



Log cabin style on the square



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Celebrating beauty and local design style

This weekly series takes readers on a tour of outstanding homes in Greater Victoria. Writer Thelma Fayle and award-winning photographer Ted Grant take you inside houses that show off unique architecture and design.

Look for House Beautiful every Saturday in the Times Colonist Homes section.

A hurricane in Ontario in 1966 is rooted as a factor in Hermann Thoene's decision to build himself a log home five decades later.

At the time, a forester friend had been looking into ways to make use of the wasted fallen wood. He learned that although Canadian pioneers built log homes from round logs as temporary structures, they used squared logs in their permanent buildings — many of which are still standing.

When Thoene was laid off after 20 years as a project manager with a large computer company, he decided to pick up on his friend's research. He set up a website and rented a booth at a home show in Victoria to gauge interest in log homes.

"I became convinced that people would never

buy a log home from a picture, so I decided to build my own," says Thoene.

Although founded in a practical realism, Thoene says growing up in Germany might have given him some residual romantic notions about the idea of building a log house in Canada.

The thought of the project aligned with his personal feelings about being a good environmental steward and, in spite of never having built a home, he felt inspired.

He bought a piece of land on Stelly's Cross Road, and started building in November 2009. A year later, Thoene, his 13-year-old son and their newly acquired SPCA rescue dog, Koda, moved into their new home.

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Log cabin construction gave owner a lot of fun

"My son helped out on projects, but to be honest, he is not very interested in the space beyond what he calls his 'Boy Cave,'" Thoenes says.

"When I moved in, I was surprised at how comfortable the climate feels in the house," Thoenes says.

The squared logs give his home a contemporary presence, along with the same warm and cozy feel we usually expect in a log house.

The wood stove heats the entire main and upper floors of the 2,700-square-foot home, with its efficiently designed 1,000-square-foot footprint — no doubt a factor in the high energy rating from Canada EnergyGuide.

"After I turn off the wood stove, the house stays warm for almost 24 hours," Thoenes says. "Unlike a stick house that cools quickly, logs store a lot of energy."

Thoenes points out the large woodshed and notes that construction leftovers will give them two to three years of free home heating.

Most of the second-growth hemlock used in Thoenes's home comes from the Cowichan Valley. "We have plenty of this valuable resource, and it regrows in 50 years," Thoenes says.

Between the squared logs used in the walls is "chinking," estimated to last 50 years or more. In the current architectural trend to "show rather than conceal" certain structural ele-

ments, the logs and chinking are featured as part of the design.

Rather than have one big room with a vaulted ceiling in the middle of the upper loft, which he thought would be wasteful, Thoenes designed three comfortably sized bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs.

The doors and windows are called "tilt-turn" and are made by Vera-DE in Courtenay. "Everyone has them in Germany," says Thoenes. "They are good for ventilation and are totally theft-proof."

"I try to go with local people wherever possible; unfortunately the only exception was for the kitchen cupboards. I was restricted by budget, and ended up going with Ikea cupboards. I don't know how they can produce so inexpensively. The cupboards have features [for which] you would pay at least \$20,000, and these cost \$6,000."

The radiant in-floor heating in the basement suite is supported by solar panel and hydro backup. The painted concrete floor looks and feels like tile.

"I put four layers of paint on the concrete and masking tape to give it this effect," Thoenes says. "The builder suggested the design and I thought it was a great idea."

"These homes are not for a mass market, but I like the idea of encouraging some diversity in homebuilding

rather than a repetition of the standard and identical West Coast variety."

Thoenes will finish landscaping in April just in time to participate in the annual Young Life Home Tour — a fundraiser supporting local programs for teenagers. Thoenes is amazed that 800 to 1,200 people would pay \$25 each to go into 10 local homes, and have been doing so on this tour for more than 20 years.

"It will be a good profile for my home, but it is also a really great cause," Thoenes says.

As we stand outside and admire the charming log house with its richly hued cedar exterior and the contrasting, lower slate façade, Thoenes animatedly points out the artwork in the black railings and the sturdiness of the red metal roof.

I suggest Thoenes is really having fun.

"Yes, absolutely," he says. "Building this home for myself and my son has been satisfying in a different way from past accomplishments in my computer industry career."

"This house reflects the things I care about. I designed it. I lifted the logs myself and I smelled the cedar as I was sanding. I built it from the ground up, and it feels good to know that. It feels rewarding; and yes, I am definitely having fun."



Photos clockwise from the top: The wood-burner heat both floors of the house.

The porch is defined by the metalwork, and it fits in beautifully with the logs.

The chinking found throughout the house — the design of the house.

Diagonal wood trim in the bathroom is reflect

On the stairway, most of the second-growth Valley.

The dining room fills with light from the glass

The master bedroom is one of three located o

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urning fireplace in the living room can
the stone covering the exterior walls
— even in the bathroom — is part of
ected in the mirror frame.
hemlock comes from the Cowichan
ss door leading outside.
on the second floor.

CREDITS

Main contractor: Walter Vandenbroek, WNU Construction
Plumbing: Dennis Litster, Yubou
Electric: Robert Gendall, Duncan
Metal Work: Mike Mintern, Cowichan Bay
Roof: Square Deal Roofing, Victoria
Heavy Timber: Cowichan Lake Timber, sawmill
Cedar wood: Seaside Productions, East Sooke
Light fixtures: Pine Lighting, Victoria
Windows: Vera-DE, Courtenay
Building Supplies: Slegg Lumber
Interior Doors: Windsor Plywood (B.C. Doors)



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