

High Country Carpentry's award winning ways

Two builds and seven House of the Year awards

The 2016 Registered Master Builders House of the Year competition was just the second time High Country Carpentry had entered the competition, but much like the Gold and Silver awards the South Canterbury firm took out last year, the company's two 2016 entries again impressed, taking out a whopping seven awards between them.



It's a fitting way to celebrate 10 years in business for the company which started when Lain and Heather Hellmrich brought together a specialised team of skilled tradesmen who lived, worked and played in the region.

There had been somewhat of a boom in the Mackenzie District in the early 2000s which saw large building firms entering the market with little experience of the unique environmental extremes faced by South Canterbury's homes and their inhabitants.

While these companies have adapted many of their practices and "off-the-shelf" plans for a best fit, there was still a large demand for local builders to build homes they would stand-by in the years to come.

Both Lain and Heather are from long time families in the MacKenzie and they maintain a strong ethical foundation with their clients and are transparent and open about all they do, providing

clients with the reliability and accessibility expected from a trusted local provider.

Even a lot of their building materials are locally grown, with Douglas Fir, Macrocarpa and Larch timber used in many of their homes, with stone, glass and other natural materials also adding to the integrity of their buildings.

"In Christchurch the houses are designed to make the most of small spaces, because the houses are surrounded," Lain explains.

"In South Canterbury, many of our homes are in open, expansive areas, with no neighbours. So the design needs to be a lot stronger and more durable, because they're open to the elements and, as a result, they get hammered by the weather.

"We've always been passionate about the local region and its people. We have a deep understanding of the specialised environment we live and work in, which is a unique one."

It's an environment which proved ideal for the log cabin-style home in Oamaru. Outside, the pitched gables and logs stacked to curve demand a closer look. The approach is, in fact, very down to earth – all locally sourced Douglas Fir logs.

And despite its heavy duty look, the 300sqm, two storey structure treads lightly in its environment. Fully self-sufficient, the three bedroom, two bathroom home takes care of its own power, water and heating. It'll deliver the goods for five days without solar gain, at which point a back-up generator kicks in.

A Rayburn cooker powers underfloor heating and radiators, while baking bread and boiling the kettle. Bright red accents – from cabinetry and appliances to the freestanding bath – break up the widespread use of timber, with high bi-fold windows opening wide for that outdoor-bathing effect.

"The client was a great lady and it was really enjoyable working with her," Lain says.

"These homes are amazing places, but it really comes down to the clients. We're just carrying out what is the client's vision, so the success of these homes really comes down to great clients who are able to get their message and vision across."

With the log house built as a shell, there is a settling process which involves the external logs shrinking as they dry. When the job is done well, most people will never see that this takes place.

"Living away from home for duration of both this build and the Twizel house were challenging, but physically the key challenges were the complexity of the roof structure and dealing with the settling process of the log shell. As the structure settles over time, we had to finish the house around that process."

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- LAIN HELLMRICH

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"But we're extremely pleased with the finished product and it was a privilege to be involved with this project."

Not only did the Oamaru home win a Gold Award, a Gold Reserve Award (Top 100 in New Zealand), the Local Craftsmanship Award and the Lifestyle Award for Sustainability, but it was also the category winner for the Carters \$1 million - \$2 million category and it was the Local Supreme Winner for the Mid and South Canterbury region – an impressive haul of six awards in total.

As with all successful companies, the professional company they keep can make a significant difference and High Country Carpentry is no exception. The Kitchen Joinery for the award winning Jeanne Gray House was supplied and fitted by McMaster Joinery Waimate. "We always like a challenge and fitting joinery to a log house certainly was", says company founder Des McMaster.





Situated among the tussock and mountains, the new country home in Twizel also features extensive use of Douglas fir in posts, battens and trims, adding a wonderful woodland feel and connecting the home to the landscape.

Exposed beams in the open-plan living area are eye-catching, drawing the gaze to the soaring ceiling. The lounge is the centre of everyday action. Along with the entrance and kitchen, it frames wonderful mountain views, with outdoor living accessible through large sliding doors.

The north-facing position allows for optimum solar gain, even in winter. Fully polished floors absorb the rays and release heat throughout

the day, while underfloor heating is on standby for extra cold days and nights. Whether it's minus 20 degrees and snowing or a sweltering 30 degrees, this home will adapt to ensure superior comfort. Just sit back, relax and enjoy the dramatic landscape.

The Twizel home was awarded the Gold Award in the Future-Proof Building New Home \$500,000 - \$650,000 category.

"Both of these homes are awesome, unique homes. I'm over the moon with the finish of both properties. It's such a privilege to have the chance to build houses of this quality. There are a lot of amazing builders out there, so to be

given the chance to prove yourself amongst that high calibre group really is a privilege."

It's an impressive medal haul for the company which is only in its second year entering, but it's a team effort Lain explains.

"It's pretty special to have been recognised at this level," he says.

"It feels well earned by the team after 10 years. We never entered the awards for our first eight years - then we got the Gold Reserve last year, so to earn the Supreme House of the Year for the region, on top of numerous other awards was an extremely special night for the team and for our clients."

"The goal has always been to grow into a long standing local company with a good crew of guys. The quality of our staff really is the thing that attracts the quality of clients we get, so looking after and maintaining that great core of people is key for us."

"There's 10 of us now full time, with five fully qualified carpenters, four apprentices and one labourer."

"Most of us hunt together when we can. We are a good group of friends and individually I enjoy the company and shared respect of all the staff. It's a privilege to be surrounded by such a great crew. >

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