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Olympic proportions

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OLYMPIC PROPORTIONS

Sitka Log Homes played a vital role in showing off British Columbia to the rest of the world during the Torino Winter Olympics—their contribution was a stunning building made almost entirely of B.C. wood

by JEFF CUMMINGS

After months of planning, hard work and flying back and forth from Vancouver, B.C., to Torino, Italy, officials with Sitka Log Homes have breathed a sigh of relief now that they've finished building British Columbia-Canada Place, B.C.'s home in Italy for the 2006 Winter Olympic Games.

Sitka Log Homes, a company based in 100 Mile House, B.C., won the bid to build the log house back in May 2005 based on the work they did on three log lodges constructed for the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics in 2002.

Despite time constraints and many challenges, the log house in Torino was finished by the deadline of January 3, 2006.

Grabbing the global spotlight

British Columbia-Canada Place was designed to be used as a gathering place for B.C. athletes and representatives and to showcase to the rest of the world the upcoming Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010.

The lodge, designed by Sitka Log Homes, blends warm rustic style with high-tech sophistication. Everything from light fixtures and windows to landscaping boulders was



Photo courtesy British Columbia-Canada Place

shipped from 100 Mile House. A two-storey-high fireplace was prebuilt in 100 Mile House and had to be lifted in and out of the shipping containers by cranes.

The 4,200-square-foot building was constructed almost entirely from B.C. wood products and the log shell features beetle-killed lodgepole pine.

"We saw an important opportunity to show the rest of the world the natural beauty of this wood and to confirm its structural integrity," said John Johnson, owner and operator of Sitka Log Homes.

Building a lodge of this magnitude wasn't easy, especially when the company realized the deadline could not be achieved through local Italian labour alone. Various tradespeople from 100 Mile House were sent in to help

with the project, which meant 20 flights to Italy arranged by a travel agency in 100 Mile House.

According to Sitka Log Homes, the project had more than its fair share of Olympic-sized hurdles to jump over. To begin with, there were engineering issues that needed to be addressed, as the building site was on top of a three-level parking garage. As well, designers had to figure out how to attach the lodge to an existing glass building.

On top of those challenges, the European Union insisted ►

► that the five (of the 11) shipping containers that contained the log shell needed to be heated.

Things didn't get any easier for Sitka Log Homes as they faced a truckers' strike in B.C., which caused some logistical problems in obtaining containers; as well, various train derailments delayed transportation within Canada. Once the containers arrived in Italy, Sitka Log Homes was faced with another truckers' strike in that country.

"We did have our doubts about getting the project done at times, but we were cautiously optimistic as failure was not an option with such a high-profile project," said Johnson.

Johnson said British Columbia-Canada Place could put B.C.'s forest industry in the global spotlight by raising the profile of log home construction.

"With the promotion of the beetle-killed lodgepole pine, we are utilizing a natural resource that Mother Nature provided naturally for us," said Johnson. "This enables healthy forests to continue to grow and prosper while we use the standing dead forests for our products."

Johnson said that because of the project, the company has already received a number of inquiries about pricing and shipping log homes to Europe.

British Columbia-Canada Place is located in the heart of the city, right beside one of the accredited media centres in Torino.

Since it opened on January 22, British Columbia-Canada Place has started each morning with a lineup of people waiting to view it. It will close its doors March 21 after the Paralympics. At that point, the City of Torino plans to re-assemble the structure in a park in the centre of the city, to be used for various displays of art.

On February 24, British Columbia-Canada Place was the site of a forum hosted by BC Wood that promoted various wood products from British Columbia to 75 European architects and builders.

To find out more about British Columbia-Canada Place, go to www.bc.canadaplace.gov.bc.ca.



SHOWING OFF B.C.: In January, Sitka Log Homes finished a three-month building project to complete British Columbia-Canada Place in Torino, Italy, for the Olympics.