



Citizen photo/Hope Strong

Rethinking the traditional log home. (left to right) Casey Eason, Evelyn Cutler, Mike Murphy, Dave Erickson and Meghan Powers have teamed up to build energy efficient homes without losing the romance of the valley's oldest structures.

teton dwellings is the marriage of old charm and new design

Local log home company takes the industry into the future

By Hope Strong

Shifting the paradigm is a lofty phrase for just changing the model by which you operate, but that is exactly what one local company is doing in order to be competitive in today's housing market.

In a valley that has been glutted with

trophy homes now worth only a fraction of their asking price two years ago, Grand Teton Log and Lumber is rebranding itself as teton dwellings. Like the signature of American poet e.e. cummings, teton dwellings is all lower case for effect, just the tip of the iceberg in a Titanic move to stay afloat in an industry that has sunk far below the boom of year's past.

Originally purchased from Jackson Hole Log Homes, Grand Teton Log Homes ultimately switched to Grand Teton Log and Lumber over the course of the past years. For a dozen years, mill manager

Mike Murphy took part in the building boom that sent hundreds of units out to contractors in the region. While Murphy still serves the needs of local builders looking for custom beams and boards, he is now part of an innovative team that is driven to marrying the concept of efficiency with the rustic romance of a log home.

Brought in nearly a year ago to pioneer innovative design, Meghan Powers is teton dwellings' chief designer who began as an illustrator for Grand Teton Log and Lumber. Through the course of recreating

images of the traditional log home, Powers utilized her skills as an environmentally conscious architect to rethink aspects of energy efficiency without losing the charm of a log cabin.

"It has been said that 70 percent of a building's energy use is determined within 5 percent of its design," Powers said.

Putting this simple concept to work for teton dwellings, Powers has designed a number of footprints that try to take every aspect of energy conservation into consideration. Supporting a concept of relevant livability that exists at the core of the company's brand, passive design elements within a log home are used to capture heat and keep it working so that the fireplace gets a break in a part of the country that sometimes gets more months of winter than any other season. Along with the basics of passive design, which position a house to receive maximum exposure from the sun in the southern sky of Teton Valley, the core log structure that exists within the heart of teton dwellings' design enhances the internal thermal mass efficiency without losing the character of a cabin.

Perhaps out of place on a tropical coastline, teton dwellings has designed homes with a log cabin core that they are calling their Agrarian Conservation Series. These are homes suited specifically for this region, reducing the square footage and increasing energy efficiency. Acknowledging the historical and aesthetic combination that inspires valley homeowners to want a log structure as part of their floor plan, the team at teton dwelling also knew the hurdles they must overcome to take some of the mystery out of the log industry. Perceived as a building practice that harvests logs by clear-cutting forests, Casey Eason and Dave Erickson set out, as sales and marketing directors respectively, to shift the paradigm once again by complying with the Healthy Forest Initiative, offering homes built with logs taken from standing dead timber.

Eason and Erickson are working to distance teton dwellings from the outdated business model of the log industry that may have experienced success a decade

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Log homes

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and 90s, Grand Teton Log and Lumber took a step forward with its Teton Heritage Series, offering log cabins small enough that they didn't bankrupt the builder. From the success of that model, teton dwelling was born by putting Eason and Erickson together with Powers and Clint Gridley, who heads Grand Teton Construction, the arm of teton dwellings that parlays innovation into actual building permits and construction of homes with specific products that have been deemed the most durable and effective.

Partnerships with Pella windows and doors, Sure-loc hardware and Sashco log maintenance products have given teton dwellings the wherewithal to move forward with confidence in an industry that had its foundations recently shaken

by a recession and an overproduction of inefficient homes. With what they believe is the most progressive approach to the old art of building a log home, teton dwellings is moving boldly forward to be relevant by making sure not a square foot of living space is left unused.

Employing subcontractors like Kim Mills' Chinker Chick and Greta Prociuous' Maverick Creations, the team at teton dwellings is confident they are tapping the best resources for the best log home construction in the area. Together with their subcontractors and the product lines they endorse, teton dwellings is looking to the future of building smaller and smarter for the next generation.

Featuring their innovative eco-cabin the fourth weekend of March in the Broulim's parking lot, teton dwellings is set to share some of their secrets, highlighting the benefits of green technology that are the foundation of their vision.