

Log_Home_Building_Experience_2004.txt

From: mike

Subject: Re: SUMMARY: Log Home info request.

Newsgroups: misc.rural

>I received a number of requests for posting a summary on this topic,
>so here are the responses I got. Thanks to those that responded to my
>original post. This is a LONG post.

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>*****

>

>Can't answer your specific questions, but my wife and I have had a bad
>experience with one log home company. We put a down payment on a kit with
>the company's assurance that we would have no trouble finding a builder. If
>necessary, they had builders that we could contract. Surprise, surprise,
>none of our local contractors wanted to bother with a log home kit. They
>didn't know much about them, and weren't much interested in learning about
>them. When we went back to the company, they called a builder in to talk
>with us, who guaranteed quick work when we were ready to start. Several
>months, and many phone calls later, none of them returned, we decided to
>cancel our contract. It was only after contacting the state better business
>bureau that we were able to get a portion of our down payment back.

>

>Moral to this story: Be sure you have a competent builder lined up before
>you purchase a log home kit.

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>I asked the net about log homes a while back and I've attached the
>responses I got. Bottomline, spend some \$ for brochures from several
>vendors, spend some \$ at the bookstores and some time in the library.
>And take a lot of what salesmen say with a grain of salt :-)

>

> I have no experience first-hand with log homes, but I have just finished
>building a log storage shed for myself. The inside dimensions are about 14 x

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>14 feet, with 5-1/2 foot walls. The roof is about 11 feet above the floor.
>Location is in Danby NY, a small town south of Ithaca (home of Cornell Univ),
>centrally isolated in south-central NY state.
>
> Here are a few things to think about for log homes.
>
>Things that the contractors and distributors should already know:
>
>1) logs should be cut in winter. Winter-cut logs, according to many
>generations of wisdom and experience in Europe, last up to twice as long as
>summer-cut logs. Whereas there is debate about why this is so, one of the
>reasons given is that winter-cut logs tend to dry more slowly. Of course,
>log home kits may have kiln-dried logs, which obviates the need for cutting
>the logs in winter. Logs from the southeast don't have much of a winter to
>experience anyway, unlike logs up here.
>
>2) Logs should be stripped as quickly as possible. Again, this probably is
>no problem with a kit. If you are going to use pine logs, pine sawyers are
>notorious insects, and once the weather warms up consistently into the 50's,
>you can expect these beetles to be laying their eggs under the bark. The
>larvae are extremely destructive, boring into the centers of the logs. The
>holes are a good 1/4 inch in diameter. The beetles must lay their eggs under
>the bark, so if the logs are stripped prior to the beetles coming around,
>your logs are safe.
>
>3) Logs never die. Logs tend to work as the seasons go by, moving a little
>bit here and there. I don't know how kiln-dried logs perform, but naturally
>dried ones will move about. This makes it a little difficult at times in the
>construction phase if the logs are tongue-and-grooved to provide a good seal.
>The tongue and/or groove may be straight when the log leaves the factory, but
>it may no longer be straight when you're ready to put them together. This
>will also lead to you never having an airtight house.
>
>4) A dry log is a happy log. It is important that logs be protected from the

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>wet elements, especially if situated in a location prone to periods of
>wet/humid weather. The eaves should extend at least 2 feet from the wall,
>the further they extend, the less rain/snow will hit the logs and make them
>wet. Wet logs will tend to decay, especially since logs check (split).
>Water that gets down in a crack can have a hard time getting back out,
>especially in a humid environment. This introduces a wonderful breeding home
>to fungi, and you may wake up some morning to see shelf-fungi growing on your
>house. The roof is quite important.

>

>5) In the same vain, the logs should not be laying on the ground. Even if
>you can use black locust or chestnut or cedar, logs in contact with the
>ground will invariably decay (unless they are in a bog). A rule of thumb
>that I have heard is that the bottom log should be at least 10 inches above
>ground.

>

>6) The chinking is very important. Since the logs work, hard chinking such
>as mortar or even dried mud may be subject to cracking and certainly won't
>expand to fill the gaps. There is a material out on the market these days
>that is pliable. It's not oakum,

>

>Things that others may not quite know:

>

>1) logs with a right-hand twist will not check and move like those with a
>left-hand twist. Again, this is a piece of European wisdom.

>

>2) log buildings in colder climates last longer than those in warmer
>climates. It is probably not so much the temperature as the humidity
>gradient that is most important.

>

>3) pine is easy to work with, and not as heavy as other logs. However, while
>pine is a good log-building wood, it is not the best. Oak will outlast pine,
>but is more expensive and certainly heavier. Larch is also a good
>log-building wood, being somewhere between oak and pine. White pine is
>better than red pine. I don't know how Douglas fir stands. Black locust is

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>also a good wood, but the trees tend not to grow straight since they are
>shade intolerant and grow best when grown in the open.
>
>
>All in all, logs homes are different. You should really want to live in one
>and enjoy a rustic home if you want a log home. My own personal philosophy
>says that we should be able to live off of the land we own as much as
>possible. My shed was a 9 month project, starting with felling my own white
>pines in January and February. It was a lot of work, and my knees are still
>not quite back to normal (from climbing up and down the walls several hundred
>times), but it was a lot of fun and a good learning experience. I am hoping
>to build a timber-frame building in the next few years. Whatever you decide
>to do, best of luck and enjoy retirement. I can't wait until I can retire in
>another 30 years or earlier if I'm lucky.
>
>*****
>
>This is a *VERY* long post. Feel free to bail out at any time!
>
>>I'm going to be in the market for a new home in the next few months (finally
>>moving out of town, yea!), and I'm quite attracted to these log homes I've
>>seen in magazines. There's actually very little information available about
>>them, however, beyond that furnished by manufacturers themselves in their
>>books, advertising, etc. Can anyone give me any pointers, major do's and
>>don't, advantages/disadvantages, about these structures?
>>
>>One reason is not just their charm and ruggedness, but the fact that for the
>>same money, your standard wood-frame tract house these days is built like a
>>piece of junk, unless you're able to spend several hundred thousand bucks.
>>
>>A few factors: this is a pretty hot, humid climate, in south central Texas.
>>Resistance to termites would be quite critical. Also, this would probably be
>>a three-bedroom mother-in-law plan on a single floor, if that makes any
>>difference.

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>>I would be *especially* eager to hear from someone who actually *lives* (or
>>has lived) in one.

>

>Last year at this time, I was arranging financing to get my log house built.
>We moved in on December 20, 1990. (We looked in the Farmer's Almanac to find
>the *worst* possible day to move in. The high for the day was -15F.)

>

>Information: There are two magazines, Log Home Living and one other, that are
>commonly available on newsstands in the United States, which deal exclusively
>with log homes. They are evangelical about log houses, and do not present
>a balanced viewpoint. Nonetheless, they provide quite a bit of valuable
>information. Also, one of the university agricultural extension services in
>Texas (I forget which) provides information on maintaining and preserving the
>logs in warm, humid climates such as yours. NIST (National Institute of
>Standards and Testing) has several technical publications on the thermal
>characteristics of log buildings.

>

>The log home industry can be divided up arbitrarily in a variety of different
>ways. In my opinion, one of the first divisions is that between handcrafted
>logs and milled logs. Most of the "manufacturers" supply milled log systems
>of one kind or another. Some of the handcrafters advertise, but not nearly
>as extensively. Handcrafting tends to be more of a cottage industry, whereas
>a big milled log vendor may have a large production operation with dealers
>all over the country.

>

>Log homes may be further categorized into log style and corner joint style.
>Rare in the West, but common in the Appalachians is a square hewn log with
>dovetail corners. Various kinds of "solid wall" systems may also be called
>log construction (e.g., Lindal Cedar homes), but they don't really qualify,
>in my opinion. Stick-built homes with half log siding are also offered.
>These may be marketed as a "super insulated" log house, and they are very
>attractive, but they do not depend on logs for their structure.

>

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>Milled logs may also be available in systems with 2 sides (top and bottom)
>flat, 3 sides (top and bottom and interior) flat, coped (referred to variously
>as Swedish, Norwegian or Scandinavian cope: the bottom of the log has a
>hollow milled along its length so as to fit closely over the log underneath
>it), and full round. Many employ tongue-in-groove or other systems to improve
>sealing. Corner joints are usually butt-and-pass for systems with flat sides
>or saddle notched for coped and full round systems. Butt-and-pass involves
>having the logs around the structure all at the same level, i.e., the seam
>in a north wall will match up to a seam in a west wall. Where two logs come
>together at a corner, one butts up against the side of the other one which
>"passes" and sticks out in the familiar log house style. To make saddle
>notches, the logs must be staggered - one of any two adjacent walls starts
>out with a half-log on the bottom, so that subsequent seams are separated by
>the width of half a log. At the corner, the higher log has a notch cut into
>it to fit over the log coming from the other direction. With butt-and-pass,
>there are spaces the height of one log between the ends that stick out in one
>direction. With saddle notches, all logs in both directions stick out.
>Unlike toy Lincoln Logs, a notch should never be cut into the lower log on a
>corner. Such a joint will tend to hold water if it is driven into the joint.
>True saddle notches are self draining.
>
>Variations on these systems exist, but most are similar and recognizable as
>being based on one of the above.
>
>Most handcrafters work in either full round or coped styles, with saddle
>notches. A true handcrafted log house uses hand peeled logs running the
>full length of each wall with no butt joints. As a result, a crane of some
>kind is usually used to set a handcrafted shell, since the logs are very
>difficult to handle manually. Shorter logs may be used where doors and
>windows will be placed, so that a butt joint is still avoided. This may
>also limit placement of a handcrafted house, since it may be impossible to
>get a log truck with 44' logs to the desired site in rough terrain. Milled
>logs are usually supplied in 8' to 16' lengths, and it is possible to place
>them by hand or with much smaller equipment.

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>
>Handcrafters will often rough-cut and stack the shell in their yards prior
>to setting it on your foundation. Setting our shell with a boom truck took
>less than a day and a half.
>
>Costs and quality: You get what you pay for. Tract homes offer economies
>of scale not generally found in constructing a custom home in the boonies.
>If you are contemplating a complete custom home, you can make it as nice as
>you want, but it won't be cheap. Cheaper log home "kits" provide smaller
>logs (which give you both less insulation and less thermal mass) and less of
>the stuff you need to finish your house. Tradespeople will not drive out to
>your house for free. They don't consider it a privilege to visit you.
>
>It is entirely possible to get an inexpensive kit, do a lot of work yourself,
>and finish the house to tract home standards. This can get you a nice house
>at reasonable cost, but may take you years of evenings and weekends, by
>which time you will have paid an enormous amount of interest on your
>construction loan, and you'll be so sick of it that you'll be ready to burn
>it down. And that cultured marble bathroom that looked so practical and
>attractive? Forget it - many \$\$\$! Tongue-in-groove pine on the walls and
>ceilings? \$\$\$! Exposed beams and/or purlins? \$\$\$\$\$! R-38 or R-44 built-up
>roof system so that you can have vaulted ceilings and insulation? \$\$\$.
>Custom cabinets? \$\$\$\$\$. The best appliances? \$\$\$\$. Hardwood floors? \$\$\$\$!
>Slate hearth? Antique brass light fixtures? Custom-built doors? \$\$\$\$\$\$!!
>These things have nothing to do with it being a log home. They are good and
>beautiful items which raise the price of any house, and which you might want
>in order to raise your house out of the tract-home morass.
>
>If you start with a vendor offering logs of 9" or more, pay a contractor
>familiar with the system to put it up and finish it out beautifully, and
>add the extras you want, it will be better than a tract home, it will look
>better than a tract home, and it will cost more than a tract home. What
>about the cost of the well? How close is power? People building in the
>suburbs don't have to think about this.

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>So the bad news is that you're probably not going to get out of this cheap,
>despite what the dealers try to tell you. Has anyone given you a COMPLETE
>turn-key quote? If so, do you have all the bids and cost breakdowns?
>Without these, it's not a quote - it's a blue-sky guess. If it's based
>on anything, it's based on how someone else had a house sort of like yours
>done. When you get a complete quote with all the bid information, you'll
>begin to have some idea of the cost of what you want. Then you have to
>find out what they left out. A good contractor will tell you; a poor one
>may let you find out in mid-construction. Don't mislead them about what
>you've done or expect to do. Document everything. Don't mislead yourself.
>Will it take you three hours to do what a master carpenter does in one? Is
>your time only worth \$4-\$5/hour?

>

>There are always unexpected costs. Be prepared. Have several thousand
>dollars "headroom" in your construction loan and your permanent financing
>so you can cope. This usually means, actually, that you have to have more
>of your own money up front. It's a custom home. The contractor has never
>built one exactly like it before. By the way, only hire a contractor who
>has worked with the particular log system you are using. Minimize surprises
>all around.

>

>The good news is that, if you (and the contractor) do it right, you'll love
>living in it, even though you're in hock up to your nose hairs.

>

>Weathertightness, insulation, etc.: Log structures move. Period. Even a
>6" milled log (too small for anything except a vacation cottage) is a large
>piece of wood. Logs expand and contract with temperature and humidity. The
>structure will settle noticeably in the first year, and because of temperature
>and humidity changes, *it never stops moving*! Therefore construction
>techniques and sealing systems must take this into account. In particular,
>I do not believe systems dependent on small beads of caulk or thin foam
>strips can be expected to perform well. The logs move too much and will tend
>to break the seal. Tongue-and-groove systems may seal well but are often

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>difficult to assemble because the logs have changed shape slightly since
>they were milled. Logs with the top and bottom milled flat often do not fit
>together as nicely as the drawing suggest. Logs are simply not dimensionally
>stable.

>

>This is why I selected a full round handcrafted builder. My bias is evident.
>The logs are actually set with a little space in between. The gap is sealed
>with a substance derived from the commercial concrete construction industry
>(big pieces of concrete are not dimensionally stable, either.). It's modified
>to look like traditional mortar chinking. It's rubbery, it moves with the
>logs, and it is placed in large enough beads to accommodate movement.

>

>Some other systems would also work, I believe, but I am quite sure that many
>systems being sold today are more difficult to work with than they look and
>may be prone to failure.

>

>Care must be taken in sealing external checks in the logs, particularly those
>which face up and may hold water. Checks which run into window and door
>frames may provide entry points for air, water and insects, whether they face
>up or down. In warm or damp climates, insect infestation may be a particular
>concern, and log houses in such areas will require a lot of maintenance.

>

>I live where insects and decay are not problems. However, my house is
>occasionally exposed to extremely severe weather. Rain may be accompanied
>by very high winds of 60 mph or more, driving water into any check facing the
>wind. If the check doesn't connect to anything, the dry climate in the
>Rockies will soon dry it out. If it connects to a window opening or another
>check in another log, the wind may be able to drive water into the house.
>As a result, my house must be more tightly sealed than most. Just last week,
>we had 4" of rain in one hour, accompanied by high winds. It's not that
>unusual. Houses built in certain coastal areas would have to be sealed with
>similar care.

>

>Larger logs provide more insulation than smaller ones. Log houses also

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>depend on the thermal capacity of their walls much more than stick-built
>houses. A 9" log gives no more insulation value than the wall of the
>average cheap tract house. However, it holds a lot more heat. It will be
>slow to heat up and will re-radiate the heat as it cools down. If your
>climate is consistently hot, this will make it difficult to cool the house
>at night with just a fan. If you have air conditioning, on the other hand,
>thus preventing the interior of your logs from getting hot in the first
>place, the air conditioning load will be less at night than it would be with
>a stick-built house. This works the other way around in the winter. It is
>relatively easy to keep the house warm overnight, but difficult to heat it
>up if you allow it to get too cold. Our house is positioned for considerable
>solar gain, so that it hoards heat nicely in the winter. The summer heat
>is rarely a problem. We have operable skylights and a ceiling fan in the
>stairwell to pull heat out of the house.
>
>A heavily insulated roof system is essential.
>
>Our house: (Sorry. I have to give the basis for my experience and opinions,
>but I'll brag a little, too.) Handcrafted, full round construction. Log
>diameter 9"-14". Lodgepole pine harvested in northern Colorado. Weathershield
>clear pine windows, casement or awning - no double hung or other sliding
>designs. Roof: 12" built up starting with 1" T&G on the inside, furring
>strips, 2x10s on edge with fiberglass batts in between, sheathing, etc., R-38.
>Purlin design provides 100psf snow load. Fiberglass shingles; will replace
>with metal in 10-15 years. Two floors plus walkout basement. All electric,
>electric provides code-required backup to wood heat. Vermont Castings
>Defiant Encore woodstove heats entire house, 1700sf, not counting basement.
>Well: 440'. Three miles from nearest public road. Research log systems
>for two years before building house. Hired contractor to do complete
>turn-key construction. I did cleanup, so checked on work in detail 3 times
>a week. Construction time was 4 months. Six months is more typical for
>a custom log home. Owner-built is more like 4 years.
>
>*****

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>>Never, thankfully, having had to actually live in a log house I
>>have had many neighbors and friends who have and have spent
>>many hours observing construction techniques and living conditions.

>>

>>The more I see of log houses the more I am convinced that I wouldn't
>>park my car in one, let alone live there. Why not? Let me count
>>the reasons...

>>

>>1. Cold and drafty. Regardless of the log house industry propaganda,
>>the R factor for an 8 inch log wall is about 5. R1 means 1 inch of wood.
>>The mean diameter of a 8 inch log is ~5.6 inches. There you are. Now,

>

>True as far as it goes. 8 inches is really a bit small for a log wall. As
>I explained in my earlier post, failure to manage heat carefully can make
>life difficult. However, if thermal mass (U value) counts for nothing, I am
>at a loss to explain why my house is so easy to heat (or even overheat, with,
>say, 10-15 guests) in 10 degree weather.

>

>It is true that U value means little in an environment which is consistently
>very cold or very hot. The time constant (delay) which thermal mass provides
>is eventually used up. Thermal mass is useful to me because sunshine and
>warm days are common in the winter, and my house has sufficient thermal mass
>to withstand several days of subzero weather before it really wants to cool
>down. If the sun comes out (cold clear days are also common), I get
>substantial passive solar gain, and it may be necessary to let the fire go out
>if the exterior temperature rises above 25 degrees. Below that, a fire
>is still necessary.

>

>>the log house people come back with a lot of crap about how you have
>>to look at logs differently, thermal mass, etc. Nonsense, R factor
>>is R factor, whether you're using logs, frame, or mud. Besides the
>>less than thrilling insulating abilities, the corner joints are a

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>>bitch to seal and, due to unbelievable shrinkage and warping, are
>>constantly conspiring against you. The shrinkage in log houses
>>is incredible, you have to float the window and door frames to
>>allow for a 2 to 3 inch shrink in exterior wall height.
>
>This is entirely possible. Handcrafted houses built with green logs tend
>to shrink a lot and experience seal failures. Mine was built with beetle
>kill pine cut standing dead, so the shrinkage and twisting had already
>happened. I also pointed out that I believe many milled log sealing systems
>may have problems, but I have no first-hand experience. My house did settle
>after the roof was on. Every structural post in the house has a screw jack
>under it to account for this. The house was leveled and aligned about one
>month after the roof was put on, before the interior walls were finished.
>
>To seal properly large beads of flexible chinking must be used. Mine was
>Sashco Log Jam. This argues in favor of a "traditional" log house look, but
>means that those who favor a particularly neat, uniform appearance will not
>be pleased.
>
>>2. Crude finish.
>>It still looked like someplace
>>that Conan the Barbarian might agree to hang his sword. The base, window,
>>and door casing was very crude. The electrical outlets were hideous.
>>The resolution of interior framed walls joining up with the exterior
>>log walls was awful. The point is, the quality of work and materials
>>was the best that money could buy but the log environment did not
>>allow anything to be done very well.
>
>Again true, up to a point. People who want neat, uniform, smooth interiors
>have no business shopping for a log home. They won't be happy. In my case,
>I wanted a "rustic" interior. It actually came out much less rustic than I
>expected. After seeing the custom-made knotty pine trim, planed smooth with
>nice routed edges, I thought I probably would have been just as happy with
>rough-sawn cedar, although the cedar certainly would have collected more dirt.

>I think the outlets are kind of ugly, but they'll look better when I get
>around to replacing the standard plastic covers with wood ones - but then,
>of course, they won't be as smooth and soothing.
>
>My interior walls are joined to the logs by simply cutting a shallow slot in
>the wall logs so that a straight edge of drywall or, in some places, T&G pine
>can be used. The resulting joint is chinked. The whole effect is, indeed,
>"rustic" as opposed to uniform and soothing.
>
>>3. Dust and dirt. Log houses give new meaning to dust. You got nothing
>>but nooks and crannies to collect and shed dust. A log wall is just
>>a dozen or so horizontal shelves gathering dust. If you live in an
>>area with any wind at all, dirt and dust is continually blowing in
>>thru ill fitting windows, doors, and logs.
>
>Possibly true. We haven't really noticed any more dust than we had in our
>house in town. Our main problem is cat hair, anyway. There was noticeable
>dust initially, probably left over from construction, but maybe we just got
>accustomed to it. There is a lot more dirt on the floor than in town, but
>we expected that, since we've given up concrete and bluegrass for dirt roads,
>and, so far, dirt landscaping. It takes a while to get things to grow up
>here. Logs do provide many nooks and crannies. To deal with those every
>six months or so, Sears makes a very powerful shop vac, a tool which every
>rural dweller should have anyway. We haven't noticed dust blowing in through
>the windows, despite winds in excess of 80mph on occasion. It doesn't seem
>any worse than the dust we got in town from forced air heat, which we no
>longer have!
>
>>4. Visual violence. Log houses are visually very busy. While this is
>>certainly a subjective judgement, I prefer a more soothing visual
>>environment. I find the overabundance of lines, shadows,
>>discordant joints, and colors very annoying.
>
>True, true. See statements above. You wouldn't be happy in a log house for

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>this reason alone. In our house, the 6" T&G, the slate hearth and the hand
>peeled railings all add to the cacophony. Being handcrafted, the logs are
>lumpy and irregular, and the chinked seams are all different sizes.
>Chaos! ;-) The thing is made from *trees* and, by God, they aren't hidden
>away where they can't be seen, and they haven't been made smooth and uniform.
>To my way of thinking, the house has a wonderful texture - but I know it has
>entirely too much texture for a lot of people.
>
>A friend of mine grew up in a house built to a modernistic style back in the
>'60s. Everything is very smooth; everything is precisely aligned; all surfaces
>are easily cleaned. The kitchen cabinets were white metal, which I thought
>to be rather, uh, institutional. The drywall work had to be done twice in
>order to make it align precisely to the cabinets without any concealing trim.
>The whole effect was, I thought, rather sterile. Nonetheless, my friend
>liked it, and I knew without asking (although he later confirmed this) that
>he would find a log house disturbing and unpleasant.
>
>>Now, I sure that there are lots of log house dwellers that would
>>and no doubt will vigorously disagree. I wish them well in their
>>log experience. I have known lots of people who have built and
>>lived in log houses. I have never known anyone that did it a
>>second time.
>
>My next-door neighbors are on their second log house. I hope never to build
>another one because I'm not interested in moving out of this one, but maybe
>my fairy godmother will allow me to live near a ski area someday ("near"
>being 30 miles back in the nearest unpopulated woods!).
>
>Frankly, compared to a well-designed and manufactured modular home, log
>houses, particularly handcrafted ones, offer mediocre value for the money.
>To be more specific, modulars are now available which can be placed over
>basements and offer custom interiors, 2x6 construction and fake log siding.
>But log houses are the real thing. There is an emotional attachment. They
>smell like trees. A good design can be open and airy (if that's what you

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>like), with good light. It doesn't have to be small, dark, cold or drafty.
>In the living room of our house, we can't even tell that a 40 mph wind is
>blowing unless we look out at the trees. It's solid. It's tight and it's
>astonishingly easy to heat. I keep it 5-10 degrees warmer than my old house
>in town because I can. I have lots of downed wood to get rid of, and even
>if I buy fancy peeled pine at \$65/cord, a cord lasts 6-8 weeks. And pine is
>a really lousy wood to heat with!

>
>Log houses aren't for everyone. They *do* have lots of nooks and crannies.
>They *are* visually "busy". There's lots of work involved in cutting and
>splitting wood, whether the house is log or stick-built. A poorly built
>log house will leak like a sieve, and small beads of caulk attempting to
>hold two large pieces of wood together will fail repeatedly. Like any
>construction project, it must be done right by knowledgeable people, and
>not very many people really know log construction. Lots of people know
>stick-built techniques.

>
>Also, I would not build a log house in a consistently hot, humid environment.
>If it doesn't get cool at night (it does where I live - 90 degree days
>followed by 50 degree nights are common) the logs will eventually heat up,
>and the thermal mass will work against you when it finally does cool off.

>
>The Texas environment makes it difficult to prevent insect infestation and
>decay in exposed wood, and maintenance is a continuous project. In Colorado,
>however, crudely built log houses built a century ago with no treatment
>whatsoever are still standing, although the stick built parts (window frames,
>roof systems, floors) have long since failed.

>
>I seem to be the only one posting with anything good to say about log houses.
>This is, perhaps, as it should be, since they can be difficult. If you want
>one, go in with your eyes open.

>
>*****
>

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>I like to think I know something about log houses. I own one. I designed
>it (custom) and contracted for its construction with a fairly well-known
>log home builder.
>
>You will, undoubtedly, receive strong opinions on both sides (i.e., log
>homes are wonderful, or log homes are junk). The truth lies somewhere in
>between. Like any construction method, log building has strengths and
>weaknesses.
>
>First, you should know that log construction comes in two basic flavors:
>milled and handcrafted. Lincoln Logs are milled. All the logs in your
>house will be the same size and shape, like dimension lumber. Handcrafted
>construction involves logs that are peeled, but which otherwise retain
>their original shape, including bumps, lumps and taper from one end to the
>other. There are many variations on both milled and handcrafted.
>
>>He (distributor) told me that it would cost (roughly):
>>
>> (3 x Kit Price) = Total cost if I did nothing (contractor does it).
>> (2.5 x Kit Price)= Total cost if I did some work (like finishing).
>> (2 x Kit Price) = Total cost if I did all work.
>
>Maybe. Cost is also heavily dependent on how you choose to finish the house.
>A house finished sort of like a tract home will cost sort of like a tract
>home. A house with a lot of custom woodwork will be much more expensive.
>
>>Also, I was told building the house takes 4-6 weeks by professionals.
>>He said their log homes really don't settle. Can this be true, or do
>>all log homes settle ?
>
>The house will settle a little, but milled log houses built with properly
>dried wood usually don't settle much. It is, however, necessary to leave
>a small allowance for settling around door and window frames.
>

>>Their kit prices range from \$20,000 up to \$71,000. Is that a lot ?
> This is in the "normal" range.
>>Lincoln Logs has a 100 year limited warranty and uses:
>> * Minimum 12 Course Exterior Wall - 8" high x 6" Thick Double T&G,
> A solid wood wall only 6" thick will not have much R value. It will,
> like any solid wood wall, have good thermal mass, but I believe solid
> wood walls should be at least 9" thick. (R value for dry pine is
> about 1.25 per inch.)
>> Graded logs
> Standard practice with milled logs.
>> * Owens-Corning Class A Fire Rated Fiberglass Roof Shingles (25 year).
> Nothing special here - these are ordinary 3 tabs.
>> * Benchmark Doors
>> * HURD Windows with Heat Mirror
>> * HURD Swinging Patio Doors with Heat Mirror
>> * Vetter Sliding Patio Doors w/HiPro 4 insulated glass
>> * Velux skylights
> Not familiar with these brands - I have Weathershield.
>
>*****
>
>Eastern White Pine is also what we went with. It's easy to cut & work
>with (yellow pine can be a real pain) and fairly cheap. I've heard of
>Lincoln Logs but can't give you any recommendations.
>
>We bought from Old Timer Log Homes out of Knoxville TN, and they have
>since been acquired by a larger company. We have no complaints.
>We bought logs by the bundle (no plans, no kit) and got a good product.
>
>
>>He (distributor) told me that it
>>would cost :
>
>> (3 x Kit Price)= Total cost if I did nothing and had a contractor do it all.

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>> (2.5 x Kit Price)= Total cost if I did some work (like finishing) and had a
>> contractor do the rest it.
>> (2 x Kit Price)= Total cost if I did all work.
>
>> That would be a "finished" house with well, septic, appliances, ect...
>> Move in condition.
>
>These seem awful arbitrary. Are these prices for *their* contractors?
>Not that this is bad because if that's all the guys do, they have gotten
>good at it. Unfortunately, with craftsmen, it also means they know where
>to cut corners. Depends how much perfection you're willing to pay for.
>A local contractor who hasn't built a log home before may cut you a break
>to gain the experience (or massively underbid). Lots of unknowns. Banks
>do not like unknowns. I guess I'd lean towards option 2 if you don't
>mind living in total chaos for a year or two.
>
>
>> Their kit prices range from \$20,000 up to \$71,000. Is that a lot ?
>
>Ours was kind of a weird construction because only 2 walls were logs
>with the others mostly below grade (log siding over frame on top of block).
>The house is 1900 ft**2 and it cost us 15,000 for logs (+ spikes, foam,
>other miscellany) in 1986. So this does not sound like a terrible price.
>Also, the price is only going to go higher.
>
>I can't tell if they pre-cut the logs to length for you. This adds.
>
>> He said they have 7 full-time crews building log homes and that they are
>> good crews that do quality work. Also, I was told building the house takes
>> 4-6 weeks. He said their log homes really don't settle. Is this legit
>> or do all log homes settle ? He said they now recommended some new product
>> to apply to the wood (can't remember the name) that it is excellent and
>> is good for a long time. He said it is expensive -> \$30 a gallon.
>

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>If you decide to go with their crew, make sure you have a good rapport with
>the contractor. One of the strong points of log homes is that they go up
>quickly. I can't imagine a home not settling as the wood shrinks. Did he
>mean the foundation? Good wood finishes are indeed this expensive. We used
>WoodGard (which is now EPA red-tagged), about this expensive, at the advice
>of a neighbor who's a painter & sprayed it on for us. Dunno what he uses
>now. Again, a big overhang for the roof will cure a multitude of evils.
>We waited 4-5 years to spray...you might consider doing the same, so the
>wood can dry out evenly (dunno about humidity concerns in Mass. vs. here)
>
>> Also, he stated that they do not require full payment until 90 days after
>> completion (I'm pretty sure he said that).
>
>That's between them, you, and the bank. The bank will probably be happiest
>if they or some other contractor does a turnkey job. This sounds like a
>nice concession on their part to give you time to get your occupancy permit,
>and get the money from the bank.
>
>> Lincoln Logs has a 100 year limited warranty.
>
>The worst that can happen is bad twisting (are the logs kiln-dried? Ours
>were, and almost all were very straight) and insects/rot. What does the
>warranty cover?
>
>> All the kits use:
>
>> Minimum 12 Course Exterior Wall - 8" high x 6" Thick Double T&G, Graded logs
>6" is a little thin. We have 8" and a north exposure, good solar upstairs,
>half earth-sheltered, temp range -10 - 90, and burn about 3 cords on average
>to maintain a 60-65 temperature.
>
>> Owens-Corning Class A Fire Rated Fiberglass Roof Shingles (25 year ones.)
>If it were me, I'd get a metal roof. They come in lots of colors, go on
>quick, and last forever (ours are 75 year warranted). Good for snow and

>fire. Skylights can be problematical.
>
>> Benchmark Doors
>> HURD Windows with Heat Mirror (triple glass with polarization layer)
>> HURD Swinging Patio Doors with Heat Mirror
>
>We used Hurd double glass. No major problems, they're pretty good quality.
>
>> Vetter Sliding Patio Doors w/HiPro 4 insulated glass
>> and all the interior partitions and necessary materials to build the "shell"
>> of the house..
>
>Do you mean that the logs are used as siding over a framed house? (This is
>what my neighbor did)
>
>> Does this sound pretty good, and what should I be asking the distributor ?
>
>>From my limited experience, this sounds pretty good. Lincoln Logs is one
>of the bigger companies and can be flexible with you. Ask to see other
>homes. Make sure a semi can get to where you want to build. Foundation?
>Can a cement truck get where you want to build? What is the policy on
>defective materials? Are there any banks he'd recommend for financing?
>Who is responsible for getting all the permits? What do you need, like
>wetlands stuff, septic certification, well certification, any more?
>
>>Just wondering if you could recommend them or anyone else that
>>does log homes, and any "gotchas" I should be aware of in dealing with log
>>homes.
>
>How do you plan to heat the thing? If you want a/c or forced air,
>ductwork can be a real pain with log construction. Main gotchas are
>poor construction technique, like breaking a log over a door or window
>(I've seen this!) or not allowing for settling over a door or window
>(I've done this!). After most of the settling, perma-chink the logs

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>in 4-5 years. This does wonders for the interior appearance & does
>a little to seal air leaks. If you can work in some passive solar,
>log homes can be very energy efficient (might be less of a factor
>where you are).
>
>*****
>
>There is a series of episodes of the PBS 'Hometime' series that deals with log
>home construction. It just finished here about 4 weeks ago. I don't know
about
>the quality of information it contains, but it was fun to watch, and looked
like
>it would at least be food for thought.
>
>*****
>
>Don't know if this'll be any help or not, but I remember there was a
>whole series on log homes on PBS about 6 months ago. It was on the
>show where the pseudo-couple did all the work on the homes. The woman
>on the show recently retired, and the show turned into (I think) the
>Bob Vila home show. If you're familiar with the PBS home shows, you'll
>know that they're pretty informational. As I recall, it was a pretty
>lengthy series, and covered everything from roofing to installing
>windows. You may want to catch the address (Sunday morning) on your
>local PBS show.
>
>*****
>
>We've been living in our log home for just over 8 years now. Overall, it's
>great. Ours was a kit from Heritage Log Homes in Gatlinburg TN. There is
>a magazine available, I believe it's called "Log Home Living" - I've seen
>it on several newsstands - lots of stories about "nice" log homes, also a
>good source book for manufacturers/distributors.
>

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>
>> They claimed they are the only log house company that is certified
>> by some National organization (forgot the name), for water-tightness.
>
>Take this with a grain of salt.
>
>> They said that they have sold and have been involved with about
>> 150 different log homes in the Mass area.
>>
>> He (distributor) told me that it would cost (roughly):
>>
>> (3 x Kit Price) = Total cost if I did nothing (contractor does it).
>> (2.5 x Kit Price)= Total cost if I did some work (like finishing).
>> (2 x Kit Price) = Total cost if I did all work.
>
>This is probably not too far out of line, depending on amenities, fixtures,
>etc. We did "essentially" all the work on ours, but with top of the line
>fixtures, hardwood floors, etc, it came in about 3.5 x kit price (our kit
>only included the logs, doors, & windows) so all 2nd floor, and roof framing
>and finish were additional. Question you have to ask yourself is how much
>time and effort are you willing/able to devote (ours took about 18months from
>foundation to move-in)
>
>>
>> That would be a "finished" house with well, septic, appliances, ect...
>> Move in condition.
>>
>> Also, I was told building the house takes 4-6 weeks by professionals.
>
>If everything goes right! - no rain, no missed deliveries, subcontractors
>show up on time, etc, etc, etc. DON'T COUNT ON IT! 2 - 2.5 months is
>more like it.
>
>> He said their log homes really don't settle.

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>
>WRONG, WRONG, WRONG. Unless they are using kiln dried logs, you can expect
>about 1.5" to 2" of settling in the first year, after that, it's negligible
>(the house will actually "brathe" about 1/4" annually, as the ambient
>humidity varies) You need to allow for this in any plumbing, etc that you
>run to the 2nd floor.
>
>Can this be true, or do
>> all log homes settle ? He said they now recommend some new product to
>> apply to the wood (can't remember the name) that it is excellent and
>> is good for a long time. He said it is expensive -> \$30 a gallon.
>
>There are a number of good wood preservative/sealers on the market - your
>price is about right.
>>
>> Their kit prices range from \$20,000 up to \$71,000. Is that a lot ?
>
>It depends, what is included? I suggest you contact several companies and
>get their info packs (typically \$5 - \$10 each) and look at floor plans, features
>options, etc. Don't rush into it! Make sure you know what you want and can
>afford.
>> Lincoln Logs has a 100 year limited warranty and uses:
>> * Minimum 12 Course Exterior Wall - 8" high x 6" Thick Double T&G,
>> Graded logs
>> * Owens-Corning Class A Fire Rated Fiberglass Roof Shingles (25 year).
>
>might I suggest a metal roof - they look great, and sound wonderful in the rain
>(wish I had put one on our house!)
>
>> * Benchmark Doors
>> * HURD Windows with Heat Mirror
>> * HURD Swinging Patio Doors with Heat Mirror
>> * Vetter Sliding Patio Doors w/HiPro 4 insulated glass
>> * Velux skylights

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>
>Excellent skylights!
>
>Other things to consider: log shape - round logs look great, but on the inside
>they tend to collect dust - my wife "hates" this. Some companies manufacture
>a "D" shaped log - log shape on the outside, flat wall inside.
>
>Switches, and outlets on the exterior walls take a little ingenuity - our
>outlets are let into the baseboards (4" - 6" planks). If you go with a raised
>floor (crawl space or basement under) plumbing, wiring, ducts, etc. are a lot
>easier.
>
>*****
**
>
>Last season, the home-improvement show Hometime did a series on building a
>log cabin. They often make the videotape for a project available commercially;
>the videos are also generally available through your local public TV station.
>
>They covered a _lot_ in the series about the differences in building a log
>vs. a standard frame home. I understand that the videos are usually even
>more detailed; at least it would give you some ideas of the issues to
>question the distributor/builder about.
>
>Hometime did not use Lincoln. They made a _big_ deal about allowances for
>settlement, including special plumbing and a detached fireplace! I'd ask
>to see log homes that the builder built several years ago before believing
>that the logs won't settle.
>
>*****
>
>We did. We visited Southern Log Homes in SC and several real homes of
>various ages. We read through the literature for many many companies.
>Our conclusions: all log home companies have a selling point, i.e. the

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>"only" company that provides such and such. All homes settle, all log
>homes settle. The problem is that you can see the settling in a log home
>in the forms of cracked interior walls, cracks in logs or chinking. All
>this may not be a real problem, as long as your home maintains its
>insulation factor.
>
>What dissuaded us: unless you sheetrock the interior walls, they will
>always be log walls, a dark finish for interiors. You must decide before
>building where all the electrical conduit will go, as this is drilled
>into the interior of the logs. This cannot be changed, and if you add
>electrical runs in the future, you must scab them in on top of the walls.
> You can put in central vacuum, but I believe it must be run only on
>interior (stick construction) walls.
>
>My recommendations: read "Log Homes" magazine for ideas. Contact the
>PBS show Hometime and order their video on log home construction. They
>added numerous features to account for settling, such as compression
>joints in all plumbing and all walls. Take a good look at your
>neighborhood, will a log home fit in? Get a quote from a builder for the
>same size/style home in conventional construction; we found that the log
>home would end up to be considerably more in price. Good luck.
>
>*****
**
>
>I moved into a log cabin (not a kit, hand built, etc) about 3.5 years ago,
>after buying it the Insurance company canceled my insurance policy for
>replacement cost and replaced the policy with one that would only pay me
>what I paid for the cabin originally. I was told that this was their policy
>on log cabins. I had wished they had told me this up front when I went to
>them for insurance to start. This last year they have upgraded my insurance
>for replacement cost, I am not sure why the change since it cost no more
>than the other policy. Anyway, you might check on whether your insurance
>policy will cover the replacement or original cost only (which does not

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>help if the place burns down and its ten years later worth of inflation).
>