 60-acre property and chose to work he would for his professional jobs. One with its partially constructed building instead of demolishing it, they continued the vision step for energy-efficiency will be coating of the late Edward Leary, a local man who so admired the medieval lifestyle he spent more the cement blocks' exteriors with insulathan a decade erecting, block by block, the backwoods palace. Leary was a probation officer tion board and stucco, creating a thermal with zero architectural training, but "he did a really good job," says Andy, whose Ramsgard envelope and a monolithic look. Sixty-Architectural Design firm has dealt in building high-end residences, restaurants and bou-five feet up, on the roof, rainwater will be tique hotels since 1995. "He got the bones of the structure right," blasting a solid founda- harvested, and a greenhouse will extend tion out of the granite hillside. At the time of his death Leary had almost finished an "inge-the veggie-growing season. Such elevanious" four-story spiral staircase, a feat with a complicated formula that would take most tion also eliminates deer and other pests. folks years of schooling and practice.

According to Andy, Leary's plans—hand-scrawled notes on the backs of cereal boxes, corthough, like the great European châteaus, ners of receipts, whatever he had handy—reveal a man who created as he went, often chang- this castle will be a work in progress. In ing his mind on the spot, mulling obsessively over details. Leary's fantasy and his execution the meantime, Andy's trying on his "King of it make the castle an extraordinary example of outsider art. That's one of the reasons "I Andrew" title. When asked what Sherie didn't want to go backwards or undo anything he did," says Andy. "I want to embellish the thinks about being queen, Andy says design, make it my own while keeping its character. Houses get built every day ... homes he'd only call her that "with the utmost are the creation of experience."

The Ramsgards have turned their funky fortress into the ultimate family project. Each summer weekend they've made the three-plus-hour drive to Tupper with their 12-year-old son, Rex, nine-year-old daughter, Ruby, and golden retriever, Tosh, for castle-work powwows. Sherie blogs about their progress on her www.learycastle.blogspot.com. One entry shows photos of Ruby cutting rebar. Another follows Rex overseeing the cement mixer. Always posted are Andy's sketches, as well as an open invitation to anyone willing to lend a hand.

The kids have a say in their seasonal getaway's design: a trap door, hidden passageways, secret room behind a bookcase, plus a drawbridge and moat—all doable, says their father. There's even a "fungeon" with a pool table and darts. And Andy picked up a 1970s-era fiberglass knight at a garage sale. By carving openings in the sculpture's eyes it will work for Scooby Doo-esque spying. The home's furnishings will be spare-no "Queen Elizabeth-style ornate pomp and circumstance"—with refurbished flea market finds and handmade pieces. The Ramsgards, says Andy, are going rustic "in a medieval sort of way."

Because an uninsulated concrete structure in the Adirondacks' often freezy cliing the same alternative-energy designs

The Ramsgards' move-in date is 2012, respect. And humbly, on one knee."