

BC'S VALUE-ADDED WOOD JOURNAL

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Crosscut



**ISLAND PRECISION
OLD COUNTRY
WOODTURNING**



**On show at Salt Lake
Sitka Log Homes**

**Providing structures for the
Olympics and the world**



**VANDERHOOF
SPECIALTY WOOD**

COVER



John Johnson,
owner of Sitka Log Homes

SITKA LOG HOMES

Providing structures for the Olympics and the world

Photos and Story by Bill Tice

A British Columbia log structure manufacturer is making a big name for themselves at this year's Winter Olympic Games near Salt Lake City, Utah.

Sitka Log Homes of 100 Mile House was awarded the contract to provide all of the log work for three of the day lodges at Snowbasin Resort, the site for the Downhill and Super G events at the winter extravaganza. Initially, the BC manufacturer was awarded the contract for the main day lodge, a 46,000-square-foot structure. The two-level building features five stone fireplaces, offices, restaurants, lounges and dining rooms. Spruce log columns of 40 inches in diameter support 50-ft. wide log trusses built with 24-inch diameter spruce logs, while a grid work of large diameter logs are featured in reflective ceilings throughout the structure. The exterior features 18-inch log siding and stone accents.

"The owners of Snowbasin Resort were very impressed with the quality of workmanship and materials in the main day lodge, so they also selected us to provide the log work and installation for two more of the venue's smaller day lodges," says John Johnson, owner of Sitka Log Homes.

The smaller lodges are located further up the mountain, at the 10,000-

foot level. The John Paul Lodge and the Middlebowl Lodge are both situated at the starting point of two different downhill events. The John Paul Lodge is 12,000 square feet on two floors, while the Middlebowl Lodge is 20,000 square feet on two floors. Like the main day lodge, the smaller day lodges feature relaxing

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and eating areas, fireplaces and common lounges.

According to Johnson, getting the materials to the 10,000-ft. elevation was very challenging.

"All of the material had to be off-loaded at the base of the mountain and taken to the building site with Caterpillar bulldozers pulling wagons," explains Johnson. "We could

only pack 20,000 lbs per load, so we had three Cats running all day long throughout the summer. We were also awarded the contract to install the smaller day lodges so we hired local crews and used four-wheel drive



Wally Bramsleven, General Manager,
Sitka Log Homes

vehicles to get everyone to the site. Once on-site, we had to compete with other companies for space at the top of the mountain, which meant we did not have a staging ground. Logistically, it was very difficult, but we got the job done," adds Johnson.

So how does a log home manufacturer from the interior of British Columbia secure a contract for Olympic lodges? Johnson and Wally Bramsleven, General Manager, both concede they are low key when it comes to marketing and let their quality of workmanship and materials speak for themselves.

"They initially found us on the Internet," explains Bramsleven when talking about the Olympics project. "We go to trade shows but, for the most part, our business is generated by word of mouth and by providing our customers with an excellent product."

As for the Internet, Bramsleven says the architectural firm that was hired by Snowbasin Resort to design the buildings contracted a research company in the US to provide a list of 200 randomly picked log structure companies. The research company was then asked to short list four firms that had the capability to provide the materials for the Olympic lodges.

"We were one of the four firms selected for the short list," says Bramsleven. "We were sent a set of blueprints so that we could provide a quote on the job. The architects called us the same day and asked us to provide bids to six different general contractors within five days and we worked night and day to put

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together the numbers. The following week, Union Pointe General Contractors of Salt Lake City was awarded the construction contract and they contacted us immediately and asked us to provide the log work. Prior to completing the whole project, we put together a section in our yard and the architects, the general contractor, a representative of the owner, and the on-site installer for the job all flew to 100 Mile House to view the work. They toured our facility and were very impressed by our production, our log quality, and the section we had built for them."

The visitors were also impressed with the environmental aspect of some of the spruce logs they viewed at the 100 Mile House plant. Many of the logs used by Sitka are harvested from dead standing timber that has been attacked by beetle-kill. The telltale blue stain provided character in the logs for the Utah structures.

"We picked up wood for the project from all over the province but most of the bigger logs came from the McBride and Houston areas," says Johnson. "The main lodge alone was 21 semi trailer loads of finished logs."

Johnson started Sitka Log Homes over 30 years ago when prefabricated log home companies were starting to develop in the Cariboo region.

"This was one of the first areas in the province to build log homes and ship them to sites around the world for re-erection," explains Johnson. "Prior to that time, most log building was done on site."



Colin Latimer

Johnson started on his own and slowly built the company to three or four employees and to a point where he was providing the logs for approximately six homes per year.

"The industry has evolved over the years, and once the European

market came on strong in the 1980s and the Japanese market took off in the 1990s, log homes changed from being a fashionable recreational home to the custom homes worth millions of dollars that we are seeing today," says Johnson. "What started as a small, local industry 30 years ago has grown to a multi million dollar industry, where most of the markets are outside of Canada."

Johnson's company has grown from his one-man operation to an average of 24 employees, although Bramsleven says at peak times they have had as many as 35 employees. They have also opened a second operation in Vernon, BC that focuses on smaller structures. In 2000, Sitka Log Homes provided 50 structures. In 2001, Bramsleven says they only did 30 buildings but that included the three large lodges for the Utah Olympics.

"We have structures going up all over the world," says Johnson. "During the summer months on any given week, we could have one house being set-up in Japan, one in the eastern United States and one en

route to somewhere else in the world. It averages to about one house a week leaving our yard."

Johnson and Bramsleven both say there is nothing typical about any project they complete.

"Our projects range from homes to public facilities to resorts and anything in between," says Bramsleven. "We do everything from a 14-ft. by 18-ft. cabin to the huge lodges for the Olympics. We could be doing a restaurant for Korea one week, a ski vacation home in Colorado the next and then a cabin that is being shipped five miles down the road the week after that."

Johnson stresses the company's success is due to their quality of workmanship, quality of materials and the close knit group of people he works with, including his wife, Bonnie, who looks after the company website, promotion and handles many of the customer enquiries.

Bramsleven adds that Sitka's customers are also responsible for part of the company's success, and their satisfaction is one of the reasons they get so much business from referrals.

"We really get to know our clients, and in many cases it goes beyond the usual vendor-client relationship. We end up becoming friends, and at the end of the day, that is one of the biggest rewards for me," says Bramsleven. **C**



Chris Kennedy



Bill Reed



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