

What's New In Log Homes?

Log-home innovations are popping up all over the industry, representing the latest advancements in design concepts, technology and energy efficiency.



story by DANIELLE TAYLOR

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For many, the draw of a log cabin is the return to simplicity. The very construction of such a home has so much historic significance, and for many homeowners, a rustic cabin symbolizes the ultimate getaway.

So the introduction of modern innovations to what has always represented a humble retreat from modern, urban existence may seem a little contradictory. However, some of today's developments make it easier than ever to simplify your home — and your life.

Design Developments

In response to consumer requests, many log-home companies are developing new design technologies, both in planning tools that help customers make well-informed decisions as well as advanced engineering concepts that are revolutionizing current building practices. Both allow customers more options and information with which they can make wise choices regarding their future home.

To start, Wisconsin Log Homes has developed advanced 3-D rendering software that allows the consumer to see his or her potential home virtually built on an actual photograph of the building site. Log walls, roofing products, stone details, furniture, appliances and actual property views as they will be seen from inside and outside the home all help amplify the three-dimensional floor plans. These amenities allow customers to fully visualize what their future home will look and feel like, and give them the opportunity to make changes before construction begins.

"Before the floor plan is built, customers have the option to literally walk through their home via the computer," says Dave Janczak, owner and founder of Wisconsin Log Homes, based in Green Bay, Wisconsin. "It's difficult to tell the difference between the 3-D rendering and the actual photograph of the completed home." The cost for their rendering services starts around \$1 per square foot, making it significantly more affordable than the many change orders often required when owners find unwelcome surprises during construction.

Other companies have developed design principles that change the very structure of the log homes themselves. Bracebridge, Ontario-based True North Log Homes has created a unique timber-frame king-post system that uses a hanging post in the center of the home to support the extending roof beams. By stretching the post instead of compressing the load, as in traditional post-and-beam construction, this engineering system allows for varying rooflines and greater versatility in design, as it reduces the need for load-bearing walls or support posts.



ABOVE: These renderings by Wisconsin Log Homes show homeowners precisely how their proposed design will look and feel on their exact site when built.

OPPOSITE: Even a cozy, traditional-style cabin can benefit from modern innovations. This Honka log home features laminated logs and nearly impenetrable corners, making it significantly tighter than its drafty predecessors.



True North Log Homes borrowed ideas from timber-frame architectural designs to create this innovative king-post system, which allows for larger open spaces within the home. This system uses the load-bearing upper ridge post to support hanging beams that extend across the roofline.

Logs of Variety

Different log options also are popping up all over the marketplace, and consumers have a wider variety of choices than ever before for their home's construction. Estemerwalt Log Homes, based in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, gives new meaning to "cutting edge" with its revolutionary new lathe. This state-of-the-art piece of equipment is capable of milling logs up to 38 feet in length and 20 inches in diameter.

Affectionately dubbed the "Amber Lynn" (an enigmatic name found scrawled on the lathe's carriage upon its arrival at the mill), this immense machine can mill round logs as well as flat edges down the entire length of the log, making it an extremely versatile, in-demand tool at Estemerwalt. Mammoth-sized logs are becoming more and more popular among modern log-home owners, both for their aesthetically pleasing characteristics as well as their increased thermal mass.

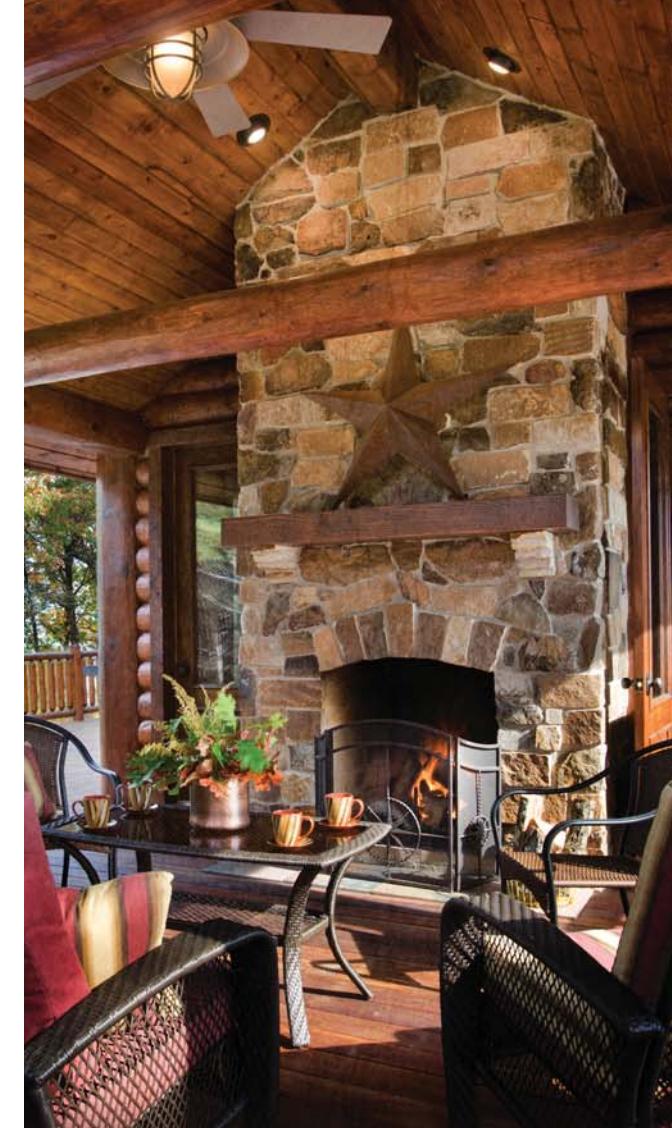


In 2009, Estemerwalt Log Homes unveiled the latest addition to its milling operations, an immense round log lathe that can mill logs with either round or flat profiles to extraordinary lengths and widths. Transporting the machinery took several tractor trailers, and the company had to pour a new foundation prior to its installation to support this massive equipment's weight.

"The Amber Lynn allows us to expand our offerings to help fully realize the unique visions that our customers have as we help them design their dream home," says Kurt Propst, owner of Estemerwalt. (For more on the company's customized machinery, see "Turning Dust Into Green" on page 12.)



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Honka Log Homes has changed the structure of the actual logs the company uses for residential construction. Using popular European lamination technology, Honka glues together narrow pieces of tightly grained Nordic pine and mills them to either a square or Swedish cope log profile. The company then mills round joints inside the walls' corners to slow the flow of infiltrating air and direct water away to reduce weathering and rot. Exceptional sealing and insulation combined with Honka's unique corner system and non-warping log design create a structure that's twice as snug as a traditional log home.

Energy-Efficient Innovations

Any overview of recent innovations in the log-home industry would be remiss to exclude the scores of developments that are making log homes tighter, better insulated and more stable. Not that long ago, R-values (measures of thermal resistance) weren't considered important factors in a home's value, and many builders and contractors didn't even know what they were. Single-pane windows and draft-surrounded doors were the norm, and homeowners placed a much higher level of importance on looks than efficiency.

Today, homes can be made so tight that air-exchange systems are necessary to keep the air inside fresh and breathable. And the log-home industry has taken this challenge by storm.

According to the Log Homes Council, the average log home is approximately 15 percent more energy efficient than its stick-framed counterpart, largely because of the thermal mass of logs. Even with this solid base, tightness and efficiency can be improved dramatically. From innovative insulation ideas to revamped wall systems, log-home manufacturers are providing today's customer with plenty of competitive options for creating a highly energy-efficient home.



Timber Block's insulated logs could easily be mistaken for traditional full-core milled logs, as their interior and exterior profiles belie the superior R-30 insulation hidden within.

Northwoods Log Homes, based in Laporte, Minnesota, designed its Evergreen Northwoods Log specifically to cooperate with probable upcoming energy code changes. The log profile retains the core and rounded faces of a traditional log, but includes deep notches in both the top and bottom of each stacked log, in which high-density closed cell foam can be used to bridge the joint. This design retains the same full-log aesthetic on both sides of the wall but significantly increases thermal efficiency to the equivalent of an R-19 to R-21 stick-framed traditional wall.

For a different look but even higher insulation value, Timber Block in Raleigh, North Carolina, has created its Classic Log Series with R-30 insulation, standard in every one of its homes. The company's operation places flat, hand-peeled or round log facing over a highly insulated polyurethane core, stacks the logs, bolts them into panels and delivers them in sections to the construction site. This building system allows crews to assemble an entire home extremely quickly, often in less than a day.

"Today's consumer is very knowledgeable when it comes to building energy-efficient homes," says Timber Block President Craig Johnson. "A smart homebuyer realizes that energy efficiency not only reduces energy costs but also increases a home's value for future buyers."

Log-home companies all over the nation are developing individual innov-



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Golden Eagle Log Homes combines the thermal mass properties of full logs with modern foam insulation to create its energy-efficient High Performance Full Wall Log System.

gan, created its groundbreaking System 6000 structural log wall system. This LEED-certified design eliminates drafts and factors in engineering considerations for electrical, phone and cable wiring, a challenging headache in traditional log construction.

The company's 8-inch wall system offers R-26 insulation, while its 10-inch log design features R-42 efficiency. Both styles feature the highest level of fire resistance available in a residential product. Because of the tightness of the structure, the company highly recommends fresh-air exchangers and down-sized HVAC systems in each structure.

To top it off, Eagle Panel Systems offers a revolutionary R-50 Integroove roof panel that's only 10 13/16 inches thick. In too many homes, energy expenditures are literally going through the roof, but this and other structural insulated panels (SIPs) can help keep heat and air conditioning from escaping through the roof as well as the walls and floors.

With a firm knowledge of the exciting new developments on the market, as well as an understanding of the longstanding benefits of building with logs, you'll be sure to end up with a modern home still steeped in an enduring, time-honored tradition. **CBC**



Eagle Panel Systems' R-50 Integroove roof panel features a rigid insulation core fronted by tongue-and-groove pine to match the natural log-home aesthetic.

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vative solutions to the energy-efficiency challenge, and while the pros and cons of any one system over another can be debated, the competition can only mean good news for the consumer.

Recognizing the aesthetic as well as the practical value of maintaining a full-log profile but wanting to increase its product's efficiency, Golden Eagle Log Homes designed a High Performance Full Wall Log System that triples traditional log efficiency to a noteworthy value of R-31. The company cuts 12-inch logs at the 4- and 8-inch points, and reassembles the two sides with 2 1/2 inches of high-density foam in between. Customers have their choice of a variety of log profiles and corner types, and with all complete package orders placed before June 1, this log upgrade is available for \$1.65 per square foot.

In response to increasing code requirements, more energy-savvy customers, increased competition from around the industry and a desire to produce a more eco-friendly structure, Holland Log & Cedar Homes of Holland, Michigan

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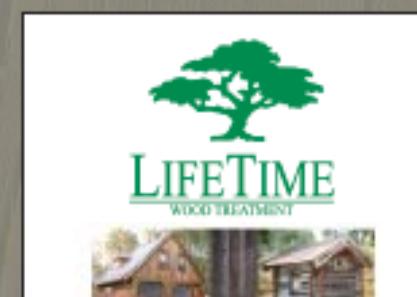


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