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John Johnson of Sitka Log Homes stands in front of beetle-log home being built in BC Place for the home show.

# Builder sees blue future

## House made from beetle-stained timber is expected to be big draw at home show

BY GORDON HAMILTON  
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The mountain pine beetle may have devastated Interior forests, but the dry, blue stained timber it leaves behind has turned into a marketing plus for log home builder John Johnson.

Johnson has found the blue stain, caused by a fungus that is carried by the beetle as it bores into the bark, gives the wood a special look that customers from Europe to Australia find appealing.

Johnson's company, Sitka Log Homes of 100 Mile House, earned international fame for building the \$3 million B.C.-Canada House for the 2006 Turin Olympics. More than 100,000 people a day toured the two-storey chalet.

This week he is building a 1,200-square-foot home out of the blue-stained wood inside BC Place stadium, assembling the log house piece-by-piece for this year's B.C. Home and Garden Show.

"This is a great place to show people that beetle-killed wood can be just like any other wood for construction," Johnson said during a break in the frenzy of construction.

The home has to be finished for Wednesday's opening of the show.

Johnson said he expects the log home will be the first encounter for most Low-

er Mainland residents with the beetle that has killed the Interior pine forests, turning vast landscapes into red and grey patterns of dead and dying trees.

"We are trying to reach as many people as we can and this is a great place to explain to people that beetle-killed wood is no different than any other wood in terms of its strength."

Like most log home builders in B.C., Johnson has been forced on to a supply of wood killed by the epidemic that has destroyed half a billion trees so far. But he has found the logs are perfectly sound and add valuable character to the homes. The blue stain penetrates deep into the wood long after the beetle — which lives out its life-cycle in the bark — has left.

He builds 35 to 40 log homes a year, most for the U.S. market. About 80 per cent of those homes are made from beetle wood and that's not only because he has no alternative. Buyers actually ask for it, he said.

"People want it, especially for the higher-end houses that we send to the United States. The bugs only go into the bark and then they leave, so there are no adverse effects from the bugs except the colour."

"We have been using it for several years now and the reason is that it has a lot more character than the others woods. There's the colour as well as the natural

characteristics of pine."

The chalet at BC Place is up for sale, and Johnson is hoping that by the time the home and garden show ends Sunday, he will have found a buyer.

"We are asking \$199,000, set up pretty well anywhere in B.C. It comes complete with light fixtures and cabinets."

Peter Simpson chief executive officer of the Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association, said the beetle-log home is expected to be a major draw at this year's show. The log home was built at 100 Mile House then all the logs were numbered and the home disassembled for the journey to BC Place stadium. Johnson and his crew spent a week re-assembling it.

"Some of our beetle-damaged lodgepole pines are showing up all over the world now, which we find kind of neat," Simpson said. "I am a real fan of log home construction, but you can actually see the blue rings caused by the stain from the beetles."

Simpson views the home as a showpiece for what this province's builders, can accomplish.

"Everybody has heard about this wood being not good for anything but here you can see that it can be real value-added wood."

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