

## "LEAST COST" OR "LUXURY" ROUTE — TAKE YOUR PICK!

# Living Is Easy In A Luxurious Log Home

While the uninitiated may still think of log homes as "cabins," the fact is that many going up today are large and luxurious mansion-like projects. Sure, it's entirely possible to build a "bare bones" log home on a limited budget. But the surprise is that you can also pull out all stops and end up with a home that's worth a good-sized spread in Texas.

Ralph and Pat Watkins, Jordan, Minn., started with a modest log package costing about \$9,500. They wound up putting a total of \$91,000 into their 1,748 sq. ft. home, not counting the land or garage.

"Before you say 'Ouch,'" Ralph says, "remember that the average current price tag of a new home in the suburbs is now \$100,979 — up from \$87,650 a year ago."

The home is 26' x 46'. It includes a large living room with adjoining dining area and kitchen, all open; two large bedrooms, one in a loft area; a main floor office for Ralph and a loft-area office under a sky window for Pat; a bathroom and a 46' x 6' porch.

It also boasts an exposed vaulted ceiling faced with knotty pine, a large east-facing bay window, sky window in the roof, large backyard patio and a 200' gravel driveway.

The full basement includes a root cellar, and the home has both baseboard electric heat and a wood-burning stove. Exterior walls are 10" logs; interior wall partitions are faced with rough-sawn cedar.

The work vs. build dilemma, of course, faces just about every couple thinking of building a home. But today, Ralph and Pat are living in that log house they dreamed of, and they feel that, in many ways, they did build it themselves. How so?

First, they were fortunate in having a close, trusted friend who is a general contractor — Russ Engle of Lakeville, Minn. He was willing to take on the assignment; Ralph and Pat were able to work closely with him on all details of the house — not only in drawing up initial plans, but throughout actual construction.

"Also," says Ralph, "we spent Saturdays and some Sundays for five months at the site, cutting trees from our own pine grove for support timbers, and otherwise working with our contractor.

"On many Saturdays, friends and acquaintances came to help — peeling bark from timbers, putting up log walls and otherwise helping in the house raising." Ralph and Pat credit a large part of their good results to being able to communicate well and work closely with the contractor.

Published by special arrangement with **The Family Handyman Magazine**, Copyright 1981, The Webb Company, 1999 Shepard Road, St. Paul, Minn. 55116. **Family Handyman** serves do-it-yourself home owners. One year subscription (10 issues) is \$7.50.

Ralph offers these points about contractors:

"You can't hire experience in log homes because most communities have so few such homes, and because so many are owner-built. Very few contractors ever get a crack at one. So chances are, if you approach a contractor, it may be his first log home.

"The result is that when you ask for a bid, he's leery — doesn't know how to estimate the job, and simply covers himself by adding in extra dollars as a hedge."

Ralph and Pat, knowing their contractor well, were able to cover this problem by agreeing on an open-end contract. "While the expected cost of the house was estimated in advance, we agreed to cover any losses. The contractor agreed to make only a small profit on the house.

"Unless you're working with someone you trust completely, such an open-end contract can keep you awake nights," Ralph cautions.

As it turned out, however, their home cost only 5% more than estimated, primarily due to add-ons over and above original plans. Also, lumber prices declined somewhat during the 1979-80 winter period while the house was under construction.

How does this kind of cost compare with other homes? "We believe we did pay a premium," says Ralph. "Our contractor figures our home cost \$6,244 more in log construction than it would have in conventional stud walls — that's about 7%."

For others planning a log home, Ralph and Pat offer this checklist of possible "surprises and pitfalls":

**Wall logs.** These need to join tightly as they stack, and at the corners. Log home manufacturers use a variety of systems, some good, some

### WHAT IT COST

**Ralph and Pat Watkins spent \$91,000 on their home, not counting garage and land. Here's how the costs broke down:**

Building permit	\$ 771
Landscape plan	563
Appliances, including freezer	2,220
Value of owner-supplied labor and timber from wood lot	2,025
Contractor's labor and fees	21,283
Electrical, including fixtures	4,603
Plumbing, including water softener and fixtures	2,824
Staining and painting	1,750
Well and water system	2,715
Septic tank system	1,535
Wallpapering	196
All floor coverings, including carpeting	3,295
Stonework, interior	996
Kitchen cabinets and bath vanity	1,733
Wood-burning stove and flue	1,177
Basic pre-cut log packages, without logs for gable ends	9,474
Balance, all other costs for labor, materials, freight	33,583
<b>Total cost</b>	<b>\$91,013</b>

Do-it-yourself construction would have trimmed price to \$64,000, without appliances, landscaping and permits.



"We feel we actually did build it ourselves," says Ralph. The Watkins were able to work closely with their contractor, who was a trusted friend.

not so good. "We bought our log package from Beaver Log Homes, which uses a double tongue-and-groove system with two soft rubber gaskets between logs," says Ralph. "No chinking is necessary. Some log systems spike logs together as you stack. Ours didn't."

**Shrinkage!** Plan on it, unless you buy logs that are dry and pre-shrunk, and most log systems aren't. "Our home is built to shrink from top to bottom, or settle, 2½" to 3" over the first two or three years. Some unique construction ideas have to be used to allow for this shrinkage — no small task! For example, our stairway to the loft area is hinged at the top and free-floating at the bottom where it meets the floor.

**Financing.** A few lenders still refuse to finance log homes.

**Local codes.** "We ran into a problem with bedroom window size, and had to re-work our plan. Building inspectors tend to watch more closely when the construction system is unconventional."

**Retaining the wood-look.** "Our painting subcontractor put on one coat of clear preservative stain on the exterior and we added another after move-in. We expect to put on a coat each year for several years to make sure we keep the natural log color."

**Energy conservation.** "Our logs are larger than most, 10" diameter, providing an R value of 11.16. You can beat that with a 2x6 stud wall filled with fiberglass insulation. We built an unusually well-insulated roof using 2x12 rafters, fiberglass and Styrofoam. The R value, except at the sky window, is 37.57. Our basement concrete block walls are faced on the outside with 1" of Styrofoam."

### LOG HOME SUPPLIERS

Following is a partial listing of major log home kit manufacturers. Some will do the total construction job, some sell and erect home packages, some sell just logs.

The companies listed without an asterisk are members of the Log Homes Council, which is part of the National Association of Home Manufacturers, 6521 Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, Va. 22042. The Log

Homes Council roster includes 21 companies, and they sell 70% of all pre-cut log homes, according to E.T. Fillion, chairman of the council. Fillion says that 80% of log home owners do some of the work themselves.

**Air-Lock Log Co.**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 2506, Las Vegas, N. M. 87701; **Alta Industries Ltd.**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 88, Halcottsville, N.Y. 12438; **Authentic Homes Corp.**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 1288, Laramie, Wyo. 82070; **Beaver Log Homes**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 1966, Grand Island, Neb. 68801; **Boyer Falls Log Homes**, Dept. FH, Highway 131, Boyer Falls, Mich. 49713; **Cabin Log Co. of America**, Dept. FH, 2809 Highway 167N, Lafayette, La. 70507; **Green Mountain Cabins**, Dept. FH, Box 190, Chester, Vt. 05143; **Justus Co.**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 98300, Tacoma, Wash. 98499; **Lincoln Logs Ltd.\***, Dept. FH, 11 County Line Rd., Chesterstown, N.Y. 12817; **Lodge Log**, Dept. FH, 3200 Gowen Rd., Boise, Ida. 83705; **Logcrafters**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 286, Lookout Mountain, Tenn. 37350; **Lok-N-Logs**, Dept. FH, Rt. #2, Box 212, Sherburne, N.Y. 13460; **Lumber Enterprises**, Dept. FH, Gallatin Rd., Bozeman, Mont. 59715; **National Log Construction Co.\***, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 69, Thompson Falls, Mont. 59873; **New England Log Homes**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 126, Groton, Vt. 05046; **Northern Products Log Homes**, Dept. FH, Bomarc Rd., Bangor, Maine 04401; **Real Log Homes**, National Information Center, Dept. FH, Box 202, Hartland, Vt. 05048; **Rocky Mountain Log Homes**, Dept. FH, 3353 Highway 93 S., Hamilton, Mont. 59840; **Rustic Log Homes**, Dept. FH, 204 W. Ridge St., Kings Mountains, N.C. 28086; **Rustics of Lindbergh Lake**, Dept. FH, Condon, Mont. 59826; **Timber Log Homes\***, Austin Drive, Marlborough, Conn. 06447; **Ward Cabin Co.**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box 72, Houlton, Maine 04730; **Western Valley Log Homes**, Dept. FH, P.O. Box D, Hamilton, Mont. 59840; **Wilderness Log Homes\***, Dept. FH, R.R. 2, Plymouth, Wis. 53073. □