

A Different Angle

Appreciating logs from every direction.

By Janice Brewster

ANY WAY YOU STACK THEM, logs make for a cozy cabin. Most wall logs are stacked horizontally, but you can use shorter vertical logs or combine horizontal and vertical construction in your cabin. No logs? No worries: You can even build a getaway place from firewood. For cabins, in particular and especially if you're planning to build your own, alternative log-building methods are worth a second look.

Vertical log building, sometimes called stockade construction, offers benefits to the DIYer. Eight-foot, relatively straight logs are all you need. Folks with a chain saw, pickup truck and strong backs can horse logs of that length around. Erecting the walls on your cabin foundation can be as easy as standing the logs up next to each other and splicing them together.

Of course, if you want your vertical log cabin to last longer than a kid's fort, you should refine the technique a bit. Hewing or milling the logs flat on the two sides where they meet creates a more snug fit. If you prefer to let professionals handle the grunt work, Stockade Style Log Homes in Nova Scotia (stockadestyleloghomes.com) produces logs that are milled flat on two sides and feature a groove that accepts a spline. The plywood strip, or spline, locks the logs together and creates a barrier at the point where the log faces meet.

Log shrinkage concerns all log-home

builders and owners. As logs dry, they shrink in diameter, but not much in length. In vertical log building, the walls won't decrease in height as the logs shrink (which can occur with horizontally stacked walls), but the logs will tend to pull apart from each other, possibly leaving vertical gaps between logs. Historically, vertical-log cabin dwellers used whatever they could put their hands on to bridge those gaps: mortar, mud, newspaper, wool, you name it. Today's more high-tech chinking and caulking materials would help keep a vertical-log cabin free from drafts. Starting with dry logs would lessen the impact of shrinkage, too.

Combining vertical and horizontal stacking methods in your cabin offers the best of both worlds. Piece-en-piece, or "stack-and-rack," construction calls for vertical log posts, which serve as a timber frame of sorts. The posts are infilled with short logs (about 4-foot long) stacked horizontally. For the handy person, this method allows for the use of shorter logs than those necessary for traditional horizontal log building, while easing the problems of gaps formed by shrinkage in vertical building.



TOP: JIM WILSON PHOTO; STOCKADESTYLELOGHOMES.COM
LEFT: FLORENT 2008 PHOTO; EARTHWOODMASONRY.COM

Vertically challenged, but still in the market for a cabin? With cordwood masonry, you can use log pieces as short as 16 inches or so as raw building materials. Rob Roy of Earthwood Building School (cordwoodmasonry.com) preaches the gospel of cordwood masonry as an ecologically sound, thrifty and charming way to build a mortgage-free cabin. His school and others like it offer workshops that teach the technique. A finished cordwood masonry home resembles a mosaic, with the log ends visible and surrounded by mortar.

Whichever method you choose, remember that keeping your cabin design small makes for a much more manageable (and enjoyable) project. ♣



ABOVE: Stockadestyle cabins turn logs on their end and look like frontier forts. They also allow the use of shorter logs to fashion the walls.

LEFT: Cordwood masonry construction turns log ends out to build cabins that are earth friendly, thrifty and charming.