



## LOG HOME A LABOUR OF LOVE...

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*Dreams of owning a cosy log cabin years ago became a wonderful reality for homeowner Jeanne Gray, when she moved into her log home in October 2015. Featuring completely, locally sourced Douglas Fir logs (there is no treated timber on the site), Jeanne's initial cosy cabin thoughts became a 300-square-metre, two-storey structure – a superb celebration of craftsmanship, created by a group of skilled individuals, all clearly passionate about their work.*

**B**eyond a “very, very happy homeowner”, the level of skill and attention to detail was duly rewarded, with the home gaining Supreme honours for builder, South Canterbury’s High Country Carpentry, at the 2016 Registered Master Builders House of the Year (Mid and South Canterbury region). It also earned the overall Craftsmanship Award, along with Gold, Sustainable Home and Category Winner awards. The accolades continued when last month it was announced Jeanne’s three bedroom, two bathroom, log home had made the National Gold Reserve, making it one of the top one hundred home builds in New Zealand. The national judging panel were particularly impressed with the alternative build, commenting, “this is a complex project that required a challenging construction method using unconventional building materials ... given the nature of this type of construction, the builder’s craft was amazing in every respect and a worthy winner”.

High Country Carpentry’s owner and builder, Lain Hellmrich, was absolutely delighted with the industry recognition. “A log home is labour intensive and ultra-specialised. The whole thing about these buildings is it’s not like a standard home, it’s not an individual effort, it’s the whole team contributing that makes it come together. That’s a part of what makes the journey so special and it’s just brilliant to have the end result acknowledged.”

Situated in the back hills of Oamaru, behind Papakaio, this is a statement home that blends beautifully with the environment in which it sits, both externally and internally. Completely off the grid, the home provides its own power, water and heating, able to function for five days without solar gain. Jeanne utilises her Rayburn wood-burning cooker frequently, cooking in it as it powers the underfloor heating, radiators and heats the water. The kitchen also has a gas oven, if needed. A back-up generator exists on site, though Jeanne has not required it.

The interior of the home is bathed in light and warmth, thanks to the distinctive golden glow of the logs and the natural light pouring through strategically placed windows, which frame stunning views of the rural setting. High ceilings deliver an abundant sense of space in the open-plan living



RIGHT Logs naturally shrink over time, posing significant challenges to overcome in many elements of the build.



ABOVE Red cabinetry makes a striking statement in the warm and inviting kitchen.

and upstairs areas. Striking red accents feature in the kitchen cabinetry and in the bathroom, with the stunning bath Jeanne found on the internet. “I didn’t realise it was quite as big as it was – it took about eight people to carry it in. The kids love it, about six of them fit in all at once.” Autumnal oranges and greens provide further colour amidst the primarily neutral colour palette, perfectly complemented by the polished pebble floors that run throughout the lower floor.

“I couldn’t be happier, it’s so much more than I’d dreamed

of,” says Jeanne. “It’s taken the dedication of so many – from the architect, to the log shell, to the build – and I’m so pleased to have been a part of creating it. There is definitely a sense of pride and satisfaction.”

Jeanne met with Graeme Mould, owner of Geraldine’s Natural Log Homes, a couple of years ago to discuss her ideas. Having built numerous log homes throughout the country over the past thirty years, Graeme initially put Jeanne in touch with architect Jess Paterson, also experienced with





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log homes. Graeme said, “Jeanne had a fair idea of what she wanted, she was excellent to work with... I’m so happy her place has won the awards, to have the degree of craftsmanship acknowledged. It’s brilliant to see an alternative construction win.”

Lain and Graeme connected early in the process, working together regularly to ensure the success of the project. The log shell was crafted over twelve months in Graeme’s yard, during which he, Lain and Jeanne all worked closely together. There are numerous challenges when building a log home, amongst them factoring in shrinkage, as logs shrink over time. Shrinkage for each one has to be calculated and considered in order to determine the finished height of the home after four years. This also required careful consideration around window placement, to avoid shattered windows as pressure increases.

When the log shell was completed it was dismantled in reverse, put in containers and transported to the site. With the foundation structure in place, Graeme and Lain’s team took about three days to reassemble the shell. Based in Fairlie, Lain and his staff (eight-ten of them) then moved into the old Papakaia store, near the site. They lived there during the week for the next ten months, turning the log shell into a liveable house. “Jeanne was amazing; she cooked for us most



ABOVE Space abounds in Jeanne’s log home, enjoyed by regular visitors, especially her grandchildren.



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ABOVE Views from the bathroom are simply stunning.

of the time. We'd get home in the dark and dinner would be prepared for us. She absolutely took us under her wing, always turning up with smoko of some sort. She nurtured us through the entire build."

For Lain, building this home was always about the people. "With the team living together on site for so many months it was a unique and special experience. This house is all about people, quality people, and the house is a reflection of how important people were to the build and are to Jeanne. It's about the people, not just the noise and mess of a site. Jeanne's log home is so much about her, what a super-cool lady she is. It's about her grandchildren, her daughters and sons-in-law. This was definitely all about families and people and relationships."

Jeanne couldn't agree more, saying her home has regular visitors, primarily her four children and nine grandchildren. "It's cosy and homely; people come in, sit down and just feel comfortable." Entertaining is a breeze, the space has no problem accommodating large groups, its ambience incredibly welcoming. "My nine-year-old grandson recently had a sleepover here, celebrating his birthday. They had lots of fun running around everywhere."

Jeanne regularly marvels at the results Lain and Graeme have achieved, admitting at the beginning she had no idea of how much was involved. "The woodwork, the angles, so much extra work to allow for log shrinkage, so much thought to allow for movement. They have done a truly amazing job. They are all craftsmen, not just builders. And they are lovely people. Their heart and soul is a part of this hand-crafted house." ■

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*Gold Reserve National finalists, representing the top entrants from the regional competitions held in July and August, will be re-judged by a national judging panel. Finalists have the opportunity to win one of twelve National Category Awards, four Lifestyle Awards and the National Supreme House of the Year and National Supreme Renovation of the Year. Winners will be announced at a gala dinner in Auckland late November.*