

Once a Week ...

... a short essay/story from woodblock printmaker David Bull

Under Construction

My friend Ushiro-san is building a log house down in the country. So far, it has taken him about five years, and it's still far from ready for his family to move in. When I ask him how much longer it will probably take, he just shrugs his shoulders ... who knows ...

Five years! Do you think he is lazy? Don't you think he is a little bit too slow? Well actually, he's neither. He works very hard on the house ... when he can. You see, not only does he have a full-time job to go to every day, and thus only has weekends and holidays free for his house project, but his future home is located about 300 kilometers away from his current residence. That means an awful lot of time spent just in travelling back and forth. Obviously Shigeyoshi-san is very, very dedicated to his home building project, and I'm amazed that he's got as far as he has, in just five years.

The log walls are up, the roof is finally on, and he is now building doors and windows, all by hand. The plumbing and electrical wiring will come next, and then the interior finishing.

When you hear this story, do you say "Taihen, desu ne!?" I think Ushiro-san probably hears this phrase a lot ... but he'll never hear it from me! I would rather say, "Tanoshii, desu ne!" Yes of course, his work is 'taihen' ... hard, heavy and time consuming. But it is also something very special. With his own two hands, along with help from his family, Shigeyoshi-san is building his own home - a place where his children will grow up, and the family roots will go down.

In times gone by, before the age of large cities, building one's own home must have been something that nearly every man did as a matter of course. But these days, it is an accomplishment that very few of us achieve. When I was somewhat younger, in my early 20's, I too thought that one day I would like to take on such a big project, but now that I find myself in my 40's, I wonder if I would be able to find the energy. And by the time I do finally get it together in terms of land and money, I suppose my kids will have grown up and left, and that seems to take away a lot of the motivation for doing it in the first place ...

But Ushiro-san is well under way. When his family does finally move in, in the (I hope) not too distant future, they will enjoy the pleasure of knowing that every log, every board, and every rail, was put in place by their father, not by a blase group of professional carpenters, who were 'here today, somewhere else tomorrow'. What more satisfying and interesting work could there possibly be for a man? As he raises his children, so does he raise his home, with love and care ...

So surely with a project this important and enjoyable, the longer it takes ... the better. Only 5 years so far - Ushiro-san, I hope it will take you 50 more!

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