



Longtime Energy Star Builder Goes Green

If he ever wanted to take his turn at being an author, Michael Gingras could write the book on how to build energy-efficient log homes. Gingras, owner of Seven North Log Homes (New Haven, VT) and a builder/dealer for Real Log Homes (Hartland, VT), has built well over 300 log homes in his 21 years in the log home business. Many of his homes meet or exceed the requirements for Vermont Star, a statewide energy-efficiency program that mirrors Energy Star. This means homes built to this standard are at least 30% more energy efficient than the current model energy code calls for.



Mike Gingras has completed more than 300 log homes in his 21 years in the business, including this one.

Gingras specifies 8" thick logs to increase the thermal mass of the homes. "A lot of my competitors use 6" or 5" logs and they simply don't perform as well in this Vermont climate. The other great thing about the Real system is it allows logs to settle. As the logs acclimate to their environment, they shrink and settle a little bit. The Real system allows this settlement, which maintains compression from the roof to the floor system. This compresses the gasket system between the tongue and groove of each course of logs and maintains a weather-tight seal.

"A lot of my competitors have a different system, where logs aren't allowed to settle and when they start to dry and twist, there's no compression. That's where you have trouble with joints opening up. I've done more than 300 log homes and I've never had to caulk or chink any of those homes. That's how good the Real system is and it's why I've been with them so long. It's a great building system."

Before the housing market crash, Gingras attracted a loyal following of Vermonters interested in creating their dream rustic palaces that were also energy efficient. He typically built more than 30 homes a year. But even he has been affected by the slowdown. "I only did five homes last year, although some of them were pretty large, including an 11,000-sq.ft. home that was a joy to work on. I will do six to eight homes in 2009. Don't get me wrong, I'm happy to have that much work. The housing environment is the roughest I've seen in my 21 years in the business. But even with this slowdown, people are still interested in their dream log home."



This 11,000 sq.ft. home is one of Mike Gingras' recent projects.

Photos courtesy of Seven North Log Homes.

But now Gingras has broken ground on his first eco-friendly log home, a 2,500-sq.ft. log home in Sudbury, VT, which will be built to the NAHB's National Green Building Guidelines, which was recently approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). "We're also aiming for a five-star energy rating with this project as well, which I don't anticipate will be a problem," says Gingras.

"We have a great building site to work with, with a lot of south and west exposure. We will be incorporating a solar hot water heating system mounted on the roof for the domestic water," he says. "We have a lot of glass to capture passive solar heat in the winter, with 3' eaves on the south and west sides of the house to minimize heat gain in the summer. We will be mounting this home on a radiant heated slab and we will be utilizing a geothermal heating system, not burning oil or propane in this house. This is one of the first alternative energy sources I've installed. So it's fun—I'm still learning new things."

Gingras says the key to the performance of his homes lies in the building system created by Real Log Homes. To start,

Carolina Builder Finds Success On Green Path

When Bud and Louise Foster wanted to build a log home in South Carolina, they knew they wanted their dream home to be eco-friendly. They turned to Bill and Kathy Seymour and their two sons, William and Daren, to make it happen.

"Log homes are naturally energy efficient simply due to the building materials and construction techniques," says Bill Seymour, certified green builder and owner of Carolina Log Center, which uses log home packages from Katahdin Cedar Log Homes (Oakfield, ME). Katahdin has earned Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) chain-of-custody certification from the Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood program, which earns points among a variety of green building certification programs. The FSC certification enables the log home manufacturer to offer northern white cedar



Bud and Louise Foster in front of their new eco-friendly log home.

Photos courtesy of Carolina Log Center.

from responsibly managed forests. "We are very happy to have the first locally and nationally certified green home in these programs," says Seymour.

The Foster's home became the first home to be certified green by the Build Green Greater Columbia program. Additionally, the home is Energy Star certified and is a certified Gold level green home in the National Green Building Certification Program administered by the NAHB Research Center.

The 1,983-sq.ft. home passed the battery of tests with minimal modifications to the standard Katahdin log home package. For certification, the builder works with a

certifying agent or third-party certification company to ensure that each element of the home employs efficiencies and green practices. The process begins with the design, is followed throughout construction and is completed with a final inspection and blower door test to ensure minimal air infiltration.

The Build Green Greater Columbia program is administered by the Green Building Council of Greater Columbia, which is affiliated with the National Association of Home Builders' green building program. Homes in the program are third-party verified to ensure that they meet the criteria as outlined. There are three levels of certification in the Build Green Greater Columbia program: Bronze, Silver and Gold. The home built by Carolina Log Center is certified at the highest level—Gold.

Manufactured of high thermal value northern white cedar logs, the Foster's home features Katahdin's insulation package (which includes wrapping the inside of the log home with foam boards of insulation covered with tongue-and-groove paneling to maintain the look of a log home), Andersen 400 windows and patio doors, 20" to 24" overhangs, low-flow water fixtures and a 92% efficient heating and cooling system. The home features a fully covered front porch, a large, screened rear porch and oak floors.



The Foster's home under construction last year.

"The home is outfitted with a conditioned crawl space, tankless hot water heaters and a variety of other green building strategies," says Seymour. "Using a compass, we positioned the house on the building site to benefit from passive solar heat gain in the winter. We also positioned the home between trees, so we didn't have to cut down many trees at all—just a couple of dead trees where we positioned the driveway."

Carolina Log Center was founded in 1999, when Bill and Kathy and their two sons, William and Daren, decided they wanted to start a family business. Bill was previously in the auto sales industry, but had built several homes as well. "We like construction, felt comfortable in it." They had purchased land to build a log cabin and this inspired a vision to get into the log home builder/dealer business.

"When we started researching the log

home industry, we found out there is a huge difference between log packages, what manufacturers offer," says Seymour. "We eventually found Katahdin." Besides being FSC certified, the Katahdin system is really excellent to work with, Seymour adds. "They mill their logs to extremely precise dimensions and they are counter sunk to receive lag bolts. It's just a very smooth system that goes together well and makes for a tight envelope," Seymour says.

"Green building has always been a passion of mine. It stems back many years ago when I was a certified pipe welder. I built our first home in 1979. I built my own wood boiler with a heat exchanger and installed radiant heat in the floors of the home. I really enjoy being creative and saving money on energy. If we can break free from our dependence on oil, I think this country will be in a much safer position. So we do our part to help that along."

Carolina Log Center built eight log homes last year, with another dozen on tap for 2009. "We have been blessed. We understand that the market is not strong right now. But I'm a longtime fan of sales and marketing consultant Jerry Rouleau. He points out, correctly, that there are still buyers out there. So we will hang on and just go after those buyers who are still in the market."

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