

Log_Home_Building_Experiance_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.
>
>*****
>
>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.
>
>*****
>
>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
>expend 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 morter 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.

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>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.
>

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>>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

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>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 a 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 (crawlspace 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
>settling, 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 vaccuum, 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 then 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).

>