

Canadian housing for export

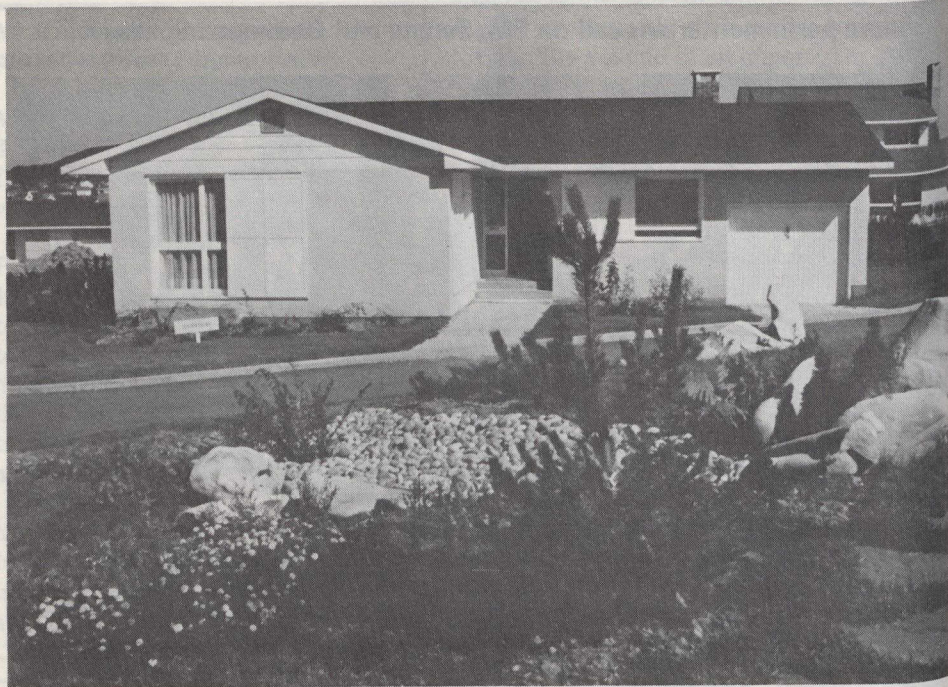
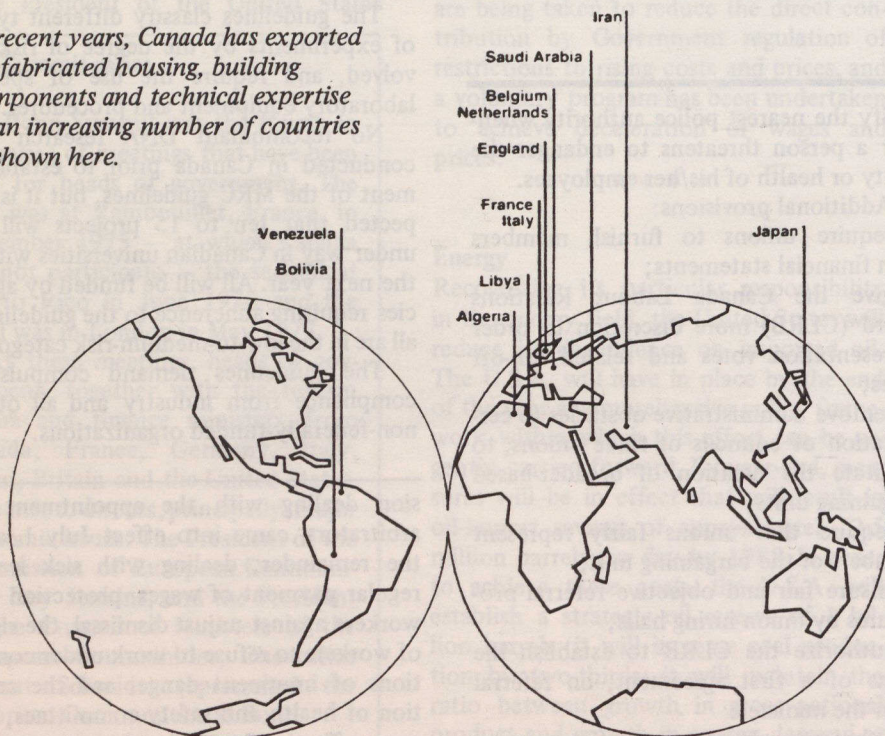
Although Canadian exports as a whole may not have the edge in world markets, a healthy trade in prefabricated housing, building components, and housing construction expertise is currently bringing some \$300 million a year to Canadian companies. And businessmen as well as Canadian trade officials see an even rosier export picture ahead....

The recent push in exports in the construction field began in the 1960s. At the time, Britain was looking for a way to improve home-building methods and ease its chronic housing shortage. Traditionally, British houses were constructed with bricks and mortar on site, a "wet" system of construction easily impeded by rainy weather and low temperatures. Until 15 years ago, some British home buyers could expect a two-year wait between the time they hired a contractor and the time they took possession of a new house.

Britain's interest

In 1963, a group of professional builders from Britain toured Canada to assess techniques for producing timber-frame housing. Nine out of ten Canadian homes are of timber-frame construction, a "dry" construction method based on prefabricated wood structural components that are factory-produced and simply erected

In recent years, Canada has exported prefabricated housing, building components and technical expertise to an increasing number of countries as shown here.



Timber-frame, Canadian-style home is part of a housing project in Igny, France.

on the building site. Within a few months these homes are fully finished and ready for occupancy. The British saw timber-frame construction as a promising alternative to their traditional methods, but needed proof that it was adaptable to their climatic conditions, building codes, mortgage and insurance requirements, and most of all, that it would appeal to

the British buyer.

Subsequently, Canada co-operated in a demonstration project at Harlow, England. Several Canadian-style dwellings were built, with Canadian builders instructing British contractors in timber-frame construction. The homes sold quickly and the British construction industry plunged headlong into the manufacture of prefabricated wood-frame housing to the extent that today 30 per cent of new homes are of this type.

Pilot project in France

France embarked on an even more ambitious pilot project in 1970. As a result of an inter-governmental agreement, the Dumez-Campeau consortium, a specially formed Franco-Canadian company, erected 114 timber-frame houses of ten different designs in the Paris suburb of Igny.

Houses familiar to Canadians but virtually unknown in Europe were built: the split-levels, bungalows and two-storey homes with full basements were innovations on the French housing scene.

So were some of the construction methods: roof trusses covered with plywood sheathing before roofing material was applied; asphalt roof shingles; forced warm air from a central furnace; plumbing and wiring easily installed in timber-frame housing. And most revolutionary of all was the factory assembly of components. A simple assembly plant, located 30 kilo-