

beauty of *bespoke*

Australian designers reveal the inside tips for choosing timber, with all its various textures and tones.

TACTILE AND EVOCATIVE, Australian hardwood inspires designers to create bespoke works, offering a desirable alternative to mass-produced ranges. Meanwhile, new harvesting and processing techniques mean that timber has had its status elevated to one of the planet's most sustainable materials.

"We have a resource that has amazing characteristics," explains Ross Longmuir, director of Planet Furniture in Surry Hills, Sydney, whose streamlined pieces are created in various tones of spotted gum. "I'm always looking for daring clients who want a real statement piece."

An abundance of craftspeople have come out of the woodwork (so to speak), ushering timber into the 21st century. And while the workshop of Mark Tuckey (pictured) already employs 10 craftspeople assembling one-off pieces and designer ranges, he decided to up the ante by opening a showroom on Sydney's northern beaches. "I love working with Australian hardwood, particularly blackbutt and recycled messmate," says Tuckey, who's been in the trade for more than 20 years.

While thrilled with the resurgence of bespoke timber pieces, Tuckey is aware of the setbacks involved. "A client who ordered a massive timber table happened to live in a penthouse," he recalls. "We had to make the table in bits, incorporating a lot of metal sleeves – we virtually had to make it onsite." >

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MARK TUCKEY

timber

Price tags of bespoke furniture pieces may be on the steep side, but quality and longevity justify the cost

< Meanwhile, another timber artisan, Sydney-based designer Gary Galego (pictured), has been signed up by Woodmark. His highly acclaimed 'Leve' chair in European ash boasts beautiful proportions, making it practical and sensual. Distribution in Northern Europe is being negotiated with Danish firm Paustian, while Woodmark is developing Galego's upcoming piece, the 'Shell' chair in moulded plywood on a metal leg frame.

George Harper of Tide Design can't deny his penchant for modernist Scandinavian design and its inclination towards craft and the use of natural materials. This is reflected in his use of imported North American hardwoods, which are sourced from sustainable forests. "The grain structure has a different look to Australian hardwoods, offering more variation and a cleaner aesthetic," he says. With a nod to visionary designers such as Arne Jacobsen, Kaare Klint and N.O. Moller, Harper's refined pieces, such as the 'Tierra' sideboard and 'La Paz' stool, have a sculptural quality with no decoration. "I let the timber speak for itself," says the Melbourne-based designer/maker.

Outdoor timber furniture is also having a revival, thanks to designers such as Launceston-based Simon Ancher, who believes the natural qualities of celery-top pine from Tasmania are hard to beat. "I'm happy for the timber to show the effects of being outside and reacting to the environment," he notes. Ancher finishes the timber with Lanotec's lanolin-based oil, which slows down the ageing process and prevents timber from turning grey and silver.

Longmair suggests that while timber enhances any room, it's worth tempering this strong statement throughout the house. "Many people tend to overuse timber in architectural pieces," he says. "For contrast, we blend timber pieces with glass and painted finishes, as well as stainless steel and other metals such as copper and bronze." >

TOP: GARY GALEGO. TOP RIGHT: THE REFINED 'TIERRA' SIDEBOARD IN AMERICAN OAK BY GEORGE HARPER OF TIDE DESIGN. ABOVE: GALEGO'S 'LEVE' CHAIR AND, LEFT, HARPER'S SCULPTURAL YET SIMPLE 'LA PAZ' STOOL IN BAMBOO. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.

timber

"Quality, handmade timber furniture will last for generations – a piece the owners will love every time they walk into the room"

ROSS LONGMAIR



< When designing a contemporary home, pre-finished timber flooring with minimal grain variations offers both good insulation and a seamless look. For a more rustic appeal, recycled timber – distressed with nail holes and gum veins – can add character to any room. Taken from dilapidated piers and wool stores, these boards are more expensive than new due to salvage costs. Price tags of bespoke furniture pieces may also be on the steep side, but quality and longevity justify the cost. "When people are shocked at the price, they are comparing it to something mass-produced in a material that is not going to last for three years," says Longmair. "Quality, handmade timber furniture is something that will last for generations – a piece the owners are going to love every time they walk into the room."

"If you look back at what our grandparents spent on furniture, it was around six months of their total income to buy a dining suite. But they intended to have this furniture for their whole life and their grandchildren are probably still enjoying it," adds Longmair, who touted his 'Intersection' shelving unit on ABC-TV's *New Invention* last year.

Subtlety is the key to seamless timber joinery. "Because of its neutrality, timber joinery tends to be part of the room rather than being a feature," says Raphael Picker, co-founder of Moetice & Tenon.

Currently, light-hued American oak and moody American walnut have found favour when remodelling a kitchen. "It's a nice play of texture and tactility, keeping the palette reasonably neutral," says Picker who, like most reputable cabinetmakers and designers, sources timber from sustainably managed state forests.

One of the most satisfying aspects about timber is that it improves with age. "It's like watching a beautiful red wine develop in a bottle," explains Longmair. "With its own oxidation, it slowly increases in richness over time." **— SAREEN RAMSEY**



FAR RIGHT: PLANET FURNITURE DIRECTOR ROSS LONGMAIR AND, RIGHT, PLANET FURNITURE'S CLASSIC SIGNATURE 'CLIBE' TABLES. DETAILS, LAST PAGES.



FAR LEFT: PLANET FURNITURE. ABOVE: MARK TUCKEY'S 'EGG CUP' AND, LEFT, 'CHESS' STOOL.

