

No More Nails

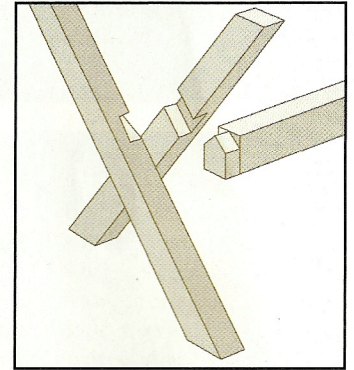
In a special look at recycling we ask furniture makers how they are using reclaimed timber, show how to make a sun lounger from discarded wood, and ask how to glue pitch pine

In the introduction to his new book, *Woodworking for the Weekend*, Mark Griffiths celebrates the unique consequences of working with reclaimed timber. 'The furniture you create will reflect the reclaimed timber that you find,' he writes. 'This is the beauty of working in this way: each item made is individual and unique to the maker.'

His book features projects made from recycled materials, with anything from log stores to coffee tables, made from rejected timber, old doors and even axe handles. The aim was to make the projects as simple as possible, and using born-again boards means that you can get away with fewer tools, indeed planer-thicknessers and bandsaws are often inappropriate for materials full of nails and screws.

Recycled bargains

Buying wood from a recycling centre is also likely to be cheaper and less intimidating for the novice. 'The timberyards can be full of jargon and convoluted language,' he explains. 'The cost of new wood for a bookcase can be quite heavy, and there is less pressure buying recycled timber, especially if you are not sure about your skills as the thing looks almost antique already. It matters less if the saw slips or you bash it with a hammer; it's all part of



Recycled An X-Frame table with T&G top and an Axe Handle table (above right) feature in Mark Griffith's new book on reclaimed timber

the character. Mark started dabbling with reclaimed timber after a visit to Brighton Wood Salvage, which is part of the Network of Wood Recycling Centres (NWRC), making a bridge from recycled teak, originally part of Brighton pier. 'It is getting easier to buy reclaimed wood. You can get a lot from building sites if you talk to the foreman, and you can always pick up pieces of chairs and tables, and wardrobes without doors.' Increasingly, he says, architects and designers are embracing the culture of recycling materials from industry, and he

cites the example of a Brazilian he's come across who is making screens from the offcuts discarded by a skateboard factory. 'Sometimes it's a case of designing a product around the waste of others.'

That's exactly what is happening at St Albans Wood Recycling (SAWR), where such is the demand for furniture from reclaimed wood that SAWR have recruited first one skilled craftsman, then a second and also a volunteer who they have taken on as an apprentice supporting him through a joinery course at the local college. The team



Scaffold Geoff Deans of St Albans Wood Recycling with a scaffold board chest (left), and a cable drum table (above). Such has been the success of making furniture at the centre that they have helped fit out a local fish and chip shop (right) and are working on a café now





converts scaffolding boards, sheets of shuttering ply and much more into saleable products. Paul Murphy had been self-employed for 10 years making banquet tables for the likes of Harrods, plus shop-fitting in high street chains like Subway and Costa. That experience impressed SAWR director Geoff Deans, and has led to work fitting out a fish and chip shop and currently a local cafe. "Paul is able to make anything the customer wants," Geoff explains. "What we produce is simple, but bespoke and exactly to requirements, not pre-made and all the same. We are a not-for-profit social enterprise which recruits volunteers with learning difficulties or troubled backgrounds, so we needed someone who could not only produce great furniture from reclaimed wood, but someone who could help train volunteers patiently and productively."

Previously Geoff and the St Albans team, like many other wood recycling yards, had concentrated on collecting and selling wood from construction sites and other industrial sources with only limited capacity for making products. Then in the run-up to Christmas last year they began receiving more and more requests for furniture made from reclaimed wood. In the New Year they employed Paul, ostensibly to make furniture that would raise funds for the centre, but



Ply Paul Murphy at St Albans Wood Recycling has been experimenting with laminating strips of shuttering ply together, the faces sheets often being damaged or marked



Display Until recently Maurizio was renting a bench in the St Albans workshop to make items like this dried fruit market stall display, but now the centre needs the space

also to widen their operations so that they'd have more things for volunteers to do, and maintain their interest. "We have a pool of volunteers from all types of background," says Geoff, "but they tend to be transient. They may not be working for a spell, or they stay for a few months, although some do stay for a year or two, until they want to try something else. For example one volunteer left to go and volunteer with a tree planting organisation."

Commenting on the value of making their own furniture from the recycled wood he adds: "It seems to complete the circle. We have the reclaimed wood, which could be used for raised beds etc..., but we feel it's taking recycling as far as we can to make quality bespoke furniture out of it. Many of the volunteers also get a great sense of achievement in helping to make furniture."

Timber supplies

Scaffolding planks feature highly at St Albans Wood Recycling. They are a particular resource Geoff Deans has no problem finding. "The boards come from scaffolders. One contractor was moving yards and had thousands of boards to get rid of." Geoff hired a lorry to collect them, and is about to do the same again when another scaffolding company approached him with an offer of many more planks.

They also get plenty of old joists, which are darker and have a nice antique feel, and recently they've been working with ply, which arrives regularly in the yard. An 8x4ft sheet might have one clean section, so strips are cut from the edges and then laminated together to produce blocks. A visiting architect was impressed by the trial blocks and asked for a kitchen worktop made that way. They've subsequently produced a bench using that technique.

Employing Paul has transformed the

Make a Sun Lounger

Mark Griffiths makes summer furniture from old ply and pine

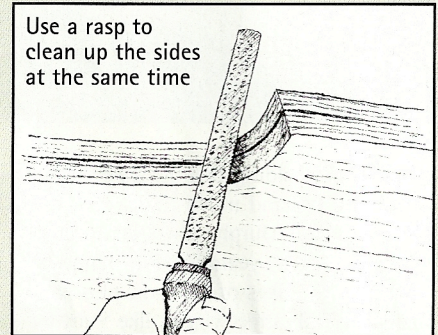
This job is straightforward to assemble and is made from basic supplies that are easily found. The two side sections and all of the frame rails were cut from one sheet of 18mm exterior-grade plywood discarded on a construction site. To use this one sheet for all these components, you'll need to make sure that you use the sheet wisely. When marking out the shape for the first side section, work toward one corner to make sure you leave enough material to cut out the second section and the supporting pieces; the same applies when you cut out the second side section. A jigsaw is used for this project because it is the easiest tool for cutting the curved shapes.

The top slats were retrieved from the waste pile of a local timber merchants. To them, they were useless leftovers from a production run; to me, they were the essential component to give my lounger a classic look and comfortable feel. Without the lucky break, I probably would have been on the hunt for old bed-frame slats or something similar with a smooth, not rough, finish. The battens I used were cut from 1½x1½in (40x40mm) boards. The two sets of wheels are not essential, but they will make it easier to move your lounger around to catch the most of those rays. I used old skateboard wheels, because as well as being economical and easy to find, they are good and strong and have a low profile. Wheels from an old office chair will also work.

Measuring to fit

Make a rough sketch of the lounger to use as a working drawing; it doesn't have to be anything fancy. First, using the tape measure and pencil, record the distance from the sole of your foot to your waist and from your waist to the top of your head. Depending on how tall you are, you may wish to increase each measurement a little to allow for taller friends. Measure yourself at your widest point, whether that is your hips or shoulders, and allow a little extra for comfort. Next, throw a stack of pillows and cushions on the floor, and arrange both them and yourself into a reclined position that you would be comfortable to stay in for an hour or two. Use the arrangement of the cushions to create a sketch of the length of the bed and the backrest.

With sketch in hand and using the pencil, mark the shape of the side (A) of your lounger onto the plywood. Start by measuring and marking the bottom horizontal edge of the lounger, then measure



up from one end of the pencil line and mark the height of the back, subtracting the thickness of the slats. Now, about 16in (400mm) from the foot end of the lounger, measure up from the bottom horizontal line to the height you want for the bed of the lounger (mine is 16in (400mm)), remembering to subtract the thickness of the slats (B). Draw a soft curve for the front of your lounger to this line, then continue this line along the length of the bed and up the backrest, as on your sketch, before finishing with another soft curve to level off when you reach the end.

With the important line of the lounger scribed, you can now draw out the rest of the side section. In order to lighten the design, I decided to create an opening at the bottom of the side section, leaving a front and rear 'foot' of 9¾in (250mm).

With the plywood marked up, it's time to cut out the first side section (A). Using the jigsaw, follow your pencil marks to cut out the edges of the side section, along with the opening to create the feet. Use this side section as a template to mark up the second side piece. Align the side pieces and hold them together, to keep them even while you clean the edges with a wood rasp.

From the leftover plywood, measure and mark out five frame rails (C), making them 1½in (40mm) shorter than the width of your lounger to allow for the thickness of the side sections. I wanted a lounger 26in (660mm) wide, so my rails were 6x24½in (150x620mm). On one rail (C1), cut out an opening just as you did on the side sections, but this time only 1½in (40mm) high. This will be the hand-hold for when the lounger needs to be moved into the sun's rays.

Then cut 10 6in (150mm) battens from 1½x1½in (40x4mm) softwood and drill pilot holes at each end, staggered on adjacent faces. Cut two pieces of 2x2in (50x50mm) (E) to fit inside the lounger feet at the back. Secure them with wood screws, then shape with a wood rasp to match the curve of the