



# Mill-Direct News

*Living the Log Home Lifestyle*

Summer 2017

## VIEW FROM THE MILL

*By Levi Hochstetler*

We are right in the middle of the spring bird migration. Next week, I want to take most of the week off in order to bird watch. I hope to take at least one son along each day. A few days ago several of the boys had 20 different species of eastern wood warblers on our property. Bird watching has been such a wonderful hobby/activity with our children through the years and would recommend it to anyone raising a family. It doesn't have to be birds. Anything in nature: flowers, trees, animals, bugs, butterflies, dragonflies – something worthwhile to keep them off You-Tube!

I apologize that we didn't get the article on the planer mill ready as we had promised. We will try to get it in the fall issue.

Earlier this spring we were starting to get kind of concerned as it had been getting sort of dry around here. However, foundations were easy to put in. Lately the rain can't seem to stop. We are having very abnormally wet weather. Things really are "growing like weeds!"

Sometimes clients ask us, "How many homes do you guys do in a year?" The answer is, "it all depends." Last year, we did 59. That's up from the bottom of the recession of 40 in 2011 but down from before the recession in 2006 of 129 units. The most units we have ever done were 151 in 2003. However, we had record sales last year in the terms of dollars. This is because we do more complete packages today, plus the homes are bigger. In fact, we didn't even offer complete packages prior to 2008.

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## 23 Most Frequently Asked Questions about Log Homes

*- By Levi Hochstetler*

*This story is the 4th & final part of a continuing story.*

### #19: Which is better, kiln-dried or air-dried?

Each drying process has its advantages. Perhaps the biggest advantage of air-drying is simply the cost savings. Dry-kilns are a major investment and are expensive to operate. Thus, smaller or start-up log home companies often don't have the monetary resources needed to invest in one. The only other advantage to the consumer is the fact that the slower the logs dry, the less stress they will have – resulting in less checking.

Dr. Gene Wengerd, Ph.D. of Wood Doctors Rx, LLC, says, "kiln-dried logs are better than air-dried products as the moisture content is lower in kiln-dried material which means, in turn, that most of the natural shrinkage that will occur in wood as it dries will occur during the drying process rather than after installation. As a result they will be more stable – requiring less caulking and problems, like doors and windows sticking." Other benefits he says is, "the material is 10 to 20% lighter than air-dried and 50% lighter than green logs and that the logs are sanitized from mold, mildew, stain fungi and decay fungi (which cause rot), plus insects,

*continued on page 2*



## Avoiding the Big Mistake - *By Levi Hochstetler*

Buying a new home may be the largest investment that you have made in your lifetime and can be the most regrettable. But with careful planning it can be a very pleasurable experience that is both fulfilling and worthwhile—especially if it's a log home.

The key to a successful project chiefly depends on who you pick for your two significant others; first, the log home designer/manufacture and second, the builder. However, this can be a daunting decision. With this article, I hope to give you some helpful guidelines on what to look for in order to avoid some of the pitfalls. Having your own dream log home designed and then built should be a good experience and, an enjoyable journey.

Whatever you do, don't fall for the ill-conceived notion that it's better to have one company take care of the complete project all the way from design through move in. While this seems an easy and convenient way out, it can open you up to be taken advantage of. When contracting with the designer/manufacturer separately from the builder you have a certain degree of checks and balances. When you throw in the building department for good measure, you should feel confident that the trio

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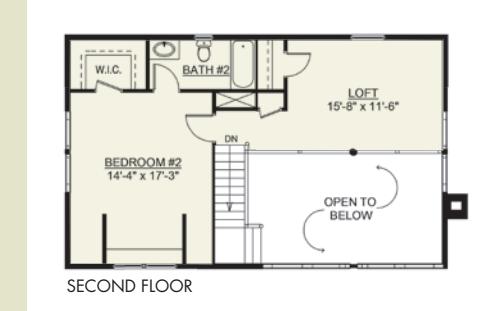
If you're looking for a picturesque, 2-bedroom vacation home or simply downsizing, the popular Mountain Laurel may be just right for you. It packs a lot of features into a smaller plan without sacrificing the essentials.

Both bedrooms have their own private baths and plenty of closet space. The spacious great room has a large stone fireplace, cathedral ceiling with exposed timbers and lavatory.

The second floor is perfect for guests since the bedroom has a bath and walk-in closet. The open loft also has a closet

and plenty of room for an entertainment center or sewing room.

Outside, the wrap-around deck offers a place to relax and take in the great outdoors!



## 23 Most Frequently Asked Questions about Log Homes - *continued from page 1*

their larvae and eggs are killed when temperatures exceed 130 degrees Fahrenheit." Furthermore, as these pathogens require water to survive and kiln-drying eliminates the required moisture." He also stated that, "when wood is heated over 150 degrees Fahrenheit in the kiln, the sap, pitch or resin in wood that would be liquid at room temperatures is evaporated. The likely hood of seepage of sap after installation is virtually eliminated." Another point he made, is that "kiln-dried wood is ready for application of finish, and that in many cases, the finish itself will penetrate deeper with kiln-dried wood, providing longer lasting finishes."

A respectable builder would not consider building a stick home with anything but kiln-dried, 2x framing material; nor would he allow the cabinet and trim manufacturer to use air-dried lumber to build the cabinets, trim or doors. So why should you or anyone else even consider using anything but kiln-dried in a log home where the logs stacked on top of each other make the importance of properly kiln-dried material far greater than with stick build homes.

We use a 2-step method in drying our logs. First, we air-dry them for 9 months, and then we finish drying them in our state-of-the-art SII dry kilns. This gives our clients the benefit of a slower dried air-dried logs, plus all the benefits that come with properly kiln-dried logs.

Because drying has such a large impact on the performance of your logs in your home, it is time well spend for you to take a close look at your log home manufacturer's drying facility before signing on the dotted line. If **kiln-dried** is your choice than there should be a large kiln on the ground. If **air-dried** is the choice than there should be an air-drying yard with stacks and stacks of timber on stickers. Don't settle to have your dream home air-dried on the way to your building site!

With today's advancement in pre-drying logs and the added benefits and peace of mind it brings, you should think twice before considering green or wet logs, unless you're building a shack out back or don't mind dealing with settling jacks and willing to put up with all the added maintenance issues.

### #20: Which log corner is the best, dovetail, saddle-notch or butt-&-pass?

If the question is which is the strongest, than the answer is all three corners are much stronger than any stick-framed corner with a single 2x4 lapping on top and OSB sheathing on the outside. Accordingly the answer is buy whatever is the most pleasing to your eye. Dovetails, which go well with square logs, tend to give your home an antique look; whereas a saddle notch, often associated with round logs, gives it more of a western look. The butt & pass is more of a simple look that the early settlers used for a temporary cabin, giving your home a country flavor.

### #21: Post-and-beam, heavy timber roof and loft, compared to 2x framing lumber?

Without pictures it's difficult to explain the difference. Large structural timbers or poles throughout are what make a log home. A log home without the large timber is like a stone fire-place without a mantel, it simply doesn't look complete. Potentially, a stick 2x framed loft and roof system with fiberglass roof insulation with a few decorative timbers thrown in could save you \$15,000 on an average 2000 square foot home. However, the post-and-beam system using polystyrene insulation panels is much better. This is because with cathedral ceilings it's very difficult to get enough ventilation so you don't have problems with condensation using 2x framing and fiberglass insulation. The moisture from condensation can stain your ceiling, cause mold and render your insulation useless.

### #22: Do log homes need a special foundation?

Frequently, folks ask if an 8" concrete block foundation wall is strong enough to carry a log home. The answer is very much so; in fact, with the added weight of the logs from above they become stronger and can withstand more side load than when they carry less weight. All other foundation types that are structurally ok for conventional stick homes such as prefab, poured concrete and insulated concrete forms work for a log home as well.

### #23: Which logs are better, single or double tongue and groove?

Go with whatever comes standard from your supplier. This often gets used as a marketing ploy but one has very little advantage over the other. However, it is very important that there is a tongue-and-groove and that there is gasket and a cavity for it. Otherwise, if the gasket is squeezed between the logs without a cavity your home will basically be sitting on sponge. This will cause excessive settling once your home gets loaded with snow or people.

A reversed tongue-and-groove where the groove is on the bottom rather than on top, such as in a spline system, may allow water to enter and lay in the groove, thus potentially causing decay problems. 

## Avoiding the Big Mistake - *continued from page 1*

will keep each other honest and on their toes. If you do your homework in picking these companies, you shouldn't have any regrets.

What are some of the pitfalls in having your home build when you don't have a check and balance scenario in place? First of all, when the builder also acts as your designer he can design it to be more profitable and not necessarily with the quality you prefer. Also, you lose the ability to have several builders bid on the project, whereas with the designer/manufacture you have the option to get as many bids from builders as you want.

In order to get a true, apples-to-apples bid you will need two things: the complete construction documents which should include a spec sheet, and a complete building material package quote from the manufacturer. Otherwise, if the builder supplies the building material, one builder can substitute material with lesser quality than their competitors; thus, you end up with bids that may be apples-to-oranges. Remember, this is not your normal stick home where the builder buys material from a Home Depot or local lumber supplier to build your home. However, for your peace of mind, even then the designer should be independent of the builder. While there are many good, well-established builders out there that would, by all means do a good job, unfortunately many aren't and may have only a tool belt to their claim-to-fame as a quality builder.

### Deciding on the Designer/Manufacturer

How can you tell if the log home manufacturer is for real, and most importantly, financially stable? The key is to visit them. Most log home manufactures will have a nice model for you to look at. While their model is something you will want to see for design purposes, you won't learn much about their financial well-being from it. What you want to see is their manufacturing facility. Pay attention to these few details.



**For quality control, manufacturer should have their own kiln operation**

job. But from our experience there is a big difference from having total, quality-drying control of the lumber in-house compared to outside operators. You don't want to jeopardize your dream home by not using properly dried logs. The right dryness of your logs is far too important to leave it to chance.



**Inventory should be well taken care of**

A company that claims to manufacture 50 log homes should have a substantial amount of inventory. This should be inventory that doesn't look like it's been sitting around for many years. (Note: air-dried logs will be weathered) If you see very little inventory it probably is a sign of a financially stressed company. Additionally, they would have a hard

time servicing you if you ran out of material. Also, check and make sure the inventory is well taken care of. You don't want substandard material for your home.



**There should be a substantial inventory of material air drying**

recession several manufacturers went under. Unfortunately some people lost their down payments, which for some, was all of their life savings. Obviously, had they checked them out beforehand with the above queries, in most cases this wouldn't have happened.

In one of the next issues we hope to continue with the second part; Deciding on the Builder

Next, how is their facility – is it clean? Do they practice good housekeeping? I think this is important from the standpoint that if they don't care about their own facility, how do you expect them to care about your project?

You should never hand over your money and sign on the dotted line before first seeing who it is that you're dealing with. During the

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# Mountain HIDEAWAY

by Bill Dinkins



The scenic beauty of central Pennsylvania did not escape the eyes of Dennis and Tammy Fix, and Dennis' father held the answer to their dreams. The breathtaking 1.5 acres of rugged mountainous terrain he sold them would be the perfect site for their log home getaway. This land was heavily forested and inhabited only by nature's critters - squirrels, raccoons, opossums, deer and black bear - to name a few. A choir of songbirds completed the list and provided a daily serenade. It seemed a relaxing way to escape the hustle and bustle of their day-to-day lives, especially since they both loved the outdoors.

The Fixes got the urge to build a log home after visiting the Seven Springs Log Home Show and talking to Hochstetler Milling. It didn't take much coaxing by Dennis to convince his wife to visit Hochstetler's McKay model, after seeing it on the internet. They made the two-hour drive to the model to check it out, and once inside, were quickly convinced. In fact, Tammy's first words were, "this is it." The overall sense of "casual comfort," punctuated by the structural enhancement of the exposed beams and rafters, was a reassuring touch. They met with Cheryl to discuss their needs and settled on the Hudson, a slightly smaller version of the McKay. Samuel Mast, owner of Cedar Creek, was hired as the builder and began construction in April, 2013. Eleven days later their home was under roof! Most of the planning was done over the phone and Dennis was surprised at how smooth the project went. The home was "turn-keyed" two weeks before Labor Day and the Fixes were able to move in and enjoy the invigorating fall weather and vivid colors.

Prior to building their getaway the Fixes spent much of their free time perusing antiques at flea markets - all the while planning to display them in their new home. For example, the open loft has a large copper firewood tub, a century-old metal cedar chest, railroad lanterns, and assorted hand tools including a rug beater. A beautiful hand-made log cabin quilt with its traditional geometric pattern adorns one wall. Not to be outdone, Dennis contributed to the overall decorative scheme with a few of his own ideas. There are three trophy whitetail mounts in the great room, along with a hand-carved wooden fish and several decorative ducks, an old duck decoy, and a small wooden canoe for holding books, snacks, etc. In the master bedroom, their love of nature is readily apparent with silhouettes of black bears and pine trees on the area rug and bedspread.

Although the upstairs is finished, the Fixes are nearing completion in the basement where they plan to add another bedroom, a bathroom, and a man cave, where Dennis can display more of his hunting trophies. Another addition was a covered rear porch instead of an uncovered deck. In the master bath, the Fixes changed the floor plan slightly to include a sliding pocket door which takes up less space and provides privacy between the dressing area and the garden tub and shower.

When I asked Dennis what he likes most about their home he didn't hesitate, "when I come here it's like all the stress of the day melts away."





*For additional information about the home of the Fixes  
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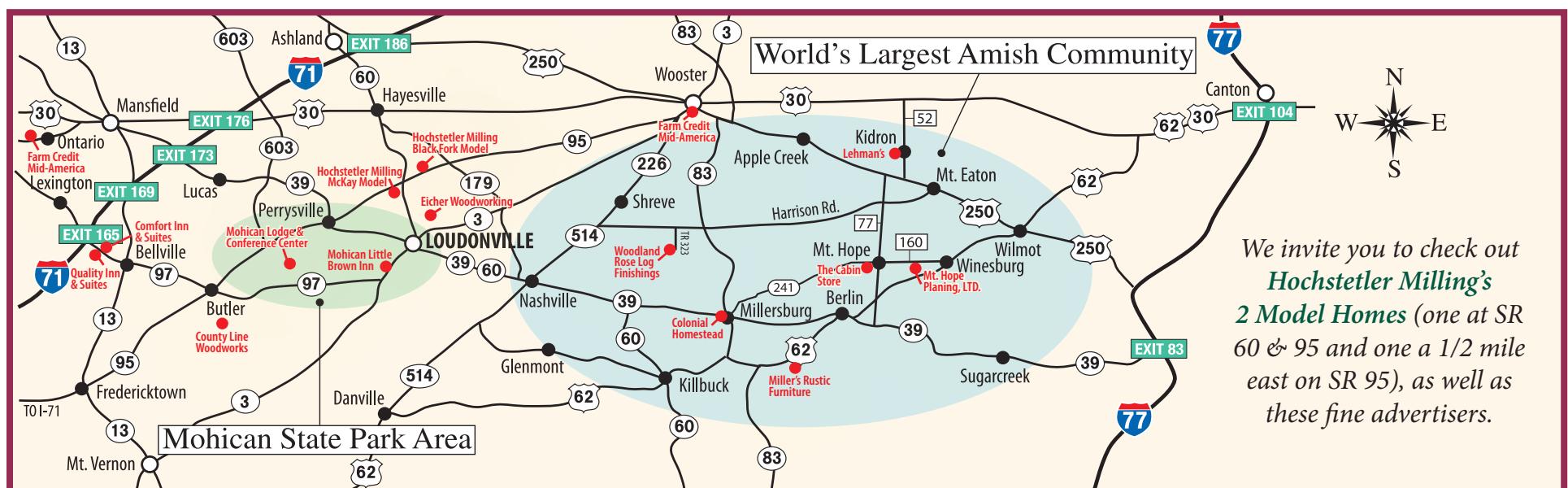
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## "Jim's Surprise Catch"

by Bill Dinkins

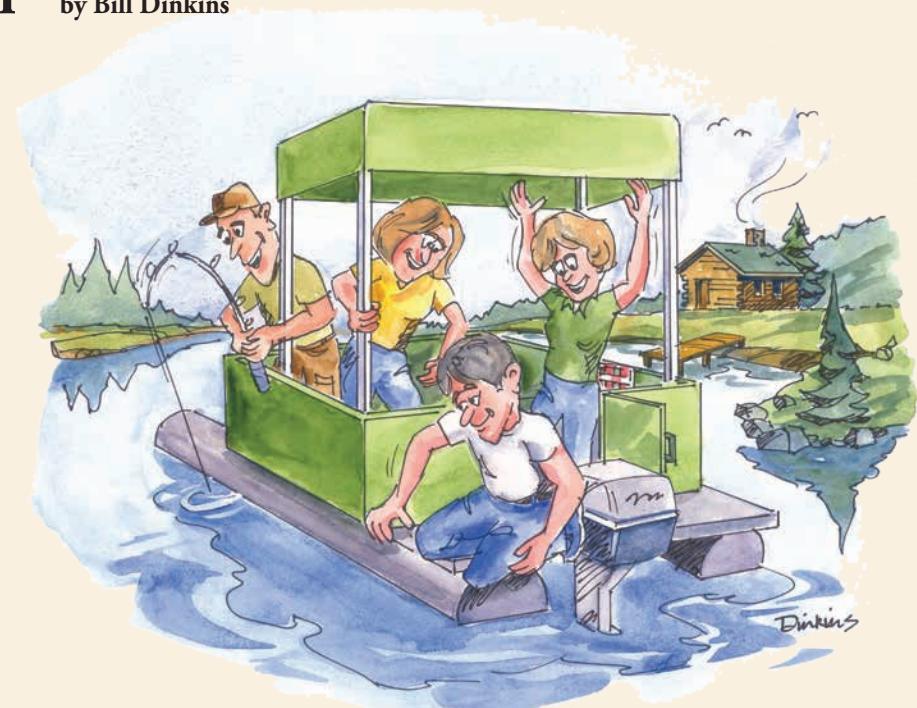
It seems like I'm always looking for an excuse to go fishing, and the farther away and more remote, the better. Such was the case a few years back when my wife, Sandy, and I were visiting with my in-laws, Jim and Charlene, who expressed an interest in joining me on a fishing trip to that place up north (no, not Michigan), Ontario.

The camp, Tumblehome Lodge, is located in eastern Ontario on the southern shore of scenic Crotch Lake (not a typo) and is a well-known spot for walleye, or pickerel, as they say up north. It is also a nature lover's paradise, complete with inhabitants - moose, bear, beaver and smaller critters. (I think I forgot to mention the moose or bear to the ladies for obvious reasons). Anyway, everyone seemed interested and we embarked on our great adventure July, 2002.

After reaching our destination and spending several days of serious, but unproductive fishing, we decided to have some fun and rent a pontoon boat. We packed a picnic lunch, a cooler with drinks, our assorted fishing gear, and a couple dozen night crawlers. The manager pointed out, on a map, a can't miss rocky point for walleye. "Anchor about 50' off shore where there's a drop off and you'll kill 'em," he said. Needless to say, our taste buds were practically jumping out of our mouths in anticipation of a succulent walleye dinner over a roaring campfire that evening.

We quietly motored into position and I motioned for Jim to drop anchor. I don't think he realized being quiet was essential if you're going to catch anything, and he hurled the 15 lb. anchor overboard with a resounding splash as nearby fishermen looked on in amazement. "This is not a bowling alley," yelled one guy, while another followed with, "Do you think this is the 4th of July, mister." Anyway, when things quieted down, we baited up, QUIETLY lowered our 'crawlers into the crystal clear water and relaxed with drinks in our folding lawn chairs. Shortly after, Jim's rod started dancing and suddenly bend downward. He grabbed the rod, and in one motion, swept it skyward with authority. However, the fish on the other end was equally determined and dove deeper, bending the rod in half. "I think you've got a large walleye, Jim." After a 5-minute tug-of-war the fish finally surfaced. It was not a walleye but instead, a nice northern pike. "I'll get the net," I yelled, only to discover we'd left it back at camp. As the fish raced from one end of the boat to the other, Jim had to pass his rod around the aluminum posts that held the boat's canopy. "Tire him out, Jim," I said, "I think I can hand-land him at the back of the boat." It was hard to tell who was more exhausted, Jim or that fish, when I finally eased my hands under him and hoisted him on board.

Back at the dock, Jim was met with some curious onlookers and a collective, "Whoo," as he lifted the stringer out of the water. The 36" pike was the talk of the camp and Jim even won a prize "Fisherman of the Week" t-shirt - which he never fails to remind me of when we get together. I then have to remind him, "You're lucky you had someone to land him for you!"



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