



HERMANN THOENE



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Hermann Thoene at his Ecolog show home in Central Saanich. More than 100 of the energy-efficient houses have been sold in Ontario.

Log Homes for the Eco-conscious

Near the eastern end of Stelly's Cross Road in Central Saanich, where it intersects with East Saanich Road, stands an eye-catching, log-cabin-style show home built by Hermann Thoene, a German immigrant who came to Canada 11 years ago. But unlike the round-log cabins of yesteryear, it pairs watertight squared-timber construction enhanced with sophisticated insulation and chinking for a high level of energy efficiency.

That's to be expected when the name of your company is Ecolog Homes. The business originated more than a decade ago when Peter Schleifenbaum, a friend of Thoene's who also came to Canada from Germany, was picking up the pieces from a series of tornadoes that struck southern Ontario in April 1996. Two years later, he had built his first Ecolog home from trees felled during the violent storms. Today, more than 100 Ecolog homes, cottages, or commercial buildings, ranging in size from 400 to 3,000 square feet, have been built in Ontario.

"When I saw Peter's homes, and saw that it's a really profitable business, I thought, 'Something like this must be possible in B.C.' I did some research and found that no company was building homes like these."

Prior to founding Van Isle Ecolog Homes Inc., Thoene, a computer specialist by trade, had never worked in construction.

"I had never held a chainsaw in my hand before last year!" he chuckles. Now, he's a veritable lumberjack, driving forklifts, building jigs, and, of course, cutting timber from Island-grown, sustainably sourced Douglas fir and hemlock at a workspace he rents at Cowichan Lake Timber sawmill. In addition to learning the woodworking trade, Thoene took courses to become a certified energy adviser, allowing him to provide home energy performance consultation in concert with or independent of his work with Ecolog.

In terms of energy-efficient homes, "We are light-years behind here in North America compared to Europe," says Thoene. "Customers say energy efficiency is nice to

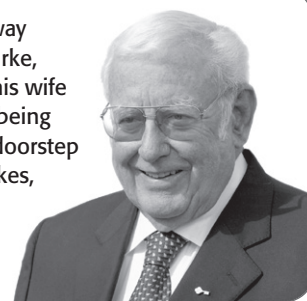
have, but it's far below other factors on their list of priorities."

Thoene lives at the Saanichton show home along with his teenage son and dog. He also owns a rental home in Langford. He says building his own Ecolog house has been a great advertisement for the concept, drawing more than 400 inquiries. Two Ecolog homes have been sold in B.C., he says.

"It's nothing to get rich off of, but it's a good starting point," he says. "When you start a new business, there are roadblocks. I worked in big corporate business for 20 years. This is my first time running my own business. It's very different. It takes a long 'breath,' you know, financially as well as ... believing in your business until you get your first sale. I am very happy I got these two sales this year."

See www.ecolog-homes.ca.

THRIFTY FOODS CO-FOUNDER ALEX A. CAMPBELL passed away Tuesday, October 11, at age 70. Longtime employee Dean Clarke, 55, joined the company as a grocery clerk in 1981 as he and his wife were expecting their first child. Just a couple of months after being hired, Campbell and his wife, Jo, showed up on the Clarkes' doorstep carrying a playpen, high chair, and toys. "I thought, 'Holy smokes, what's this all about?'" he tells *Douglas*. "Those were the lean years, when Thrifty's was a new business, but that's just the way they always operated."



THRIFTY FOODS