

Building Systems

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Magazine

LOG HOME INNOVATORS

DELIVERING THE DREAM FASTER, BETTER

LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!
New TV Series On Systems

SMALL CHANGES, BIG SAVINGS
Not All PEX Performs Equally

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Stand-Out Selling Strategies



LOG HOME

Courtesy of Ameri-Log Homes.

DELIVERING THE DREAM FASTER, BETTER

BY CHARLES BEVIER

With orange Homeland security alerts a daily reality, it's little wonder that more and more home buyers are opting for the safety, warmth and tranquility of a log home.

We are no longer surprised by who wants one. A-listers such as Oprah and moguls such as Ted Turner claim to be enamored with them.

When Vice President Dick Cheney gets away to his undisclosed location, we like to think he's in a log home deep in the woods of Virginia. We envision Cheney padding around in a bathrobe and slippers, listening to the Grateful Dead, his eyes absently memorizing grain patterns in the wood.

Our political fantasies aside, log homes offer universal appeal on a primal level. Just ask Steve Alexander. "It's hard to put into words. I guess the best way to describe it is as a very calming feeling, being in a log home," says Alexander, owner of ICF Consulting (Gardiner, NY), which measures home energy performance. Lately, Alexander has been spending a lot of time in log homes, performing blower door testing on those constructed by Alta Industries (Halcottsville, NY).



Eight of Alta's log homes have earned Energy Star certification. Blower door tests are key to the HERS scoring.

Courtesy of Alta Industries.



INNO

Courtesy of Town & Country Cedar Homes

Not surprisingly, Alta's log homes serve as more than just a satisfying refuge from today's fast-paced world. Alexander's tests prove Alta's homes qualify for the Energy Star program, enabling log homeowners to cut their energy costs by more than one-third compared to conventional housing. Homeowners can also qualify for advantageous mortgage financing and government grants totaling more than \$3,500 in New York.

To achieve an Energy Star rating means the homes perform 30% better than the model energy code, achieving a score of 86 or better on the HERS (Home Energy Rating System) scale. "The system that Alta has developed, the double tongue and groove interlocking system, produces homes that are highly energy efficient. I have found that Alta system produces homes that are superior to traditional stick frame. All of them have scored 90-plus on the HERS scale," Alexander says. In contrast, new stick frame homes from production builders in New York typically score in the low 80s, he says.

Proven Performance

Since a corporate model and a half-dozen of its builder/dealers model homes have easily passed the HERS test, Alta's executives have decided to take the 33-year-old company in a new direction.

"Alta Log Homes is now an Energy Star Partner and is committed to test each and every home it designs," says Wayne S. Cohen, director of dealer development. "After putting these homes through rigorous testing, all have passed with flying colors. We are now in the process of listing our qualified Dealers on the

Rocky Mountain Log Homes's milling capabilities creates truss joints so tight one can't slip a piece of paper into them.

VATORS



Courtesy of Rocky Mountain Log Homes.

NYSERDA Web page as Energy Star Rated Builders and Alta Log Homes as an Energy Star Partnered Manufacturer.

“We are seriously considering Energy Star Certification for builders as a prerequisite for doing business with Alta in the future. I am looking to attract the best builder/dealers in the country. We are not seeking quantity—only quality—in the packaging of our homes.”

With a 33-year track record of success and thousands of satisfied consumers to its name, hadn't Alta already proven its system works? Why go the Energy Star route?

“It comes down to consumer awareness of the Energy Star Logo,” Cohen explains. “It's easier for consumers to understand than trying to explain the energy efficiency of the transference of thermal energy through log mass.”

But Alta isn't stopping there. The company is also participating in a solar voltaic program through NYSERDA. Alta will be part of a testing phase of a group of 24 builders combining the Energy Star program and solar voltaic technology. Log homes so equipped would be able to sell excess energy back to the local utility.

Alta isn't alone in its thirst to improve and innovate. Dozens of log home producers are pursuing new techniques and technologies to improve the speed of construction and the performance of their homes once turnkeyed. Rather than sticking with a formula that worked in the past, many producers are seeking new paths to bring their homes to market, creating cutting-edge quality control, adapting new systems and reducing cost to make the dream of log homeownership a reality for more consumers.