

HOMES

Log on: Back to nature movement sees builders and buyers branching out

BRENDA McMILLAN, SPECIAL TO NATIONAL POST | March 3, 2014



1867 Confederation Log Homes Log construction adds warmth in interiors and can be very ecologically friendly.

About 30 years ago, my mother took me to see the log cabin built by her great-grandparents, the St. Pierres, in the Ottawa Valley. It was in shambles. On the same trip, I visited a gentleman in a log home older than that of the St. Pierres's, but it was in excellent shape. Why had one survived while the other had failed? The answer came to me only recently at a log home seminar.

Rick Kinsman started [1867 Confederation Log Homes](#) 35 years ago in Bobcaygeon, where he hosts regular seminars for people interested in building log homes. I sat in a closely packed presentation centre with about 30 people of all ages. One engaged young couple had a five-year plan to acquire land and amass the money they'd need to build, while others were farther ahead

in the process and were choosing a company to work with or even a home design. Only a handful were planning to build in 2014. The energy level went up in the room when Rich Kinsman, the company vice-president of sales and Rick Kinsman's son, asked us to guess why people choose log homes.



1867 Confederation Log Homes A limitless number of designs is possible: "We've never used the same plan twice."

The main reason, it turns out, is craftsmanship. Log homes are built to last — and are a legacy. You build one to enjoy now, but it will be around and healthy long past your expiry date, and your children's and their children's. A properly cared-for log home will last for many centuries. Mr. Kinsman cited an example of a log church that is 600 years old and still drawing a crowd. It was then that I realized why the St. Pierre log cabin had fallen apart — it had not been maintained, whereas the other one had been in constant use and well looked after. It was a sad "a-ha" moment.

Beyond craftsmanship, the main reasons people choose log homes are for their energy efficiency and their sustainability factor. Here's a case where cutting down trees is good. Hear me out.

Confederation gets its slow-growing eastern white pine from old-growth forests north of North Bay. By the time they are cut, these elderly trees are barely breathing, so are contributing little to the environment. As more trees are planted every year than are removed, forests are growing (pun intended), and it doesn't take long for the newbies to start cleaning our air more efficiently than their elders. Logs are a renewable resource, and so are ideal for housing.

The senior Mr. Kinsman is proud of his company's track record of home building. "Ever since we started, we built energy efficient homes. Ours were green long before green was actually recognized." The green factor goes beyond using trees to construction techniques that enable log homes to be air-tight and thus energy efficient.

Made of naturally dried logs cut in-house to 6×12-inch or 8×12-inch sizes, with tongues and grooves, log homes have notched corners in a dovetail or lapped locked style, and fit together one atop the other in an airtight fashion, with a rubber sealant in the grooves. Logs are tightened using a thru-bolt system where long rods run from top to bottom in strategic places through pre-drilled holes. When the home is built, and every year thereafter, the bolts are tightened to keep the home snug. Logs are cut by the company to exact lengths according to the design of the home — designs that are as varied as the people who buy them.



1867 Confederation Log Homes

"In 35 years," Rich Kinsman says, "we have never used the same plan twice." While the company has a book of floorplans and photographs, it is merely a starting point as each home is uniquely designed for, and with, the buyer — who gets to choose every detail from the colour of the stain, the number of storeys, the roof pitch and room placements. Want fireplaces? Walk-outs? A sun room? Drywall inside? All can be accommodated. Want a curved outer wall? Nice try. Logs don't bend, but most other design elements can be included.

Often people choose to augment their log home with structural or decorative timber posts and beams for a more rustic look. They can be used inside as real or faux roof trusses and supports in great rooms, or outside over decks or patios or other structures. Finishes to floors, ceilings, walls, doors and trim can be all wood, drywall or a combination as the homeowner decides. The room with light log walls and dark trim in the lower photo, above, shows how a log home can be modernized a bit.



1867 Confederation Log Homes

Confederation cuts and builds each log shell on its site, ensuring all is perfect before shipping. On the building site, the responsibility falls to contractors hired by the homeowner to assemble the log shell and build and finish everything else. Their log homes have been shipped across Canada and the United States, and as far away as Venezuela and Europe.

At the end of the seminar, we lunched in the company's model home. The modern kitchen fit right in with rustic log walls, a blazing stone fireplace, high ceilings and a sunroom. What I liked most was the warmth exuded by the wood tones, and the even heat of the airtight building on that crisp winter day. Logs, like cork, reflect the warmth of skin, so feel almost alive.

I now understand why these homes are (still) popular in Canada, and around the world. It makes sense that anybody searching for energy efficiency and longevity in a unique custom home choose logs. They grow on you.