



Pioneering Work - Adding Value to Wood in the Cariboo

Early settlers to the Cariboo struggled to build homes from the materials surrounding them, using horse and manpower to hew shelter from the wilderness.

The words "log house" still conjure up images of rustic backwoods settlements, a fishing camp on a distant lake perhaps, or a tumbledown homestead from Gold Rush days.

Those homesteaders would not believe their eyes if they saw what log homes have become today, but they just might be happy to know the craft they learned out of necessity has survived in the Cariboo.

"Their idea of a cabin in the woods is an 8,000-square-foot log home in the mountains of Colorado," he says.

Today, the Williams lake worksite, the largest of three sites, is bustling. There are nine houses in various states of completion under construction, including one bound for Spain and another for Germany. British Columbia-built log homes are in demand around the world.

"There are no better log home builders than here in British Columbia," Chevigny says. "we've got the quality timber here, and we've got the craftspeople."

Houses are built completely by hand from western red cedar, spruce, pine or fir, following in-depth consultation between the customer and Pioneer's drafts people. Once the house is built at the log yard, the pieces are numbered, and like massive tinker toys, dismantled, put into containers and transported to the home site to be reassembled.

The clients range from one end of the spectrum to the other. There's the wealthy U.S. customer who is having a 114,000 square-foot log house constructed (Pioneer's largest project to date), keeping the whole crew busy for about eight months. Then there is the local Cariboo customer who wants something decidedly more modest but equally unique.

"Traditionally the people who want these homes are very traditional in values," Chevigny says. They

appreciate the craftsmanship, they appreciate the people."

The company employs about 70 people, including a U.S. crew who assembles the homes once they reach their final destination. Several master craftsmen from Switzerland work for Pioneer, but most of the crew is local, trained onsite. "I figure we have the best crew in the world, the best people and the best craftsmen," Chevigny says.

The crew takes pride in their work, knowing it will be internationally recognized as a Canadian-built log home. "They're building someone's dreams with their own hands," he says.

Business is booming. By September 2000, the company already knew just what they would be working on for all of 2001, which is, incidentally, about 20 per cent more than in 2000.