

LOG HOME LIVING

Must-Have Tips for Building a Log Home on the Water

You'll spend your time enjoying the views from your waterfront log home — not worrying about maintenance — when you follow these tips for building on the water.

Written by [Janice Brewster](#)



Photo: Joe Hilliard

What could be better than sitting in a cozy cottage watching the sun set on the water just outside your windows? For many homeowners, a place on a lake, river or beach is the ultimate dream. If that waterfront vision includes a log home,

there are a few considerations to keep in mind in terms of **design** and **maintenance**.

Water, Water Everywhere

Whether you build by fresh water or the ocean, you'll need to plan for exposure to its surroundings. You may love your wide-open property for the view, but it means your home will be exposed to sunlight (both direct and reflective), which can break down log **stains**, allowing water to seep in. And, of course, where moisture is present, rot can occur.

“Moisture is the number one enemy of wood,” says Charis Babcock of **Sashco, Inc.**, which manufactures stain, sealants and other high-quality wood care products. “With anything close to a source of moisture, you need to be more diligent.” Winds that blow across water deposit extra moisture on log walls, she explains, and on the beach, those winds can also carry abrasive sand and salt.

In addition to natural factors, keep municipal restrictions in mind for homes by the water. Talk to your local building department about height restrictions, setbacks from the water's edge and special considerations for flooding or hurricanes. “The two most common upgrades for coastal construction would be in windows and roofing,” says Steve Brumfield of Original Log Cabin Homes in North Carolina. “These areas typically have requirements in order to withstand high winds from hurricanes.”

Fortunately, with a little forethought, you can design and maintain your log home to help mitigate all of these circumstances.

Designed to Last



If you're lucky enough to live lakeside, design plenty of outdoor living space around the entire perimeter of your log home. A deep covered porch (equipped with a ceiling fan) and an outdoor fireplace, like this one, let you bask in the views no matter the weather.

Photo: Joe Hilliard

One goal of log home design should be to protect the log walls as much as possible from the **elements**. All log homes — but especially those by the water — benefit from wide roof overhangs and wrap-around porches or covered decks to minimize logs' exposure to sun and rain.

Make a deliberate decision when it comes to wood species, too. “Of the many wood species we offer, bald cypress is the species of choice for coastal environments,” Steve says. “Cypress has a natural resistance to rot and can handle the harsh environment that the beach areas typically dish out, such as sun, wind and salt air.” For homes on fresh water, he recommends eastern white pine, western red cedar or bald cypress.

For a waterfront setting, a design with wide **windows** is a must. Giving public spaces inside the home and **outdoor living areas** a view allows you to make the most of your property.

Other design elements to consider involve waterfront living and the toys that come with it, from beach chairs to kayaks to fishing tackle. “Storing them can be quite simple if you plan ahead and rather difficult if you don’t,” Steve maintains. A home on raised stilts or pilings creates plenty of storage opportunities but is rather difficult to accomplish with log home construction. Another option is a boathouse (see sidebar, right). Include an outdoor shower for an easy way to rinse the sand or silt off items (and people) before they enter a storage space or your home.

Steve also suggests adding walkways to and from the water to make access easier. “Wooden deck-type walkways are common on the beach or lake areas,” he says. “Proper lighting is important as well.”

The Full Treatment



A small changing room with an outdoor shower is a smart addition to waterfront log home living.

Photo: Roger Wade

In addition to design elements, keeping your waterfront log home strong and good looking for years to come involves regular upkeep. “Don’t skimp on exterior finishing products,” Charis warns. Budget upfront for high-quality log treatments, and remember that when you’re on the water, stain may need to be reapplied as often as every two to three years.

Darker stains and those in shades of gray contain more pigment and, therefore, provide better protection, advises Charis. The best stains have elasticity to move with the logs as they acclimate, especially in the first few years after construction.

Owners should plan to **inspect** their home’s exterior twice a year. “In the spring, look for damage done over the winter, and in the fall, look for damage done over the summer,” Charis suggests. If you plan to hire a contractor to help with exterior maintenance, look for one with log home experience. Keep in mind these experts may be fully booked months in advance.

Given the challenges posed by waterfront sites, is it worthwhile to build a log home there? “Absolutely,” declares Charis. “There’s nothing that compares to a log home on the water — you just have to be prepared.”

Let's Talk Docks

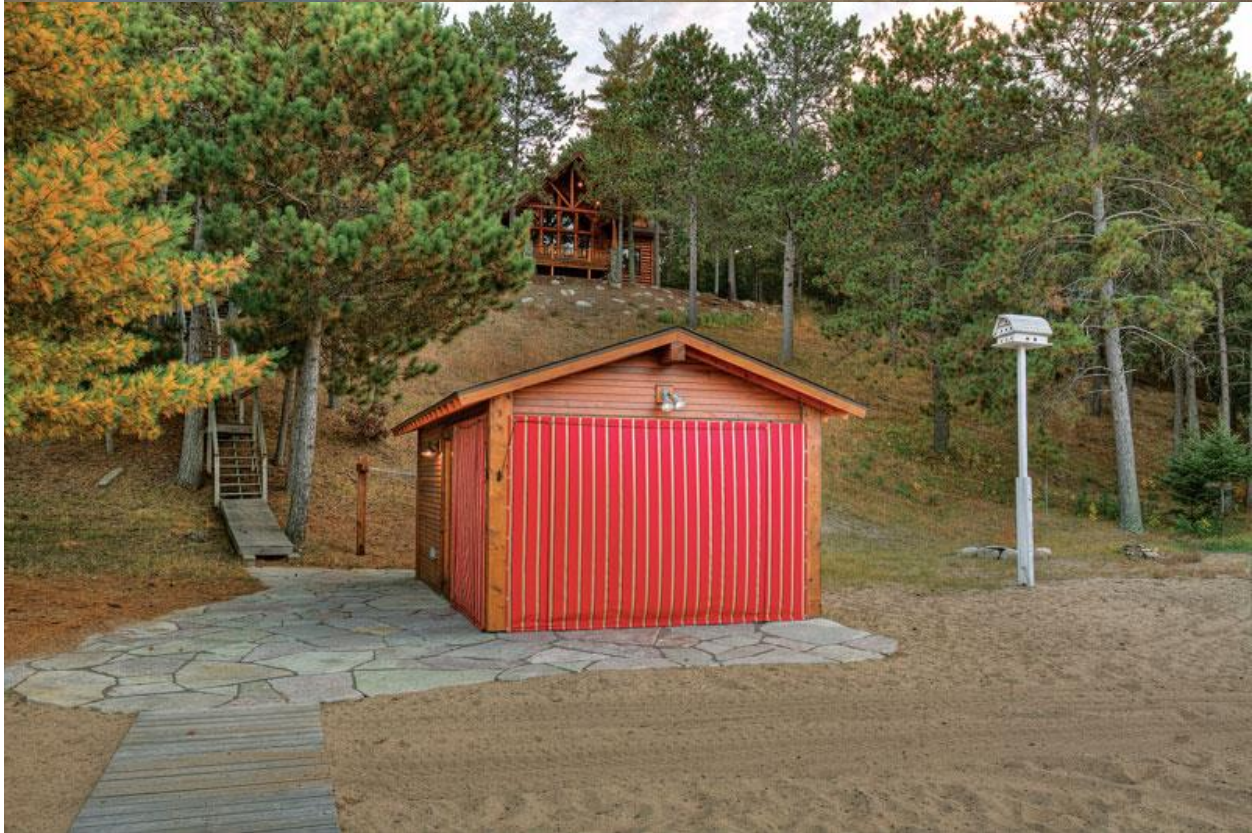


Photo: Rick Hammer, Courtesy Lands End



You don't just want to be near the water — you want to be on it! Adding a boathouse or dock to your log home makes it easier to enjoy the water.

A boathouse can stash all of the gear that water fun requires within easy reach and make a style statement, too. Plus, it can be used for much more than storage; you can use it for changing into swimsuits or as a spot for casual entertaining. Consider adding cabinetry or lockers for stowing your stuff, along with a mini-fridge to keep cool drinks close at hand.

When it comes to design, a dock that's partially covered will protect your boat from the elements while still providing plenty of sunshine for swimmers. A swim ladder or boat ramp makes coming ashore easy. Don't forget lighting, which will welcome you home after a twilight ride.

Before you start sketching out ideas, check for local zoning restrictions, which may dictate what you can build and how close it can be to the water's edge. Consider your choices for decking materials, remembering you'll often be barefoot on the dock. Finally, ask yourself important questions like: Do you want to include built-in seating? Should the deck be permanent or removable for the off season? Look to docks other homeowners in your area have built as your guide.
