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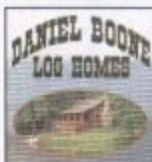
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Bark At Home

Poplar is becoming...well, popular. Its bark, that is, which is showing up more and more on the sides of houses.

Builders actually pioneered the use of bark as siding for homes and commercial properties in the late 1800s. In recent years, home builders such as Marty and Chris McCurry of Blowing Rock, N.C. have revived the idea, opting for the tougher and sturdier poplar bark over the chestnut used in the old days.

Chris McCurry explains that their method uses bark from forest crews primarily cutting logs for the furniture and plywood industries. The McCurrys' team of craftsmen then "harvest" the excess bark through a process of kiln drying, which prevents shrinking and cracking, all without using any chemical additives.

"We're reclaiming waste products," says McCurry. "We don't have to go out and cut 50 more trees to make a whole new siding to go on the exterior of a house, we just utilize something that's already being used anyway."

The McCurrys' Highland Craftsmen Inc. is just one of several building companies in the Blue Ridge region exploring the use of bark in home building. As word of mouth has spread during their 12 years in the business, the demand for bark siding has expanded more and more, with homeowners in North Carolina and Tennessee as well as in New York opting for its rustic look.

For more information: www.barksiding.com. Also visit the Western North Carolina Green Building Council at www.wncgbc.org.

-James Tompkins

"It used to be difficult to finance log homes, but things have changed," she says. "Today's log homes aren't what Daniel Boone would have lived in, with a dirt floor. There's more value in log homes today as they become more