



PHOTOS BY JEFFREY D. NICHOLLS/POST-TRIBUNE

Dave DeBoer of Cook Construction saws through a 2-by-6 while working Tuesday afternoon at the timber-framed home in Lake Hills. The St. John home features exposed beams and ornamentation in pine.

'Raise high the roof beam'

Old expression regains meaning in St. John timber-frame house

By MICHELLE L. QUINN
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ST. JOHN — A house being built in the Lake Hills subdivision is wowing construction workers and homeowners alike because of the massive pine wood pieced into its walls.

It's hard to miss the 4,000-square-foot house on a corner lot of the subdivision. The pine-constructed porch roof sits in the middle of the front yard, waiting to be lifted.

The house first drew attention on Aug. 9 when work began on the massive abode, as four flatbed trucks brought at least 20 tons of pine wood timbers, pegs, trunks and panels to the site from Canada, said Brad Ericks, operations director for Cook Builders of Schererville.

On Tuesday, workers were starting to fit windows into the house.

Cook Builders, owned by Richard Cook, is overseeing the second phase of building. And this house is like nothing Cook or his crew have ever seen.

"It is its own beast, that's for sure," Ericks said. "It's not like building a normal house."

The first phase of the house was actually completed in Canada by PineRidge Timber Frame Homes, Ericks said. The company known for its timber-framed houses drew up the blueprints and pieced together the initial structure in London, Ontario.



Large pine beams pinned together feature decorative details throughout the timber-frame home being built in St. John's Lake Hills subdivision.

"It's very much like a jigsaw puzzle or Tinker Toys," Ericks said of the tongue-and-groove construction, called mortise-and-tenon joints. "Workers from Canada came down and fitted the pieces together."

The panels are then fitted into the timber frame. With holes and tunnels inside them for plumbing and electrical wiring, the panels insulate the house as

well as create the ceiling inside.

Cook and his team worked with the Canadian team, led by PineRidge owner Mike Mader, in the initial setup, Ericks said.

Ericks said it was a complicated process.

"When we do a house, you pour the

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foundation, put the frame up and then pour the concrete floor," Ericks said. "With this, since the house is literally resting on 23 tree trunks, we built the foundation, then poured the floor and anchored the frame since there's no steel support. It was quite different."

Cook project manager Dave DeBoer likened their end of the work to a remodeling project, only so much bigger.

"When you're used to doing a house the way we do it, you have to think ahead," DeBoer said. "It's quite a job."

But it's worth it, since there are only three known timber-framed houses in Indiana,

according to Ericks. And none of them is the size and scope of the Lake Hills house.

"Mostly people will have a timber-framed master bedroom or family room, but an entire house is, to my knowledge, unheard of," Ericks said. "When (PineRidge) brought the frames, workers from all over would stop what they were doing and just watch. And all of our subcontractors, such as Dekker Electric and KBT (Heating and Cooling) just want to do the best work they can on it."

A timber-framed house is not cheap, however, costing 25 percent to 30 percent more than a traditional house. And though the upstairs of the house will be more formal, the downstairs will have a permanent lodge-like feel. It's a distinct style that the buyer really must want, Ericks said.