

## Cabin Designs

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**Image:** *3D model of our cabin.*

Building a cabin in a remote location, even if the cabin is “prefabricated”, is not a simple task. As we start to build our cabin, I am reminded that this is the end, not the beginning, of a process that has been underway since the start of this year.

Early in the process, we had to decide what our cabin “needs” were. How much space did we really require? What sort of amenities did we want? At that time, we were living in a two floor, 4

bedroom, 3 bathroom home in the city. How much of this space were we really using? How much of it was just “storage” for “stuff”. What could we do without? After some serious thought, and a lot of reading up on tiny house designs, we decided that a 20' x 20' cabin with a loft would be about right for the two of us. We also decided that we could do without major appliances, such as microwaves, dishwashers, clothes driers, and such. This meant that our electrical needs would be reduced to lighting, communications, computers, and small appliances. Making this choice would simplify our design considerably, and reduce our costs significantly.

Then we had to decide how much we could afford. This was tricky at the time, as we had not yet sold our house, and didn't know what the final amount generated by the sale would be. We needed to err on the conservative side. We also had to decide if we wanted to build our cabin from scratch or get a prefabricated cabin. Although it was potentially the cheapest option, we quickly decided that building a log cabin wasn't going to work for us. The properties that we were interested in buying didn't have the necessary trees for a log cabin, and building a cabin from salvaged logs could be a very long (several years) process. As well, neither one of us had any experience in log cabin construction. Then we considered building a wood frame cabin. I had some experience in the construction of small buildings, so I felt that we could manage this option skill-wise; however, as it turned out, the cost of lumber (without a contractor's discount) pretty much made this option as expensive as getting a cheaper prefabricated cabin. So we looked at “prefab” options.

One of the first things we found out about companies that manufacture “prefab” cabins is that very few of these companies make small, simple cabins. Almost all the designs we looked at were much larger than we wanted. The second thing we learned is that most of these companies do not support “self-assembly”. If you buy their cabin kit, they have to deliver it and build it for you, and this construction process requires heavy equipment, cranes, and on-site accommodation for the workers. With the degree of remoteness of the sites that we were considering, this simply was not going to be possible.

Finally, after much contemplating and searching, we settled on a company called [Bavarian Cottages](#) out of Kamloops for the following reasons:

- they focus on prefab kits for tiny homes, micro-sized cabin, and mini-cottages, and support the concept of living efficiently in an eco-sustainable manner with a small footprint.
- their kits use BC lumber, as opposed to some kits which were using imported Norwegian pine.
- they encourage self-assembly.
- their kits do not require heavy machinery to assemble and have very little onsite waste of materials, thus reducing the environmental footprint and potential damage to the natural areas surrounding the site.
- their kits can be assembled quickly within a week or so.
- their kits are complete, and include floor, hardware, roof, and insulation.

- they are a small, family-run, BC company, and I like supporting local small businesses.

Bavarian Cottages uses a design based on machined logs – tongue-and-groove wall “logs” which interlock together – to form the basic cabin structure. This design has been referred to as “adult lego”, as it is very simple for two people to assemble a cabin that is prefabricated in this manner (all the pieces come pre-cut, numbered, and marked for assembly). Bavarian Cottages has a number of [stock cabin kits](#), but they will also work with a client to produce a custom design. In our case, we started with their “Tom’s Cabin” model, and added a number of customizations.



**Image:** *Tom’s Cabin.*

Since we were designing a coastal cabin, we wanted a smaller overhang on the front to maximize sun exposure during the rainy coastal winters. We also decided that a mud room was very important to help keep the main cabin proper dry. This resulted in a small addition being added to one side of the cabin. This unheated space will also serve as a “pantry” for storage of canned and dried goods. Instead of having a front entrance, we will have a small covered deck on the side with a door opening into the mud room, and a secondary entrance at the rear of the building. Finally, we chose to make the interior an “open” design, with only the bathroom as a closed off space. This will allow for better, more thorough heating with the wood stove, and prevent parts of the cabin from becoming cold, damp spaces.



*Image: Cabin floor plan.*