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## TOYS FOR THE BIG BOYS

BY ANITA MURRAY JAN 2, 2014 IN HOMES



Lincoln Logs these are not, but the idea is the same.

The century-old toy invented by the son of architect Frank Lloyd Wright consists of notched miniature logs that are used to build small forts and buildings. For Pioneer Log Homes, those notched logs weigh thousands of kilograms and the buildings are massive million-dollar mansions.

In a new series premiering Sunday called *Timber Kings*, cameras follow the Pioneer crew as they construct, disassemble, ship and rebuild log homes for an elite clientele under tight deadlines, intense pressure and frustrating obstacles.

Along the way, the humour and friction among the staff offer a glimpse at a somewhat dysfunctional “family” that makes up the crew, who manage to work through it all to get the job done.

“When people think about building a log home, they haven’t just thought about it for a day or a week — they’ve dreamt about it their whole life,” Pioneer general manager André Chevigny says in the opening episode. “That dream could be a small cabin on a lake somewhere or it could be a 50,000-square-foot house.”

And it’s that dream that drives the expertise and intense commitment of the Pioneer crew, who can do amazingly skilled and detailed work with what seems like a blunt instrument — a chainsaw.

“Lots of carpenters they call me a hack because I run a chainsaw,” says Pioneer builder Beat Schwaller, “until we start working together and they see that we can cut more precise with a chainsaw than they do with a skill saw.”

The series opens with the progress on two homes under construction: a \$4-million, 4,400-square-foot home planned for a lakeside lot and a \$5-million, 6,400-square-foot dream home for a retired millionaire.

The homes are first built at the Pioneer work yard in Williams Lake,



B.C. Each piece used in the construction is carefully numbered — the lakeside home has about 1,500 — before the homes are taken apart and shipped to the build site. “(The numbering) is unbelievably important, especially on the other end when they’re setting it up,” says crane operator Danielle Haynes. “They have to know where each log goes.”

At the other end, a well-choreographed production schedule must be in place so that each truck arrives at the right time and in the right

order to put the home back together, like a giant puzzle.

Except, inevitably, things go wrong to throw a wrench in the plans. For the lakeside lot in Ontario, seven tractor trailers travelling 4,200 kilometres across the Rockies and a good chunk of the country must end their journey by getting through a four-km winding and hilly bush road with three narrow bridges and sharp curves in the middle of winter.

Is it a surprise that one truck gets stuck and another goes right off a bridge, seriously threatening an already tight four-day time limit to put the home together?

Along the way, there are fascinating details about what goes into building these giant log homes, like the tradition of a “family tree”, which is the anchor of the home (and often the focal point) and holds up the main roof structure.

In the case of the dream home, client Harry Scott chooses a 1,000-year old western red cedar, partly because it’s the biggest one in the Pioneer yard. Almost 12 feet across, the \$80,000 tree will be cleaned and sculpted to create a beautiful centrepiece in his Arkansas home.

“The house is one-of-a-kind and that’s what I wanted,” says the 70-something Scott, who has been dreaming of a larger-than-life log home since he was in his 20s. Although it’s hard to tell from the show, Scott’s home was two-and-a-half years in the making. Once shipped to Arkansas, it was put back together in seven days.

These are toys for the big boys.

*Timber Kings premieres Sunday at 10 p.m. on HGTV.*

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