

# SPECTACULAR SUN PEAKS “CABIN”

IT MIGHT ONLY BE THEIR SKI CABIN, BUT IT DIDN'T STOP THIS FAMILY FROM PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS

BY DARCY NYBO

**W**HEN YOU BUILD AWARD-WINNING HOMES, it can be difficult to find someone who is up to your standards when it comes to building your home away from home. Brent Ellingson, president of BC-based Oakvale Developments, did his research before choosing what type of cottage to build on his property at the Sun Peaks ski resort area in the Okanagan region of British Columbia.

“We have five sons, so we wouldn’t fit into a townhouse,” he laughs. “Our tastes leaned towards a log home, but not a full log home. We liked the log elements, the post and beam aspect of it. So, we bought lots of magazines and searched the web. Both my wife ▶





The main or "front" entrance to the cabin, with the garage to the right, hides the impressive size of the five-level home.

[Michelle] and I had the same taste and liked the rustic look. When we realized we wanted log post and beam with really gnarly logs we went out and spoke to half a dozen companies that make log homes. In the end we decided to go with Walter [Bramsleven] at Sitka Log Homes.

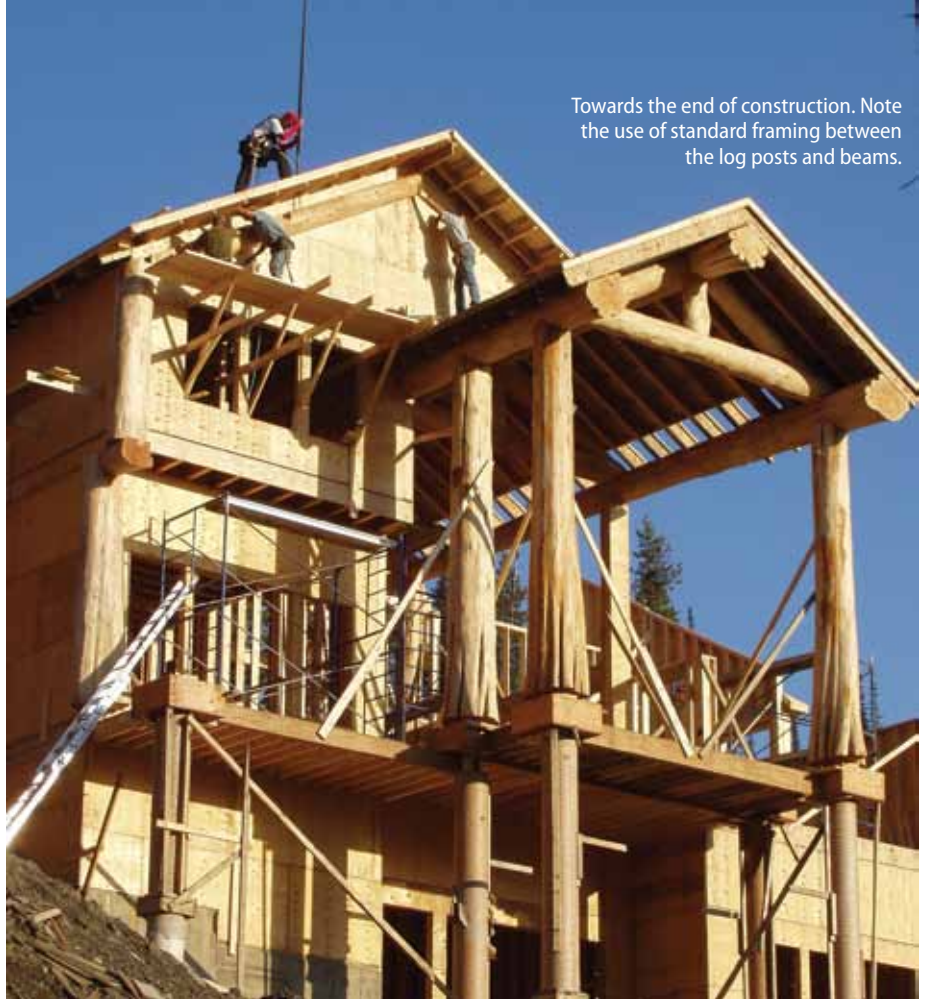
"We chose Sitka because of their experience in building the type of structure that we wanted to build," Ellingson continues. "There are a lot of log home producers out there who will build more of a traditional log home and the logs may be smooth, but we were after something different, something unique, and Sitka's niche was what we wanted."

Walter Bramsleven, general manager of Sitka, explains about the types of homes and cottages his 100-Mile-House, BC-based company builds. "We have three types of log and timber frame homes that we build," he says. "We build timber frame structures, which is self-explanatory. For log homes there are two types: conventional style with log walls about 10 feet high and a loft above, and then there are the hybrid log homes. These homes, instead of having log walls, are supported in a log post and beam style with regular frame walls in between the posts. Hybrid log homes allow for more flexibility with design both inside and out."

The trend towards the hybrid post and beam homes has taken off over the last 15 years and hybrid log homes now constitute most of Sitka's business. "Compared to conventional homes, they are much more environmentally friendly on an ecological level. The carbon emissions and landfill issues simply aren't there when you use logs. Older studies on log homes show they can be up to 40 percent more efficient than conventional-built homes. They are cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter."

As the Ellingson cottage is located at a ski resort, keeping warm in the winter was a top priority. However, the property posed several unique building challenges for any type of structure, let alone a log structure. "Our property drops 50 feet from front to back and a traditional log home on this particular property would not have worked as well as the hybrid," says Ellingson. "Our first step was to get a good designer involved. I worked with Raymond Bonter on the coast. We didn't want a steep driveway either so we had to incorporate that into the design. Once the design was complete, we started working with Sitka as to how the log components would work and the mechanics of how it would go together."

Ellingson and his designer came up with a plan that would give them room to sleep



Towards the end of construction. Note the use of standard framing between the log posts and beams.



The "view" side of the Ellingsons' ski "cabin." The middle floor features the great room (centre), the master suite to the left and the dining room to the right. Note the massive log posts.

16 (remember, they have five boys), have a rec room, five bedrooms, four full bathrooms, a den, two laundry rooms, a hot tub, dry sauna, wine cellar, media/theatre room, garage, kitchen, dining room and main living area or great room. They even put a little hobbit room under the den for storage. They

also incorporated an 800-sq-ft fully self-contained suite in the lowest level.

Now it was time to pick the logs for their home. From the ground to the ridge was 44 feet at the back (view side) of the cottage. They needed large logs so the surrounding area wouldn't dwarf them. "Some of the logs



**ABOVE** Cozy leather couches, blankets and the “gnarly” fireplace mantel frame the views of the mountains and the resort community through 28-foot-high windows.



**LEFT** In the top centre of this photo is the main entrance at the driveway level, the den door is to the right and the steps lead down to the great room and dining room. The door to the “hobbit” storage room is under the staircase.

were 30 to 36 inches in diameter,” says Ellingson. “All of the logs are red cedar and the people at Sitka even sent pictures of logs in their yard that they thought might look good in the structure. Then we picked which ones we wanted.”

Once the plans were set, the foundation was started, and five months later the largest crane that had ever been at Sun Peaks arrived to help re-assemble the log home. “Sitka sent one of their guys down as a site supervisor to manage the assembly and our guys worked alongside him in putting together the log package,” Ellingson explains. “The basic exterior of the cottage was completed to lock-up stage before the snow came. The

second year we worked on the inside of the home over the winter months. The following spring we did all the stonework, put on the siding, wall shingles, and all the architectural finishing and the grounds. We put in a heated driveway because the last thing we wanted to do was shovel snow when we got here for our vacations. We put a lot of sweat equity into this home; my five sons helped build it.”

Ellingson got around the steep slope of the lot with a 28-foot-high foundation wall at the front (driveway side). In the back, the foundation is 14 feet high. “We didn’t want to bring structural fill onto the lot as there are always concerns that springs can pop out

of the mountain and wash away the fill. We wanted to make sure it was built on hardpan,” he explains. “The big rock posts we put in go down 14 feet below the grade.”

Once it was finished, Ellingson and his family had a 5,000-sq-ft, five-level split, home-away-from-home fit for royalty. “This home is all the things we loved as a family,” he says. “Log homes cost a bit more to build but they are worth it. There is a certain warmth about them that is timeless. A regular cottage can become outdated and go out of style. A log home, whether it is traditional or timber frame hybrid, is ageless. These are 100-year homes that will last forever and not go out of style. They really hold their value well.”

From the driveway side, the cottage doesn’t look its true size, camouflaged by the various levels below and the way it blends into the hillside. Entry through the garage takes you into an area with a mud room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. When you come in



A more cozy space in the kitchen/dining room was created by bringing the ceiling down a bit. The radiant heat stone floor and the stone wall above the range were just part of the 2,000 sq. ft. of stone work in this cottage.



The den is located to the right of the main entrance. This is one of the few rooms in the cottage without stonework.



The master bedroom has a big beautiful ensuite with travertine flooring and a large walk-in shower and soaker tub.



The master suite has a large stone-front gas fireplace with backup electric baseboard heat. Ceilings in this room are 12 feet with doors that open out onto the back deck with a view of Morrissey Mountain.

the main door, you enter mid-level off the den area that overlooks the living area and all of Sun Peaks Village through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

The great room has a main ridge beam log that is 64 feet long with a butt end over 30 inches in diameter. The ceiling in the great room is 28 feet with floor-to-ceiling windows. They chose metal-clad wood windows from All Weather Windows because they didn't want the maintenance on the exterior. The outside cladding is black and the inside is natural wood for warmth. The windows have a reflective element built into the glass to keep the warmth in, and in the summer it will reflect a certain amount of the sun. Another important feature is the radiant-heat floors, as all the floors in the main living area are stone.

This brings us to the centrepiece of the design—the fireplace. Rated as a furnace

at 85,000 BTU, the fireplace, in conjunction with hot water heat, keeps this ski cottage toasty warm. "We had a lot of fun with the fireplace," he laughs. "We went back and forth numerous times, trying to find the gnarliest log we could find for our fireplace mantel."

Also on the main floor, around the corner from the fireplace, is the master bedroom, complete with an ensuite with travertine floors and a large walk-in shower. "We put the master bedroom at the [view side] of the house because of the view of Morrissey Mountain." In the summer, the bedroom opens out to a stamped concrete deck with a glass railing all the way around. The deck is also accessible from the dining area. "It was important for us to be able to look straight through so nothing obstructed the view."

Then there is the care taken in the design of the exterior of the cottage. The two top

floors are clad in cedar wall shingles while the lower levels are horizontal cedar siding. The finishing touch was the lighting, which shows off the architectural elements of the house. "We experimented with construction [style] halogen lights," Ellingson explains. "We would go there at night and point them up or down until we found something we liked. It was important for us to have up-lighting as well as down-lighting. We have up-lighting on the logs outside and inside. The lights on the floor light up the logs and the ceiling glows. We also have architectural lighting in the great room that lights up the log components."

After hours and hours of planning and years of putting it all together, Ellingson says he wouldn't change a thing about his Sun Peaks home. "We spent a good year doing our research then another two years to build it. Now we have exactly what we wanted." ©