

Ten Common Myths About Log Homes

1. Log homes are not energy efficient

Most of these rumors have been started by individuals who have never lived in a log home or are "concerned" relatives giving free advice to other relatives who are considering building a log home. Now let me say that the log home that I am talking about is one that is well designed, manufactured to modern standards and built by someone who knows what they are doing.

Most building codes only recognize "R" factor which does not take into account the tightness of a well-built log home. It does not take in the mass of wood which holds the heat far better than a flimsy stud home. Recently a client of ours finished his log home manufactured of dry, Western red cedar logs. At that time he needed to get an air-tightness test from the county. It came in as the second tightest home they have ever tested....most of them being stud homes.

In the late 90's it got down to minus 27 degrees F in Pueblo, Co. We did not have any heat on in our 3,000 sq. ft. model home. The next morning I went in at 10 AM and there wasn't a problem. The next morning it was minus 10 degrees and on Monday morning it was zero. The model was totally unheated for the whole weekend as we did not work over the weekend. The model had 9 tropical plants in it, including a fern in the window. I lost two African violets which are very sensitive to temperature. The fern in the bay window had no damage what-so-ever.

In short, there is still a reason why log homes are still being built in very cold climates such as Canada and Alaska!

2. Termites and other wood boring insects will be attracted to log homes and set about devouring them

Wood boring insects are not attracted to large quantities of wood. If the logs are constructed of green, unseasoned logs with the bark still on the logs, then some wood boring insects can become established under the bark during the summer and live there for several years. Once the wood is dry these insects are not attracted to the logs. In all my 35 plus years in the log home industry, I have never seen termites in a log home!

3. Log homes are more expensive than a conventional home

First of all, what is a "conventional" home? Is it a double wide or a modular? Is it a 2x4 framed home with vinyl siding? Is it a Tudor home with field stone exterior?

Of course a custom log home with 8 or 10-inch logs will cost more for the logs than a pile of 2x4's and vinyl siding. But the logs will go up faster saving labor. I have also noted over the years that people who build a log home don't finish it off with cheap carpeting, sheet rock, and fixtures. As the exterior walls are the least expensive of any home, the amenities installed within (wood flooring and ceilings, a fireplace, a solid wood paneling on the walls) can boost the price of the home substantially.

One of our clients told me many years ago that after the house was closed in from the weather, they felt that they were nearly done with the large expenditures for the construction of the home. They started buying better materials and upgrading the cabinets, carpet, etc. It wasn't long before they realized that they were going to be running short of money to complete the home.

In short, a log home is comparable to a standard home, if you compare the same apples-to-apples.

4. Log homes are a fire hazard

Again this is an argument that goes against common sense and logic. When you start a fire in the fireplace or build a campfire, you start with small pieces of wood.... not large solid logs. When a fire gets into the walls of a frame home, a chimney is formed in the walls and the spread is rapid. A solid log wall is very resistant to heat due to its mass. I have put a propane torch against a log wall until I got tired of holding the torch and the log wall would not hold a flame and burn of its own. When a log home burns, the sub floor, interior walls and the conventional roofing is the first to go. The log walls would be last.

5. Insurance rates are higher for log homes

This could be a case of some insurance companies as I have not called all of them. However, in my 35 plus years in the industry I have not been contacted by anyone who had trouble getting insurance.... Our insurance company didn't even frown on the fact that we have a cedar shake roof with a wood stove in one part of the building!

6. Banks will not make a loan on a log home

Of course there are banks that do not want to make a loan on a home that they know nothing about. The banks that we have dealt with get comparables in the area in which the home is being built so... that they know how much they can loan to the client for construction of the home. They will make a \$500,000 loan on a log home if comparable homes in the area sell for \$350,000! In short, have our clients had trouble getting loans on their log home? The answer is NO!

7. Log homes will rot easily

Yes, wood does rot, but only between the moisture content of 30% to 60%. There is no such thing as dry rot as wood must be quite moist to rot. So a properly designed log home (or any home for that matter) with adequate roof overhangs, rain gutters, down spouts and periodic maintenance will endure of generations.

Whenever I get a call from someone with a rotting problem, it is due to the fact they have defied basic logic and common sense. Furthermore they spend 4 hours each weekend on their lawn but never seem to be concerned about the home itself. The proof in the pudding is seeing the log structures in Europe (and the United States) that are in great shape after hundreds of years.

8. Log Homes require more time to build than a conventional stud home

The log walls go up quickly by those who are knowledgeable about log construction. If the weekend do-it-yourself family does it, it takes quite a bit longer. Here is the secret to log construction... when you place a log you have the interior of your home, the exterior of the home, the structural component and the insulation all in one component. After the log walls are up, you are done with the exterior of the home except the interior and exterior stain or finish.

A frame home has many steps; stud walls, exterior plywood, exterior roofer's felt, and siding. For the interior the home is insulated, a vapor barrier installed sheet rock with its taping, sanding, taping, sanding, and finally the paint. Whew!

9. Most contractors cannot build a log home

This is not true. If they do not want to build it, it is not because the system is too complex but rather they are like the old dog that doesn't want to learn new tricks! In my many years of experience I have found that a first time contractor can build a log home. The final product will depend on his willingness to put the same degree of craftsmanship into the log home as he does the frame home that he has built in the past.

10. The log home is hard to maintain

In our present age of "space age" materials the public has been swamped with claims of low maintenance. When motor vehicles used to have the oil changed at 1,500 miles the claim of the sales person is to change the oil at 6,000 miles. Counter tops, siding, windows and roofing all give the claim of longevity and low maintenance. Well, to use an old adage, if it is worth owning it is worth taking care of.

The first step in the maintenance of the log home is proper design (The Complete Guide to Log Homes). The next step is periodic maintenance with a good stain purchased from a company that specializes in log home products and not something off the shelf of a local discount store.

The exterior of the home is the main area of maintenance that must be taken care of during the life of the home. The interior stained or varnished walls will never need to be redone to any normal failure. If little Johnny smears the walls with marker or crayon, then drastic steps must be taken to bring the walls back to their original condition. Always remember that conventional homes with an exterior of paint must be refurbished periodically as well. There is no free lunch and there is no such thing as minimal or extended maintenance.

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