



COVER STORY: Honka Homes By Logwise

WE LIVE IN AN age of depression, weighed down by legislation and countless 'not-my-fault' stories, yet Iain Robertson has spent some time ascertaining the value of log homes and believes the time is right for wood and plenty of it.

Several years ago, having spent some time living in a log cabin in the far north of Canada, I pondered over the benefits of residing in a natural environment, surrounded by the warmth, security and healthiness of a property made from real wood. The windows fitted, there were no draughts, insulation from outside noises was excellent. Yet, there was something else. Something all-pervading and yet totally non-oppressive. The house was tactile. It felt and looked beautiful, both inside

and out and, somehow, it just fitted perfectly with the topography and what was around the property.

Despite having lived in innumerable wooden structures over the years in the UK and Europe, whenever I venture to Scandinavia, I feel as though I have returned to my domestic haven and the fond memories I harbour of log cabin life, with its snug warmth in winter and remarkable coolness in summer. I tried to put a price on it. Yet, when I approached a Scottish builder, he all but laughed me out of his office.

However, times change. The 'design and build' era has certainly been upon us in recent years. Were I to attempt the same exercise today, I know that I would have significantly

greater success. After all, the UK house buying market will now accept the kit-built property unquestioningly, which must have been a major relief to some German 'factory house-makers'.

From a head office in Tuusula, Finland, with two main production units in Karstula and Alajärvi, Honka Group is the world leader in the manufacture and marketing of genuine wooden houses, leisure properties and commercial buildings. Established in 1958, Honkarakenne Ltd was founded by the Saarelainen brothers. By the 1970s, they had spread their gospel to more than thirty countries, including Russia, Japan, France and Germany, so it would seem that I am not the only person to have been drawn by the





allure of log property.

More recently, the company has established a UK distribution agent in Devon-based Logwise Ltd and Logwise Scotland Ltd, which is where I spoke with Richard Fyffe, director of the company. As you might expect, he is an ardent enthusiast for and proponent of homes produced from wood and he explained, "Experience shows that living in a house made largely of wood is very healthy for people. In fact, science provides indisputable proof of that statement.

"For a start, there is no avoidance of the fact that we need to reduce our carbon footprint more than ever and it does not take yet another television programme to highlight that our dependence on central heating systems and our insatiable demands on natural resources are having a negative effect on the eco-system. All of these aspects can be summed up succinctly by suggesting that what most people desire is a better quality of living."

Further investigation reveals that in an empirical study into wooden properties, the more solid wood that is used in house construction, the better it maintains an even indoor humidity that is optimal for good health. Indoor air should be neither too dry, nor too humid and wood actually balances the level naturally. Without this balance, respiratory conditions, such as hay fever, bronchitis and even coughs and colds can proliferate. In a wooden house, there is nothing to promote the growth of dust mites, bacteria, mould or mould spores, all of which can have a seriously detrimental impact on a person's state of health.

"You need to be aware that wood houses breathe," declared Richard. "This relates to wood's ability to absorb or release air humidity. Honka homes can be described as being produced almost wholly from wood and, from the factories in Finland, using Nordic pine - sourced from arguably the most sustainably managed forests in the world - a high quality, impeccably finished, stylishly designed, stunning home can result."

However, to the casual reader, it would be easy to think of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy calling to each other on a snow-bound film set. While there is an inescapably romantic notion attached to the log cabin, the Honka home is not a pile of logs with mud filling the imperfections. Thoroughly modern,

while the logs are produced from real wood, they are processed and a stable laminated product results.

As Richard pointed out, "Each log is precision cut on highly advanced machinery to ensure a perfect fit with every other log. It remains a natural product, although its durability is extended in the process. By being treated in this way, the highest possible quality controls can be introduced, to ensure that a property built from a Honka 'kit' actually fits precisely where it needs to.

"This level of control also ensures that window and door apertures can be placed wherever the customer desires them and either large expanses of glazing or sliding doors and sash windows can be placed within them. It is eminently flexible and ensures that no two domestic properties need look remotely similar, which is a useful factor in the design and build sector. Yet, if identically matched Honka properties are required, such as in a holiday park or at a resort, then that requirement can be as readily handled as the bespoke property."

To provide some idea as to how speedily a modern Honka log home can be constructed, a bungalow with a 105 sq metres ground floor area was erected with all doors and windows in, wind and water tight, in just eight days.

"Whatever the buyer wants to have incorporated within the design," continued Richard, "we can manage on their behalf. This includes all partition walls, ceilings, studwork and panelling. As a Honka home does not feature roof trusses in its construction, better use can be made of the extra space, or whatever particular style of kitchen or bathroom a client wants, these too can be accommodated at the design stage."

I was keen to know how the roof would be finished and Richard explained that any type of roofing material is possible. The log sizes vary but they are generally 88mm thick for garages and outbuildings, while normal (up to 1.5 storey) structures use from 112-182mm thick logs, and larger structures may require 240mm+ thick logs. Should extra height be required, steel can be incorporated within the structure.

In most projects, an NHBC builder will supply the foundations and services throughout the property, and the Finnish construction team are responsible for erecting

the complete Honka kit. Once built, the first exterior treatment against UV and humidity is applied, with a choice of colour pigments being available at the same time. In general a building requires treatment every 4-5 years. Well maintained quality log homes should last many hundreds of years, log being not only fire resistant (many times more resistant than steel or concrete), but also as Japanese clients have discovered, earthquake resistant as well.

While wood may be the most natural of products from which to build properties, Honka continues to invest in research and development, and is currently in the process of launching an exciting new product - 'Honka Fusion'. Honka Fusion is a concept incorporating highly technical lamination and insulation properties which will provide flexible, eco-friendly buildings and can be readily used with other material such as stone, brick or steel.

In conclusion, if you want an eco-friendly, healthy, temperate, stylish, comfortable, contemporary and high quality home that can be built to your own precise requirements, then a Honka home must be worth considering for all of the right reasons. It would be a great place to get home to.

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