

For four generations, the Schellinger family has been making timber frame houses.

TIMBER

Joseph Schellinger started in business in the late 1880s, having come to this country from Germany. The tools were handed down to his son, Leo, and then Leo's son, Francis. Today, Joseph's great-grandson, Chris, is doing his part to keep the tradition alive.

"Structurally, engineering wise, it is a very solid home," Chris Schellinger said. "It's almost heirloom quality. These houses are known for their authenticity and realness. It takes a while to build one, but it is a very solid, sound building." >>

Timber framing has been practiced for centuries. Today most houses and many larger buildings are made of wood, but there are different ways of making the frame or skeleton, of the structure. Whereas typical light frame construction today involves many slender sticks of wood simply cut to length and nailed together, a typical timber frame structure requires a much smaller number of stout posts and beams, shaped at

their connections to lock together. Light frame construction, even when carefully done, is considered rough carpentry, and in dwellings it always is concealed by finished walls and ceilings. Modern timber frame work, on the other hand, is generally exposed, and timbers can be as finely prepared as the skill and care of the craftsman allow.

Joseph Schellinger's first Minnesota construction project

was a timber frame barn southwest of St. Cloud in 1889. That building is still standing and is in good shape today, Chris Schellinger said with a bit of pride. That barn was built for \$100 and a keg of beer a day for the workers who toiled with its massive beams. The barn withstood hellacious winds, including one tornado that wiped out countless buildings in its path. The tornado pushed the barn three or four feet. After the storm, >>

farmers with teams of horses pulled it back to its rightful place.

"For the most part, this is unknown to many people," Schellinger said as he led a visitor on a tour of a timber frame house he helped build in the Avon hills west of St. Cloud. "It's not very common today, but more so than it was 30 years ago. But 200 to 300 years ago most homes were built this way. The German immigrants brought their timber framing skills to this country."

For a variety of reasons, timber framing in North America declined in the latter part of the 19th century, and mixed framing methods evolved to satisfy the economic and stylistic requirements of the changing times.

In the 1970s, thanks in part to the "back-to-the-land movement," interest returned to structures that were more open and exposed, which in turn led to the modern timber frame revival.

Timber framing became popular again in Minnesota in about the 1980s, Schellinger said.

The re-emergence of timber frame construction also came about because of the advent of something called Structurally Insulated Panels, or SIPs.

Before SIPs, timber framing was less than ideal as far as energy efficiency was concerned. There was a thermal break every 16 inches. With SIPs, there's virtually a seamless envelope around the house. That envelope holds the heat in during the cold winter months and the heat out in the summer. "That's the big advantage to timber framing," Schellinger said.

There's also a beauty to timber framing, which generally involves open floor plans. "Rooms don't have to be big to look big," Schellinger said.

In the home that Schellinger's company, Remodeling Professionals, helped construct in the Avon hills area, the open floor plan leads to a main room with a 26-foot-high open ceiling. Remodeling Professionals was the general contractor and Phil Bjork of Great Northern Woodworkers of Cambridge handled much of the design work and specific construction of the house for Mike and Judy Noonan of St. Cloud.

Chris Schellinger planted the seed of a timber frame house with the Noonan's when he was doing some work on the deck of their St. Cloud home a few years back. Originally, the Noonans had been considering a log home to build on their wooded rural land.

"We wanted to build a comfortable retreat in the woods," Mike Noonan said.

Log homes, however, were darker inside and required a great deal of maintenance.

Once they started looking into timber frame homes, they were sold on the openness of the space inside and the light that design provided. The Noonans researched timber frame construction by looking at magazines, attending building shows and eventually hooking up with Phil Bjork and toured his operation west of Cambridge.

Mike Noonan said he couldn't be happier with the end result. "In some respects, it turned out better than we thought it would."

Building a timber frame home is rewarding, Schellinger said. It's almost like creating a unique piece of art, since seldom are two homes the same. "I enjoy the uniqueness, the challenge and the craftsmanship of this kind of construction. It takes a little more time and offers some

unique challenges, but it's more rewarding."

In the Avon home, white pines from Wisconsin were used for most of the beams, but all species of wood can be used, Schellinger said.

When working with prospective timber frame homeowners, Schellinger tries to get them to envision what the finished product will look like.

"Everyone is unique with unique tastes. The client in this home researched timber frame homes for five years. The biggest challenge is to get people to understand what the space will look like and feel like when it's completed. It's all about communication."

As an example, Schellinger pointed to the light pouring in from the home's many windows. Timber frame homes lend themselves to lots of sunlight because of their open floor plans. Trying to get the homeowner to envision that light streaming in is important so they can get a sense for what the house will feel like when it is ready for occupancy.

White oak pegs are used in the beams to steady them. Those pegs give a rustic feel to the home as well.

And 5 1/2 inches of foam insulation in the walls and 9 1/2 in the ceiling give the home a denseness not found in stick construction houses, Schellinger said. "There's not a lot of sound transfer. It's pretty quiet." Indeed, standing in the middle of the home that sits on a wooded lot gives one the feel of seclusion. ▶