NOT MUCH CAN BE SIMPLER than ordering a custom home, having it built in a controlled weatherproof environment, then delivered to your property and set up on site by the manufacturer—all for a fixed price.

Kurt and Kris Goodjohn of Karoleena Homes have taken cottage and cabin construction to a whole new level with their modular homes. The brothers have come a long way since Kris got a call from Kurt in 2005 about a piece of land he wanted to develop in Calgary. The two decided to go into business and started building traditional single- and multi-family stick-frame homes. They learned the construction industry during the late 1990s' building boom in Alberta. The boom started to bust in 2007 and the Goodjohns changed their game plan. The two had travelled throughout Europe and had noticed a lot of modular construction there. They realized, for them, it was a great way to go. Modular homes could be built in a controlled environment and built faster and for less money than regular framed homes built on site.

First, they had to find a factory that would build to their specifications. After a couple of failed experiences, the two decided that in order to get the high quality they wanted, they would have to create their own factory and build their modular
homes themselves. Today, seven years later, they are looking to expand with additional facilities in BC, Eastern Canada and the United States.

At first, Karoleena Homes only built houses. Cabins and cottages hadn’t even entered their minds. However, that changed in 2009 when their two-storey modular home shows the following year we created the Carolina Cabin and put it in home shows in Western Canada, “he says. “People were coming up to us and hugging us for creating them. It was pretty exciting.”

In retrospect, it just made sense. When you have a recreational property that could be an eight- or 10-hour drive to get to, it’s hard to manage a construction project. Finding trades, organizing subcontractors, or even hiring a general contractor is sometimes too much to deal with. “People told us instead of building they were just camping on their property,” says Kurt. “For them to be able to have a beautiful, architecturally designed, structurally engineered, high-end quality product as a cabin just made sense. Through us, they could get it in a reasonable amount of time at a fixed price.”

These days, Karoleena Homes gives clients the option of attaching walls together, hooking up services, putting on the roof and whatever else needs doing once the pieces leave the factory. The majority of their customers, however, have Karoleena come out and do it all, from building the foundation to putting on the roof. “They are basically 50,000-lb. Lego blocks that have to be put together,” Kurt explains. “It’s pretty intimidating for people to think about doing it themselves and they prefer us to take care of it.”

The cottage that has attracted the most attention is the Kitsilano model. It is easily configured for one, two or three bedrooms and makes use of floor-to-ceiling windows to ensure plenty of natural light is captured.

“We’ve got these beautiful lift-and-slide doors that are basically big panels of glass that give you 12 feet of wide open space from outdoors to indoors,” says Kurt. “You want to be able to enjoy the outdoors and this automatically expands your living space when entertaining.”

Karoleena architects have also placed strategic pocket and barn doors that are basically gliding walls. They are mostly used in bedroom spaces and bathrooms.

“We have in-house architects who are professionally trained to create smart living spaces,” Kurt says. “With our 1,500-sq-ft modular cabin you are getting the same functionality that you’ll find in some 2,000- to 2,500-sq-ft cabins as they have a lot of wasted space.”

Kurt explains how they get the most out of the space in their modular cabins. “We use a lot of vertical space with our cabinetry. Things that you would normally place on the floor, we put on the walls. The rooms are well proportioned without long corridors or hallways. The flow of the house is very intelligent.”

Storage space is abundant in Karoleena cottages. “We use a lot of drawers in our cabinetry to put your pots and pans in,” explains Kurt. “It makes things more readily available. We use floor-to-ceiling cabinets so there isn’t wasted space and things you don’t use as often can be stored higher up.”

Then there is the bathroom where even more space-saving ideas are implemented. “We use wall-hung toilets, again using the vertical space. When you hang a toilet instead of putting it on the floor, it gives you more space and makes it easier to clean. They are well designed to hold up to 500 lbs. There is a big steel bracket that is built into the wall which gives it all its strength.”

By choosing to go with a modular cottage, it is relatively easy to save time and money. From the pouring of the foundation to the owner moving in spans only three to four months. In contrast, it could take as long as two to three years to have a cabin built, depending on its location, the weather conditions and availability of labour.

Karoleena Homes has taken much of the hassle out of building a dream cottage. Clients can pick their design, or if they have a custom design in mind, Karoleena can accommodate that as well. Cabins can also be constructed with a walk-out basement, giving even more space.

Once a design is chosen, clients apply for their building permits for the site. Around
the same time Karoleena starts building the cottage at the factory and crews start to build the foundation on site, if requested. Once the factory work is done, Karoleena wraps the modules in protective packaging and pre-factory work is done, Karoleena wraps the foundation on site, if requested. Once the cottage at the factory and crews start to build completed.”

Outside. After that, the siding and roof is to be created or a cabinet or two put into lights are in, only the drywall seams need done when they leave the factory so there isn’t a lot to do. Toilets are in, sinks are in, pieces are stitched together and then we start isn’t a lot to do. Toilets are in, sinks are in, when they leave the factory so there isn’t a lot to do. Toilets are in, sinks are in, lights are in, only the drywall seams need when they leave the factory so there isn’t a lot to do. Toilets are in, sinks are in, lights are in, only the drywall seams need to be created or a cabinet or two put into place. The modules are already sealed from the outside. After that, the siding and roof is completed.”

According to Kurt, putting the cabins together takes little to no time at all. “Smaller cottages can take five days to complete with larger ones taking up to two weeks. If there is a basement involved, we have a full construction crew available to finish it off for our clients.”

Another advantage of a Karoleena modular home is strength. The modules are a steel structure, said to be 400 percent stronger than other wooden modular cabins and much stronger than a wood frame cabin. The walls are anywhere from R28 to R60 with ceilings starting at R51. Needless to say those cabins are energy efficient. “We have gone through a lot of the models and our modular homes have an EnerGuide rating of 91,” says Kurt. “A typical home has an EnerGuide rating of 74. That translates to savings on heating and cooling.”

Karoleena is also looking at creating Net Zero ready. By using solar panels and geo- thermal you use less energy than you create.” he says. “We can also add in security shutters for those cabins with large amounts of glass. We do the walls in tempered glass so they are quite a bit stronger than regular glass. The R factor on tempered glass is a little misleading, as you don’t typically lose energy through windows. You lose some heat but it is mostly through conduction not through convection. By using spray foam insulation we create a complete seal for the home. We have to have a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) in every home, as they are so airtight. The warm air/cold air that you exhaust is used to preheat or precool the fresh air coming in, which also saves energy. Then comes the cost factor. To build a 1,500 sq ft upper-end cabin and compare it to a 1,500 sq ft modular, you will find the modular more cost effective.

“We are anywhere from $250 to $300 a square foot when everything is included. We have a set timeframe and work on a fixed price and if anything goes wrong, that’s our cost, not the homeowner’s.”

Then there is the weather. With a modular cottage, construction (except for the foundation) is done in the factory so weather is not a factor. Karoleena has crews all over Western Canada and they hire locally. “We do have workers who are stationed at various locations throughout Western Canada, so finding good labour doesn’t hold us up. We are constantly growing our site crews,” says Kurt.

To find out more about Karoleena modular cottages and cabins go to karoleena.com.

ABOUT MODULAR CABINS

• There are many builders of modular homes in Western Canada. All approved modular homes must be built to Canadian Standards Association A277 (Canadian National Building Code). Those specs include engineered floor trusses, 2x6 exterior walls, eight-foot ceilings, and primed and painted drywall.
• Modular homes can consist of from one to eight or more modules.
• Modular homes and cottages are 75 to 90 percent finished in the factory.
• Modular homes are built to withstand transport, with 30 percent more material than conventional buildings. This makes them stronger, more efficient and they exceed most building codes.
• Energy savings, on average, are higher with a modular home due to the construction process.
• The build time and cost don’t change with a modular home. Most traditional construction costs change as the build goes on.
• Modular homes are built in a factory under ideal construction conditions.
• Prefab home factories produce far less waste than traditional job sites.
• The location of a cabin property doesn’t matter. A modular home can be delivered almost anywhere.
• Cost per square foot is equal to or less than conventional home building.
• On average, two months is saved in build time with a modular home.
• The size of individual modules for a modular home is limited by provincial/state transportation boards. Usually the maximum is 10 to 15 feet wide, 60 feet long, and 14 feet high to accommodate overpass clearance.

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