

CULTURED LOG HOMES

Reinventing the Log Home



By Angela Hawkaluk

The year was 2000. Smoke and ash filled the sky as wildfires spread across the state of Montana. Peaceful homes, tucked away in the hills and mountains, were evacuated. Thousands of acres burned and many homes were destroyed.

It was during this smoky summer that Missoula resident Dick Morgenstern began to devise a solution for creating homes that could stand up to various natural disasters. With 25 years as president of Missoula Concrete Construction, Morgenstern knew that concrete would be the best material to use. He came up with a new technique for making logs out of concrete, steel re-

inforcement, and insulation. Using several trees that were felled in his front yard, he began to experiment with making molds. He wanted the concrete to have the exact look and feel of wood, and the molds enabled him to capture every detail. After a paint job, the concrete logs looked and felt just like natural wood logs, complete with cracks, knots, and natural color variation.

"I knew if it wasn't believable, it wouldn't work," says Morgenstern. "I had to get a finish on the log to make it look like wood."

After developing the mold technique, Morgenstern found faux painter Pam Schultz to develop a process that would make the concrete look even more like wood. Any natural wood color and texture can be created and applied to the logs, which are available in various sizes—from the 8-inch D-log to the 12-inch round log to the 16-inch hand-hewn log.

After developing this new product, Morgenstern knew he had something special. He was close to retiring but decided to put that on hold. He resigned from the concrete business and began to explore marketing options for his new product. That's where Stewart Hansen came in. Hansen developed the business model and built the Board of Directors—and a new company, Cultured Log Systems (CLS), was born. Hansen is now president of CLS, which is the first company of its kind and located right here in Missoula. Their patented system is quickly catching on and attracting the interest of architects, builders, and homeowners nationwide.

"There have been no significant changes to the log home industry in some time," says Hansen. "This is a fundamental advancement in how people design, build, and live in log homes."

THE ADVANTAGES

Cultured Logs not only have the look and feel of wood, but they also have endless benefits. Wood logs require costly maintenance and can present a number of problems throughout the life of the home. Cultured Logs are maintenance-free, so preserving, restaining, and resealing are not required. They are also mold-free, insect-free, and fire resistant. Cultured Logs do not shift, twist, settle, or shrink as wood logs do—and they offer superior performance in earthquakes, hurricanes, and anything else Mother Nature can offer up.

One of the biggest advantages of a Cultured Log home is its airtightness, which makes it extremely energy efficient. After conducting a series of blower door tests, experts found that the Cultured Log home was seven times more airtight than a natural wood log home, and six times more airtight than a typical framed home.

“Cultured Logs solve the typical problems you have with a wood log home,” says Hansen. “It’s a worry-free home. You’re going to have the same home at year fifty as you did in year one.”

They are perfect for second homeowners looking to pass down a nice lake cabin or vacation home to their children, since there’s no need to worry about maintenance or how often you are there.



THE PROCESS

The office of Cultured Log Systems was the first structure to be built using Morgenstern’s innovative product. At this location, the logs are manufactured through a unique, patented system. The pours occur in the morning and are left to dry overnight. All designing, pouring, loading, and shipping takes place right out of Missoula.

Cultured Log Systems’ in-house design team works with clients across the country, incorporating the expertise of architects, builders, and engineers. Hansen emphasizes that they are not out to replace log homes—they actually work with log home companies, which provide the interior components. This collaboration provides a worry-free exterior with a beautiful wood interior.



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Once the design is complete, production takes about three to five weeks, depending on the size of the home. The amount of time required to ship and build the structure is another huge advantage and cuts down on costs. It takes one to two days to ship a structure, and anywhere from three to eight days to erect it. Also included in the package price is the erection of a wall system that starts within days of arrival on the building site. Once the walls are up, general contractors finish the home.

Three years ago, CLS completed their first home in Potomac, Montana. Since then, the company has built dozens of homes around the state and country. Shipping costs are relatively low to get a house across the country, so the market is expanding rapidly. Currently, they're working on a 10,000-square-foot spec home in Colorado, called "The Natural Dream Home." This home is being promoted as the first environmentally friendly log home ever built. From top to bottom, this home features "green" materials and demonstrates how it is possible to build incredibly beautiful and environmentally responsible homes.



THE FUTURE OF CLS

Interest in Cultured Log structures is growing, not only for those interested in second homes or those who live in timbered areas, but also for commercial businesses. Many resorts, hotels, lodges, and offices are opting to use Cultured Logs.

Cultured Logs are competitively priced compared to quality wood logs; it's in the shipping, erection, and maintenance costs that you'll see savings. Wood log homes built by a contractor typically cost \$15 to \$25 per square foot. A 3,000-square-foot Cultured Log home costs anywhere from \$45,000 to \$75,000 less than a comparably sized wood log home.

The future of Cultured Log Systems is bright. "The company is growing in the right way," says Hansen. There are no limitations on the projects, whether residential

or commercial, and people are excited about the concept. Missoula is a great place to test the new idea, says Hansen, adding that Cultured Log Systems is very fortunate to have assembled such a talented team in Missoula. He sees great potential in the city and the local entrepreneurial community. The company plans to continue to grow and scale its business model while always focusing on its customers and providing the highest-quality products. "There hasn't been a single customer who doesn't just love their home," says Morgenstern. ♦

For more information about Cultured Log Systems, please visit www.CulturedLogs.com or call 877-257-5647.

