



THE Timber Frame EXPERTS



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In 1979, after gaining several years' experience working for a large development company, David McFarlane stumbled across an article about post and beam construction – and was instantly hooked. Mr. McFarlane had always wanted to start his own construction business, and he realized that the warmth and richness of a timber frame home would be sure to captivate consumers. He launched Upper Canada Post and Beam almost immediately.

Written by Claire Suttles

THE company's distinctive timber frame plans and structures were an instant hit, and sales quickly expanded to cover Canada, and internationally. As business spread beyond Canada's borders, the team renamed the company in 1997 to Normerica Authentic Timber Frame to reflect its broader geographical footprint.

Normerica offers a complete timber frame building package for both residential and commercial projects. Structures vary

widely – from cosy cabins and elegant custom homes and cottages, to sprawling ski lodges and condominiums, "in some of the nicest resort areas of North America," Mr. McFarlane says. Whatever the project, the team is capable of taking care of every detail, from the first blueprint to the final nail.

Customers may begin the process by perusing an extensive portfolio of Normerica designs. "There is access to literally thousands of designs," Mr. McFarlane reports. The design team



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is happy to use one of the company’s plans, modify a pre-existing design to suit specific needs, create a unique design from scratch, or collaborate with a client’s architect.

The team can also offer a reasonably accurate final turnkey cost estimate at the earliest stage. Understanding the total price tag “gives a great deal of confidence to customers,” Mr. McFarlane points out. “They can proceed with a particular design and have the confidence that the overall costs are going to be acceptable to them.” The company’s comprehensive business model makes this early cost assessment possible. “We are in control of not only the design and engineering process, but also the fabrication. And then we have a construction division of our business that can step in and build the building.” This start to finish service sets the company apart, and gives Normerica the control to guarantee top notch quality at every turn.

Normerica fabricates timbers and wall panels, the two key building components for its shell package structures. The company manufactures the timbers using the latest, most technically advanced machinery to ensure the highest quality product. In fact, computer numerical control (CNC) equipment does 70 to 90 percent of the fabrication for every timber frame; much of the remaining 10 to 30 percent is fabricated by hand. Normerica partners with a select group of high quality, reliable suppliers to provide complimentary structural features such as windows, doors, and prefinished exterior wood siding to complete the shell package offering.

Normerica maintains its own specially trained construction crew to erect the timber frame buildings. Of course, with Normerica timber frame packages being shipped around the world, the company cannot build every structure that it manufactures. “But we can provide some pretty accurate overall construction costs and we can introduce our clients to builders that have built our buildings successfully in the past for other customers,” Mr. McFarlane explains. Any Normerica Timber Frame Home can be constructed by a capable contractor, either in Canada or abroad. For those who need or prefer to use their own builder, Normerica delivers the ready-to-assemble package of pre-cut timber frame, prefabricated wall and roof panels and other materials directly to the new home site.

Every package also includes the services of a specially trained Normerica Technical Representative. “Our representative will travel to the building site – no matter where it is located in the world – and oversee the initial stage of construction to ensure that the timber frame super structure is properly erected. He’s there to roll up his sleeves and get to work with the local crew to ➤



▶ oversee the safe and correct assembly of the skeleton of the building,” Mr. McFarlane explains. Technical Representatives have overseen buildings across all corners of the globe, from rural Estonia, to the snowy mountains of Japan, to the sunny shores of the Caribbean.

Wherever they are built, every Normerica structure requires state of the art engineering. Each timber frame design introduces different engineering requirements. “You have to have a lot of flexibility within the system,” says Mr. McFarlane. For example, the size and spacing of each beam will vary significantly depending on the weight it must bear. “Our beams could range anywhere from 8x8 to 8x18, or sometimes even greater if we are spanning large distances. “Really, the posts and the beams are driven by the customer’s design needs. And just about anything is possible in terms of the design that can be developed for a customer – wide spans, high vaulted ceilings, lots and lots of windows within the walls –these are all things that drive the engineering of the timber frame itself. No two buildings are really the same.”

Cypress Creek Day Lodge, a ski lodge designed and built for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, showcases the team’s engineering skills beautifully. The 4,700 square metre, three level

building was commissioned to accommodate snowboarding and freestyle skiing enthusiasts during the Games. Normerica designers and engineers had significantly more to worry about than Olympic fans and athletes, however. The team also had to contend with a relatively short deadline and a strict budget. Even more challenging, the ski lodge is located in an earthquake zone, so the team had to specially design the structure to withstand seismic activity. Engineers also had to ensure that the structure could withstand 450lbs of snow at any given time, as well as heavy winds. “There is a lot of engineering that went into the sizing of the timbers, roof rafters and floor joists for that particular building,” Mr. McFarlane recalls. As with many Normerica buildings, the plans “were driven by unique site requirements.”

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While a carefully crafted product and advanced technical expertise have been crucial to the company’s success, a high level of customer service has also been key. “Ours is very much a service business,” Mr. McFarlane explains. “When you are in the custom manufacturing and building business, no two projects are the same, and that requires a very high commitment to customer service.” The team works closely with each customer during the design stage, as well as guaranteeing the highest level of quality of each fabricated component. And then there is the construction itself – “If you



Normerica homes illuminate a feeling of elegance, comfort and timelessness. The final result is a marvelous timber frame home with everything the owners require. Whatever the challenge, it is absolutely possible with Normerica. Photo courtesy of Normerica Authentic Timber Frame. www.normerica.com

know anything about construction, you know there are a lot of things that can go wrong. Anticipating what these things are and making sure that they don't go wrong takes a real commitment to service."

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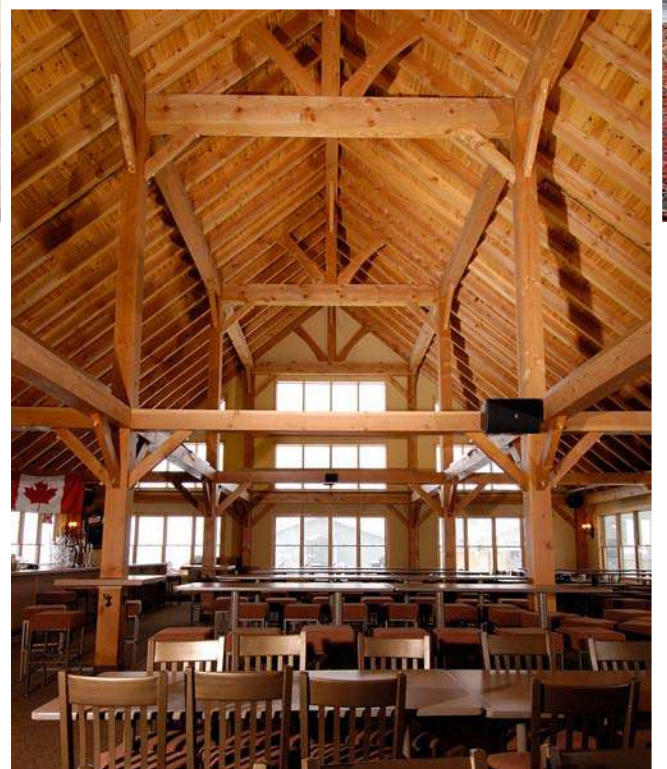
Normerica's commitment to an outstanding finished product and quality customer service is evidenced by the company's thirty plus years of sales. "I think our longevity speaks for itself," Mr. McFarlane points out. In fact, word of mouth has been the company's number one marketing tool, with over 50 percent of the company's business coming from referrals. Normerica also enjoys a substantial amount of repeat business from satisfied customers

wishing to add on to their original design. And, although Normerica could simply rest on its past success, the team constantly strives to raise the bar. "I can tell you, there isn't a day that goes by without a series of meetings and discussions on improvements that we are constantly trying to apply to better the business," Mr. McFarlane reports.

As a result of all that effort, Normerica is able to offer clients one of the highest quality timber frame structures on the market. Indeed, the team boasts an enviable portfolio of award winning projects. "We are equally proud of all of them," Mr. McFarlane remarks. Certainly, the Olympic venue stands out, "but there are some great little cabins

that are 1,000 square feet or less that we love." In fact, cabins might just be the company President's personal favourite. "I think everybody has a little bit of Thoreau in them," he laughs.

Whether it is a secluded, one-room hideaway or a daringly modern resort complex, Normerica can bring the vision to reality. All projects "offer up their own unique challenge," Mr. McFarlane says. And Normerica is ready to meet that challenge. ■





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