

Sanctuary

MODERN GREEN HOMES

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64

Prefab & modular supplier guide; reclaimed timber treasure trove;
joey sanctuary bushfire rebuild; sweet syrups from foraged flora

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**One of two e-scooters from Voltrium,
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Offer open to Australian residents. Details page 81



Treasure trove

WORDS Rebecca Gross

GIVING PRECIOUS TIMBER ANOTHER LIFE

Reclaimed timber is hands-down the most sustainable option when it comes to using wood in your new build or renovation project. Reusing timber rescued from the demolition of old houses, factories, warehouses and other structures, and salvaged from wind-fallen trees and similar sources, reduces landfill. Even more importantly, it reduces the demand for newly harvested timber, avoiding the environmental impact of forestry. Often milled long ago and air-dried over decades, reclaimed wood is denser, harder and more stable than new timber, and

brings its own unique character acquired through weathering and its years of service as a floor, a roof beam or a bridge support.

We spoke to five specialist reclaimed timber suppliers around Australia, to learn about their operations and why they are committed to working with lovely old wood. When these businesses started recycling timber, they were going against the grain. Today, there is a much stronger demand for reclaimed timber in building and design; these companies are leading the way.



Thor's Hammer

LOCATION Canberra, ACT • WEBSITE www.thors.com.au • PHOTOGRAPHY Rohan Thomson

As a young woodworker making furniture and kitchens, Thor Diesendorf observed how much high-quality Australian hardwood from house demolitions was being dumped in landfill. With connections to local demolition companies, he decided to start his own business: Thor's Hammer was launched in Canberra in 1994. "My mission was to keep demolition timber out of landfill by growing the interest in and demand for recycled timber," he says.

Thor's Hammer sources hardwoods from the demolition of old houses, commercial buildings, factories, bridges and wharfs around the country. "Recycled Australian hardwoods are an amazing resource – dense and durable and with a huge range of colours and grain," says Thor, who counts blackbutt, spotted gum and brushbox among his favourites. "As a carpenter, I also

love working with reclaimed Oregon pine because it is light and strong, and I enjoy the resinous smell of native cypress pine."

There are often between five and fifteen different timber species salvaged from a single demolition. The Thor's Hammer team transforms this timber into flooring, cladding, decking, posts and beams for building and renovations, as well as doors, benchtops and joinery. They also sell slabs and dressed timbers, and craft custom furniture.

As Thor's Hammer nears its 30th birthday, Thor says the industry has completely changed since he started the business. "We've succeeded in driving demand for the product, which has transformed the way people view recycled timber. Our designs and products are attracting more interest every year."

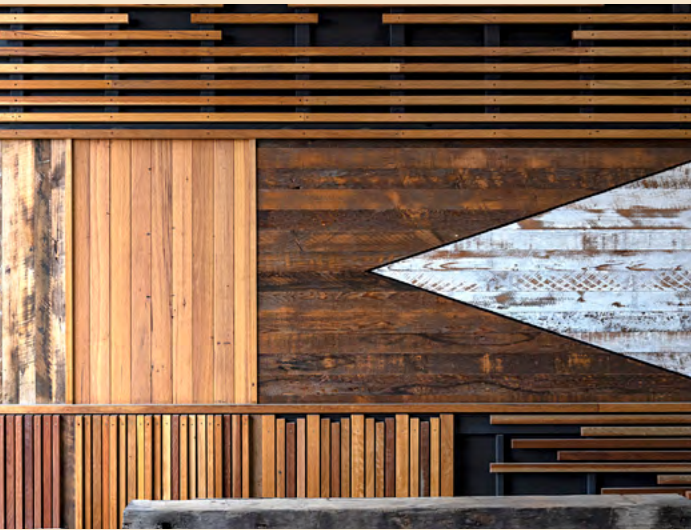


Image: Bombora Custom Furniture

Timberzoo

LOCATION Moolap, VIC • WEBSITE www.timberzoo.com.au

Dave Hutchens entered the building material salvage industry in the mid-1980s when Melbourne's inner suburbs were being renovated and restored, using building materials sympathetic to their heritage. Come the 1990s, a strong desire for modern design prevailed over heritage concerns, but Dave recalls that preloved timber emerged as the one product in consistent demand.

In 2000, Dave and business partner Nick Kritikos established Timberzoo in Geelong to process reclaimed timber for sale via their retail businesses in Melbourne. Within a few years, they had shifted all their attention to this part of the enterprise as demand grew.

Timberzoo sources most of its stock from factories and houses in Melbourne and Geelong, as well as warehouses,

wharves and bridges further afield “when the volume of timber is worth the trip,” explains Dave. A variety of local and out-of-state species can be reclaimed from buildings in Victoria, including Oregon, jarrah, messmate, mountain ash and stringybarks, while interstate projects provide hardwoods such as ironbark, tallowwood, spotted gum, blackbutt and red gum.

Dave, Nick and their team supply original and dressed timber, flooring, decking, cladding, lining boards, posts and beams to a broad market. Over the last 35 years, Dave has seen a turnaround in the marketplace for reclaimed timber – from being difficult to source and often more expensive than new timbers, to being closer in price and more readily available, due to a more organised supply.



Image: Decks by Darren



Northern Rivers Recycled Timber

LOCATION Casino, NSW • WEBSITE www.northernriverstimber.com.au

Claudia Mitchell (pictured), founder of Northern Rivers Recycled Timber (NRRT), has been in the sawmill industry for more than 20 years. She began in a traditional sawmill that transitioned to having a focus on recycled timber more than a decade ago. “That’s when I got very passionate about it,” she says. “We began interacting with people who are enthusiastic and innovative about how they use timber in design.”

NRRT operates a mill in northern New South Wales, sourcing used railway sleepers and reclaimed timber from demolished homes, warehouses and factories across the state and into southern Queensland. The majority are Australian hardwoods, plus plenty of Oregon. “Generally, the timbers found in old buildings and railroads came from what is now classed as old-growth forest,” Claudia says. “Seasoned for so long in their first application, they are incredibly dense and durable.” Her

favourite species are blackbutt, tallowwood and grey ironbark.

The reclaimed timbers are transformed into four product ranges: feature walls and cladding, railway sleeper decking, recycled flooring, and decking tiles. While each piece of timber is unique, the team at NRRT focuses on ensuring consistency within each product line. They also work to minimise waste by developing products like their modular decking tiles, which make use of the short timber lengths left over after milling traditional decking.

Aside from the environmental benefits and sustainability of recycled timber, Claudia remains passionate about its aesthetic character and the creativity it sparks. “It has colours, grains and textures that you don’t see in new timbers, and the combination of its natural attributes and past shaping by humans is so much more interesting. Every piece has a story to tell.”



Timber Traders

LOCATION Fremantle, WA • WEBSITE www.fremantletimber.com.au • PHOTOGRAPHY Terry and Damian Miskimmin

When it comes to reclaimed timber, Terry Miskimmin (pictured with a 350-year-old windblown tree) is one of the longest-standing in the business. Joining the back-to-the-land movement in the 1970s, he helped to establish and build a community in Balingup, 240 kilometres south of Perth. He would travel up to the city to buy reclaimed timber and other building materials, and gradually started working for the demolisher, assisting with the salvaging and repurposing. Terry eventually started his own business, Timber Traders, based in Fremantle, and his son Damian has recently joined him.

Terry and Damian remain very hands-on, recovering the timber themselves from residential and commercial buildings and structures. They also salvage logs from road widening works and residential land and fenceline clearing, as well as wind-blown trees from around Perth and rural Western Australia.

The main timber species include jarrah, maritime pine, marri, tuart, blackbutt, karri and sheoak. Terry's favourite is wandoo, a local eucalyptus species. "It was used extensively for heavy construction purposes, such as poles, bridges, railway sleepers, wharfs and warehouse flooring. It's very hard and beautiful," he says.

At Timber Traders, timber is cut, milled, air-dried and crafted into a range of products: posts, beams, flooring, decking, tabletops, benchtops and more. Customers can also select their timber slab before it's crafted into their chosen product.

Timber Traders is home to a handful of people making a big cumulative impact. "All the wood we've recycled over 45 years would be the equivalent of a huge forest that's been saved from logging, plus all the avoided energy costs of it being sawn, transported, dried," Terry says.



Architectural Hardwood Joinery

LOCATION Woonona, NSW • WEBSITE www.ahjoinery.com.au

Rob Chapman established Architectural Hardwood Joinery (AHJ) after a career as a furniture maker. He's based on the Illawarra coast, south of Sydney, where a lot of urban renewal over the last decade or so has seen the original fishing and mining cottages knocked down and replaced with large new houses. "There was beautiful timber in the places being demolished, and I thought about making window frames and doors out of the recycled hardwood," he says.

The team at AHJ makes all joinery to order. It's crafted with detailing that's carried over from Rob's days making furniture, and is often produced in larger dimensions, made possible by the reclaimed timber. "Because our stock is already dried and stable, we have a thicker profile on windows and doors, and our dimensional sizes are unique. A lot of eucalypt species can only be kiln-dried up to a thickness of 50 millimetres, but our eucalypt timbers have already air-dried over years or decades and in thicker pieces," Rob explains.

The timber is sourced predominantly from demolished buildings up to just 20 kilometres from the workshop, keeping transportation miles (and thus carbon emissions) low. The main species are blackbutt, spotted gum and red mahogany (*Eucalyptus resinifera*) – Rob's favourite. "I think it's the king of timbers for its quality, durability and stability. Any time I make a window frame for myself, it's red mahogany," he says.

AHJ is a carbon-negative business, powered by a 99-kilowatt solar PV system; about a third of the electricity generated is used onsite and the rest exported to the grid. For the past three years, site visits have happened using an electric car. Rob and his team also help spread the sustainability message through educational tours through their workshops.

Left and bottom right images: Reclaimed timber from AHJ was used extensively at Breezeway House by David Boyle Architect. Images: Brett Boardman