



Log home builders keep forest industry afloat

AMIDST a flailing forest economy a phoenix rises. Log home building has become the fourth largest industry in British Columbia. And it's putting displaced forest workers back on the job.

Brian Gardner, president of Original Log Homes, says the industry is thriving despite recent mill curtailments and stumpage fees.

Weary of the concrete jungle of the lower mainland, Gardner came up one summer to build a cabin with a friend the old fashioned way—by hand.

The experience, says Gardner, changed his life forever.

He's still in 100 Mile House but now he's shipping log homes into the global economy.

Gardner says Canadian log homes are in high demand due to high quality manufacturing, from thru-bolt systems, and better log selections.

Wood in the Cariboo, says Gardner, is thicker, denser, and retains less moisture making it the highest quality of wood in the world.

With seven cranes, Original Log Homes, in partnership with Sitka and MWZ, can build a dozen homes at a time.

The winters months are slower but most orders

begin pouring in for spring and summer.

Gardner says the market is global. Original Log Homes ships to Japan, Korea, Switzerland, and the United States. Gardner says his employees have been all over the world.

"From chainsaw suppliers to haulers, to loggers, to farmers we are creating a lot of jobs in the industry."

When each home is completed in the yard it is disassembled and put back together for the customer.

Gardner sends employees as far as Japan to complete the re-construction of the home.

Prices vary depending on the size of a home but he says they build deluxe lodges all the way down to one room cabins.

No layoffs at Sitka where a crew of well organized workers make homeowner's dreams a reality.

Mike Hopson, 25 is funded by Forest Renewal B.C. He's learning to scale and construct logs into a

value-added product. He, like several other employees, feel a sense of job security not reflected in other areas of the forest economy.

"People will always need a home," says Walter Bramsleven, the general manager of Sitka Holdings.

Homes can range from \$25,000-\$160,000 or up depending on what it is the customer expects, says Bramsleven, "log homes are unique with no two log homes being the same".

Bramsleven says a lot of man power goes into building one home, this means a lot of jobs are being created through one purchase order.

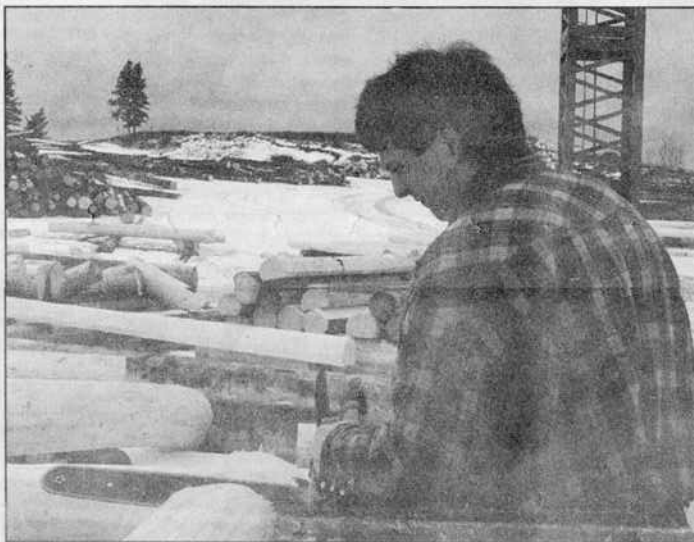
Timber is acquired through permit lots and most lots Sitka acquires are a long term supply of wood. Bramsleven says a good lot can last up to six years.

Recently Sitka has advertised for skilled log home builders in a Lower Mainland paper and says Bramsleven, the result was overwhelming.

"We received over a dozen applications of qualified individuals, and we are trying to get as many people back to work as we can."

Sheldon Young has been peeling logs for Sitka since November.

Prior to this position



S. MacEhron photo

CHRIS ST. JOHN uses a chain saw to score the logs which are used to build homes which are shipped around the world to customers eager to live in a unique log home built by our Canadian experts. The log home building industry is thriving despite economic downturns in forestry.

Young was working in a tree nursery. He says the homes are a value-added product since it can take 1-3 hours peeling time for each log depending upon size.

Bramsleven says, there are more jobs being created than just the ones in the yard due to the spin offs of the industry.

"From chainsaw suppliers, to haulers, to loggers, to farmers we are

creating a lot of jobs in the industry," says Bramsleven.

Even the waste chips in their holding yard finds it's way to contribute to the local economy.

"We give the chips to local farmers who use them to make beddings for their horse and cattle," says Bramsleven.

The market is steady says log home builders. "there has been some

impact of the Asian flu, but more buyers are taking advantage of the Canadian dollar.

"The house in the yard today, is being shipped to Colorado," says Bramsleven.

The log home building industry takes great pride in keeping the forest industry afloat in a time of uncertainty in British Columbia.