



A pile of wood makes a traditional house

◀Continued from Page 17

AP Photo/Richard Marshall

Alan Stankevitz uses short cedar and red pine logs to construct an interior wall in the cordwood house he is building in La Crescent, Minn. He has spent five years building the house by himself out of cordwood, a material most often used for firewood.



tion for heating the house is going to be next to nil."

"It's just something that evolved with me. I started reading books — that was probably my first mistake — on living a more self-sufficient life," he said. "I want to do something for the environment, and I want to try things that are different. I didn't want to follow the pack."

Stankevitz talks a lot about radiant heat and triple-paned windows and thermal mass. "I'm a nut on thermal mass," he said.

But his obsession with energy efficiency might best be reflected in the thermometers he has scattered all around the house. There are digital thermometers, mercury thermometers, thermometers to measure interior temperature, exterior temperature and the temperature of the under-floor heating system. There also will be thermometers hooked up to a computer that will constantly display the temperature at the house on Stankevitz's Web site, <http://www.daycreek.com>.

"I can go anywhere in the world and know what's going on in the house," he said.

His Web site, which includes a journal on his construction, also has become an online clearing-house of information on cordwood construction, Stankevitz said.

"There was nothing on the Internet when I was looking for cordwood," he said. "I researched all this stuff. Why keep it to myself?"

The project, which has cost about \$40,000 to \$45,000 so far, including a well and septic system, is currently on budget, he said.

He said he's building the house to be the last one he and his wife will live in, including extra wide doors in case either one of them has to use a wheelchair in the future.

"There've been times when I questioned my sanity," he said. But "I really haven't had anyone say I'm totally nuts."

"I tell you, at first, I thought Alan was nuts when he told me about this cordwood house," said Stankevitz's wife, JoAnn Hidaka, a plan-

ner with Northrop Grumman. "I thought, 'A circular house? How are you going to put cabinets on the wall?'"

"I thought this was a phase," she said of her husband's dream.

But Hidaka said she warmed up to the idea after staying in a cordwood bed-and-breakfast in Ontario.

"I know he wants this house to be perfect. I don't have a problem with that," she said. "I'm not in that big of a rush to have it done."

And she appreciates his desire for energy efficiency, "as long as he doesn't make me ride a bike to watch TV."

Stankevitz said the project has been healthier for him physically than his old desk job.

"It's fun. I'm having the time of my life doing this," he said. "Would I build another cordwood house? Well, I'm thinking about a garage."

Concrete painting tip

Here's a tip that will make paint on concrete stick the next time you paint. When you paint concrete, you can keep the paint from peeling off by washing the floor first with warm water; then rinse, and let the floor dry thoroughly for a least a day. Using a clean paint brush, apply a coat of white vinegar as a pre-paint primer. Once it dries, it will increase the bond, and the paint you apply will hold and last much longer. This works on most things made of concrete, and benefits many other types of surfaces, too, such as metal, wood, or plastic.

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