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JULY 2009

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Our cover:

Custom home in Fremont, Neb., built by Kuhlman Construction from a Kuhns Bros. log-home package.

COVER PHOTO:
RANDY HAMPTON PHOTOGRAPHY

Your Time to Shine

There are challenges, and there's the Challenge. Yes, the *Custom Builder* Design Challenge is back for its third year. This time, the program involves a custom home on a suburban lot for a multigenerational household. It's a situation that should be familiar to most CB readers: a baby-boomer couple on their second marriage living with children from both marriages, plus elderly parents with mobility issues.

In the Design Challenge, though, the clients are fictional. We want to see what kind of solutions you would invent for this family, given basic parameters such as square footage, lot dimensions, easements and setbacks. As far as adjacent properties, climate, neighborhood context and the like, you'll have to use your imagination, or use your local market as a guide.

Such an exercise is outside the comfort zone of some people. But if you relish the idea of drawing plans and elevations without anyone looking over your shoulder or rejecting your ideas, the Challenge is for you.

We aren't dictating architectural style or details. The home can be anything from contemporary to Mediterranean and even eclectic,

as long as it meets the contest requirements. More important is that it meets the needs of the client — the primary concern of any custom builder or designer. So your design has to be livable now as well as five, 10 and 15 years into the future. Think flex space and accessibility. Be sure to provide those all-important outdoor living areas, as well as places where individual family members can have much-needed time alone.

The judges will score entries on sustainability as well, so give some thought to ways you can make your design energy- and resource-efficient and reduce its impact on the environment.

Look for a full description of the program and an entry form at www.custombuilderonline.com/challenge. It won't cost you anything but time and brainpower to enter, but do it soon: the deadline is Sept. 15.

Speaking of designs that cater to the client's needs, this issue's Centerpiece is a log home in Nebraska that tested the mettle of the builders, Bill and Linda Kuhlman. The Kuhlman's started with a stock plan, but from that point on it was custom, from the white-painted interior trim and piano-shaped kitchen island to the solid log garage. Read all about it on page 6. ■

SUSAN BADY



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ENTERING THE
DESIGN CHALLENGE
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YOU ANYTHING
BUT TIME AND
BRAINPOWER,
BUT DO IT SOON:
THE DEADLINE IS
SEPT. 15.

NOTICE OUR NEW APPROACH?

Starting with the July 2009 issue, *Custom Builder* will be folded into our flagship magazine, *Professional Builder*. By doing so, we aim to reach a much larger audience of housing professionals. We will continue to deliver the same high-quality content you're accustomed to, including Tom Stephani's expert business advice, profiles of unique custom homes, design ideas and construction tips.

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Stayin' Alive

By Tom Stephani, Custom Construction Concepts

After returning from the NAHB Spring Board meeting in late May, I have both good news and bad news to report.

First, the good news:

- Housing prices have likely bottomed
- Existing-home sales are up
- The economy seems to be coming out of recession

Now the bad news:

- New-home starts are at historic lows
- Credit is ultra-tight, especially for AD&C loans
- Appraisals are unrealistically low

The really bad news, though, is that although things are going to improve, they will improve slowly — very slowly. Depending on the market, we may be looking well into 2011 before the home-building industry will see any substantial recovery. So, after surviving the downturn to this point, what's a custom builder to do?

Many small-volume and custom builders have either entered or re-entered the remodeling business, only to find that the playing field is already crowded with qualified, experienced remodelers. More contractors chasing less business does not make for a good survival strategy.

If you can't afford to hibernate and wait for this long winter to end, here are several niche opportunities to consider:

- Change your focus to a smaller and greener product. Get your Certified Green Professional (CGP) designation from NAHB and start marketing your qualifications to build a sustainable and energy-efficient home. Homes that are Certified Green to the new ANSI standard represent one of the few differentiation opportunities for builders.

- Change your contracting methods. If you typically do fixed-price custom presales, consider offering construction management services at a lower margin. It means less risk for you and a lower price for the customer.

- Ramp up a low-cost marketing strategy. Employ Web optimization, social media and

ects. Funding may be available from private sources.

- Opportunities may also exist right where you bank. Your bank likely has Real Estate Owned (REO) properties obtained through foreclosure. Some of them could be substandard and in need of repair or completion. Banks do not want to own



TOM STEPHANI
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IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO HIBERNATE AND WAIT FOR THIS LONG WINTER TO END, HERE ARE SEVERAL NICHE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONSIDER.

networking skills to get the word out. Offer to talk to Realtors, chambers of commerce, Rotary Clubs and other groups. Prepare a short presentation on green building or an example of why prices for a new custom home will never be this low again.

- Investigate short-sale opportunities both for investment and redevelopment. With a push toward smaller and greener homes, there may be opportunities right under your nose. Old homes on double lots or large lots that can be re-subdivided are two that I have identified in my market. Consider a real-estate LLC dedicated to buying and building these types of proj-

ects. Funding may be available from private sources. You may be able to help them work out their problem properties.

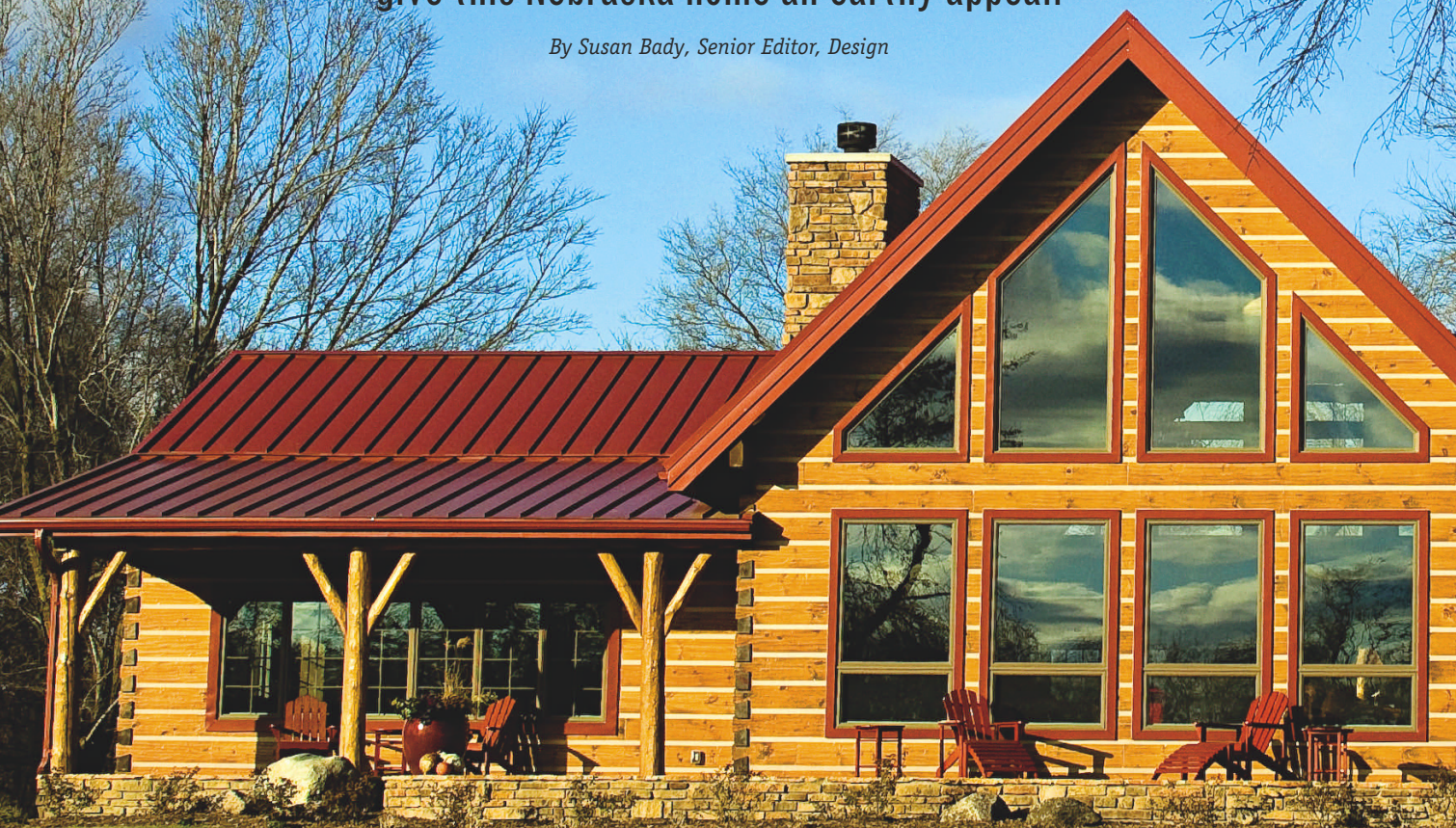
Be flexible, be inventive, but most of all, be optimistic. Things will get better. It's just going to take longer than we would all like. ■

Nationally recognized speaker and trainer Tom Stephani, MIRM, GMB, MCSP and CAPS, specializes in custom homes; infill housing; light commercial projects; and developing commercial and residential land. You can reach him at tom@custombuilding.com.

Timeless Treasure

Hand-hewn roof timbers and milled log walls give this Nebraska home an earthy appeal.

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor, Design



The clients chose exterior colors they felt would complement existing buildings on the property: cranberry for the standing-seam metal roof and trim; a light-stained, weathered color on the logs; and off-white chinking between each log.



RANDY HAMPTON PHOTOGRAPHY

Centerpiece



A wall of windows in the great room captures views of the wooded terrain. At its peak, the ceiling in this room reaches 24 feet.

Lots of people dream of building a log home, but not everyone has the resources to make that dream come true. The owners of this home in Fremont, Neb., had the money and the land: a heavily wooded piece of property with several outbuildings. Having owned a log cabin in Canada, they were completely sold on the log-home lifestyle.

Enter Bill and Linda Kuhlman of Kuhlman Construction in Pleasant Dale, Neb., who build conventionally framed and log homes. As dealers for Kuhns Bros. Log Homes in Milton, Pa., the Kuhlman's offer everything from design services and site preparation through turnkey construction. Log homes comprise about 40 percent of their business.

"[The clients] had heard about us from friends that built a log home in Kansas City," says Linda. "They wanted a home that would enhance their property and a contractor that could build a quality log home and would stand behind their product."

The couple wanted a home with a rustic, big-timber, hand-peeled, raftered roof system. This required the Kuhlman's to rent a crane to place the huge timbers. "The glulam ridge beam in the great room is 40 feet long, about 30 inches high and 8-1/2 inches wide," says Bill. "It's a tree, basically." Unlike the logs used for the walls, the hand-peeled logs that make up the roof structure are not dimensionally true, so each piece was a custom fit and required its own jig.

Because Kuhns Bros. cuts logs to the exact dimensions required using a detailed CAD program designed specifically for their log profiles, to achieve the desired hand-hewn look the logs had to be roughed up after they were cut. That entailed

Is Log Home Building for You?

If you're toying with the idea of integrating log homes into your business, educate yourself first. Read what veteran log home builders have to say and watch a video produced by the NAHB Log Homes Council at www.custombuilderonline.com.

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Centerpiece



taking a 4-inch wood grinder and manually grinding the surface of the log to give it a drawknife effect.

The home has a 6-by-12 flat, dovetail log profile, with chinking (mortar) between each log. "This particular profile has a 2-inch-wide chink joint between the logs — an actual groove in the log that houses the chinking," Linda says. Kuhns Bros. log homes don't require chinking (it was simply a look that the clients liked) and the Kuhlman's had never done it before. It took nearly five weeks to chink the home inside and out, using a special pump the builder purchased for that procedure.

Kuhlman's construction manager, Lonnie Haase, coordinated the project, including the stonework and cutting of timbers and mantels. "He's been with us for 15 years and is a fantastic craftsman," Bill says.

Taking Stock

With Linda's help, the clients customized a stock plan from the Kuhns Bros. portfolio. "Our previous home had a lot of wasted space," the client says, "so we knew what we didn't want."

Topping the list of must-haves were an open floor plan for entertaining, a large master suite, a guest bedroom and a large laundry room/mudroom. The clients wanted to keep kitchen cabinetry to a minimum in favor of a large walk-in pantry. They also requested two fireplaces: one inside and one outside.

The same stone on the façade and fireplace surrounds was used to enclose the custom range hood in the kitchen. Trapezoid windows draw light from the covered porch at the rear of the house.

START TO FINISH

09 | 2007

First meeting
with client

10 | 2007

Client signs
sales agreement
for log-home
package

12 | 2007

Materials
delivered
to job site

01 | 2008

Client signs
construction con-
tract; basement
foundation goes
in; basement floor
is poured

05 | 2008

Basic structure
completed

06 | 2008

Interior and
exterior staining
completed

07 | 2008

Metal roof
installed

10 | 2008

Home completed;
client moves in



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The floor plan is divided into two wings: the master bedroom, bathroom and walk-in closet in one wing and the sunroom, guest room, laundry/mudroom and garage in the other. At the core of the plan are the primary living areas: great room, kitchen and dining room. Very little square footage is allotted to hallways. Cathedral ceilings heighten the drama in the great room, kitchen, dining room and master suite.

"As we were building the house, the clients asked us to extend the front patio beyond the trapezoid windows in the great room," says Linda. "So we built up the initial foundation in order to connect the patios from one wing to another."

The fireplaces in the great room and the covered rear deck have surrounds made of manufactured stone. The mantel on the great-room fireplace is made of lodgepole pine that was milled on site.

Enamored of a marble shower they had seen in a photo, the clients asked the Kuhlman Construction to replicate it in their master



The guest bath doesn't have log walls, but the ceiling beams carry through the home's interior theme.

bath. The builder cut and fitted solid sheets of marble to create a walk-in shower measuring 5 feet by 5 feet.

The entire exterior of the home was originally going to have log siding, but during construction, the builder suggested cladding the sunroom in the same stone as the fireplaces to break up the expanse of wood.

Every log home Kuhlman Construction builds is different, says Linda, because each customer has their own ideas. In this

case, the clients wanted to minimize the use of drywall on the inside of the home. Instead of applying the usual brown stain to the tongue-and-groove ceiling between the timbers, they whitewashed it prior to installation. Another atypical detail is the white interior trim around the windows and doors.

The cabinets and interior doors are hand-crafted, as are the stained-glass windows on either side of the entry door. Hickory flooring was used throughout the house, excluding the bathrooms.

"The clients didn't want to go cheap on anything," says Linda. "They wanted a solid log garage, finished and insulated, with a tongue-and-groove ceiling. If you threw carpet down, it would be better than most houses." ■

One of the advantages

of log homes is their energy efficiency; the thermal mass of solid wood logs often exceeds minimum energy-code criteria. As the client puts it, "When the house gets warm it stays warm, and when it gets cool, it stays cool."

Custom-Built Log Home

Location: Fremont, Neb.

Total Square Footage: 2,700 (excluding unfinished basement)

Hard costs per square foot: \$295

Architect: Kuhns Bros. Log Homes, Milton, Pa.

Builder: Kuhlman Construction, Pleasant Dale, Neb.

Interior Designer: Kim Romick, Into the West, Steamboat Springs, Colo.

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