

Edition 13 / Spring 2021

*The Full*

£5

# CIRCLE

The journal of The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers

## LOCH AWE HARDWOODS

Written by Ian McAdam

## VISUAL STRENGTH GRADING - A NEW ASHS PROJECT

Written by Nick Marshall

## ADJUST/ADAPT ONLINE FURNITURE EXHIBITION 27 March - 24 April 2021

Written by Simon Whatley (SFMA)



Scottish Forestry / Coilltearachd na h-Alba







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# The Full CIRCLE

The journal of The Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers

This time of Covid and the Climate Emergency is stranger than any I've lived through. One unusual feature is that ASHS members and others in the sawmilling business are working flat out to produce sawn timber for DIY, renovations and extensions, house building and a myriad of other uses. At the same time, more and more people are setting up small sawmills, and, it seems, not so much competing with each other as with the vast imports of timber from overseas. We'll tell the stories of more of these hard-working and innovative businesses in future issues of the Full Circle. I personally hope to see a time when there is a small sawmill, along with other wood-using micro-businesses, in every town and village in Scotland."

This is a time of huge change - the pandemic has changed our lives for good and its economic impacts will reverberate for years to come. The various responses to climate change, from the Paris Agreement to UK and Scottish Government policies and declarations of Climate Emergency by local authorities and business associations, are already starting to affect the way we do things and profound changes to how we do everything are on the way.

A welcome change for me (who has spent a lot of time travelling to meetings) is Zoom. Being able to hold meetings by video conference may not be ideal, but it saves a lot of time and money. I've been attending the SEDA Zoom conference on Land Use and I hope we'll have a report on this important set of events, which may have a big impact on trees and forestry, in a future issue of the Full Circle.



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All the best, Nick  
**ASHS COORDINATOR**

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on our website...*



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## ASHS NEWS

Hi and a Happy New Year to everyone, and I hope you are all keeping well and busy. There's a hopeful feeling in the air that everything will start to open up again before too long and start on the road back to normal. Many of you, like me, will have been busy throughout the pandemic and even through the lockdowns due to the continuing demand for sawn timber. We might have a recap on how everyone is doing in the next issue of the Full Circle.

Work is progressing on the items that Scottish Forestry has funded this year. We're setting up a network of contract Visual Strength Graders across Scotland as you'll see from Nick's article in this issue of the Full Circle - we've helped several ASHS members take a Visual Strength Grading course and get certified; we've produced sawmillers' guides to help them cut timber that will pass inspection; we're going to publicise this through the website and in other ways.

Ulrich Loening and David Shepherd have written a second booklet on solar kilns, describing the results of several years' experience using them as well as some modifications made as a result of that experience. We're producing the first ASHS video, showing how flooring is made and how good it looks - if it's a useful marketing tool then we could make more.

The Working Woods Scotland course has been postponed again due to the lockdown, but unless something drastic gets in the way it will definitely happen in October this year, and we hope to run the course again each year.

I hope the weather is picking up at last wherever you are and that your sawmills are working well.

Written by,

**Keith Threadgall**

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## SCOTTISH FURNITURE MAKERS ASSOCIATION

### ADJUST/ADAPT EXHIBITION SHOWCASING SCOTLAND'S FINEST CONTEMPORARY FURNITURE DESIGNER-MAKERS GOES DIGITAL

*Adjust/Adapt 27 March - 24 April 2021*

The Scottish Furniture Makers Association are collaborating with Visual Arts Scotland to present a major new members exhibition showcasing and celebrating the transformative power of creativity and craft to transcend challenging times.

Reflecting the show's core thematic narrative, the exhibition now moves to a digital space. Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, the physical show at the City Art Centre can no longer take place as planned. Marking the 20th Anniversary of SFMA's founding, Adjust / Adapt, is now being hosted online via the CAC website and the new SFMA website.

The digital showcase features work from more than two dozen SFMA members, with each maker submitting a single piece. Carefully curated groups of furniture, augmented by examples of contemporary applied and fine art are presented as part of a series of 'still life' collections; captured beautifully against bespoke theatrical staging. This unique Covid-19 safe photoshoot and video shoot will take place within the Leith Theatre.

This vital show includes a hugely diverse range of bespoke pieces, from 'isolation chairs' to 'love desks' and from drinks cabinets to ingenious display and storage systems. Each expertly crafted piece seeking to enhance the quality of life and provide a sense of uplift in the face of external pressures resulting from ongoing National and International crises. Many of the exhibits provide a focus on the use of sustainable materials - often Natural, locally sourced - in an effort to tackle the growing global climate crisis.

#### *Full list of participating SFMA members:*

Tom Addy, Duke Christie, Nicholas Denney, Rob Elliot, Stephen Finch, Simon Harlow, Alice Holttum, Daniel Lacey, Kirsty MacDonald, Max McCance, Adrian McCurdy, Eoghann Menzies, Isabelle Moore, Janie Morris, Anna Nichols, Ronnie Payne, Angus Richardson, Angus Ross, Jonathan Rose, Gavin Robertson, Chris Scotland, Jack Sheahan, Alasdair Wallace, Simon Whatley, Mike Whittall

#### *Adjust/Adapt Events Programme:*

A programme of public digital events on Industry, Skills, Sales and Resources featuring a great roster of speakers will be running every Monday lunchtime throughout April. These will be free to attend. Please register in advance via Zoom or eventbrite (see new SFMA website for further information).



Angus Ross - Sutherland Chair



Anna Nichols



Isabelle/Moore - Woven Oak Stool - (lebonised white oak+danish cord) photo credit -Rebecca Wall



Right - Tom Addy Chair





SKEWED WRITING DESK (above)

North American Maple structural frame and legs; desk top comprises birch plywood encased in leather with stitched edge detail stainless steel connector detail joins top to frame

Designer: Simon Whatley / REALISE Holistic Design Maker: James Wright / Bodan

Simon Whatley, SFMA Exhibition Curator said; ***“Scotland is home to many world class artists, designers and makers.*** SFMA is a members-led organisation of 70+ stretching from the Scottish Borders to Orkney & Shetland that has worked to promote and represent the interests of those in the sector for two decades.

The quality and diversity of work that will be showcased digitally via SFMA and City Art Centre websites speaks volumes about the immense creativity within the contemporary Applied Arts scene in Scotland. The show demonstrates the profound benefits to be gained by choosing to commission a local designer-maker to create a unique piece of furniture for one’s home and/or place-of-work.”

Mike Whittall, SFMA Chair said; ***“The last nine months have been challenging for all artists and makers*** so we are delighted to be staging this exhibition both to showcase the excellent pieces our members produce and also to celebrate our 20th anniversary as an Association. One big positive that has come out of the pandemic is the ***building of new and strong alliances***, such as our partnership for this show with Visual Arts Scotland, whose members will also be exhibiting their work. It’s been a really tough year for us all, so it’s heartening for our ***members that we will be collaborating to present such a positive response to the lockdown.***”

Isabelle Moore said; “The Scottish Furniture Makers Association exhibit is a great opportunity to show work with my peers in a city centre location, ***celebrating traditional skills, contemporary design and sustainable furniture making.*** The exposure from the exhibition will build new and nurture existing relationships to generate opportunities for sales, commissions and collaborative projects. SFMA membership offers an invaluable network of resources, contacts and opportunities to its membership, in addition to the annual showcase of members work.”

The Scottish Furniture Makers Association would like to thank Scottish Forestry, City Art Centre and Leith Theatre for supporting #ADJUSTADAPT21



SKEWED TRIPOD

North American North American Black Walnut and Maple

Designer: Simon Whatley / REALISE Holistic Design  
 Maker: Alasdair Campbell / Bodan  
 Architecture: The Japanese House, Portobello -  
 Konishi Gaffney Architects  
 Photography: Robert Pereira Hind



Written by,

*Simon Whatley*

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# ADJUST ADAPT

## A DIGITAL EXHIBITION

In partnership with City Art Centre, Edinburgh

27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH - 24<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021

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## COLLABORATIVE LOCKDOWN PROJECT

Designer-makers often work alone in full control of all activity, no need for language or communication. Their intimate knowledge of materials and process provide boundaries of certainty, quality and reputation.

Sometimes a new direction, steps beyond boundaries, or an opportunity to do something different presents itself in a compelling way. I remember a fellow woodworker saying when I started, he held to the principle 'if you can draw it, you can make it' (thank you Tom Cooper).

Lockdown came to me unexpectedly. The group I have been part of for the last 3 years, which has given me the chance to show my work to a wider audience, offered a buddy scheme to meet like minded people working in different materials. Jennie McCall in Rutland became my buddy.

Jennie is a ceramic artist working in porcelain and parian, creating beautiful objects of a figurative nature. She has an artistic background in graphics, ceramics and textiles and also lecturing and teaching.

From a product design point of view, it may seem fanciful for a woodworker to collaborate with a ceramicist. However it is the kind of challenge that can bring new

work and learning into the world. We both committed to trying things out with the possibility of no finished product to show for our work. Ceramics are the very opposite of wood. Fired clay has no flexibility. If bent it breaks. It is impervious to water, can be heated beyond the vaporisation temperature of wood. It cannot be cut but before firing it can be formed into whatever shape you like. Parian is translucent to strong light and its final size is constrained by the size of the kiln.

I have recently been working in ash and oak constructional veneer. I love the flexibility and clean grain. It behaves like thick card but the folds need to be aligned correctly in relation to the grain, where it is weak in tension across and strong in tension along. It will bend, but not far in two directions. It has to be extremely thin to let through light.

Jennie and I worked with the theme of light. We both have strong connections to Scotland, Jennie being born here, me having been resident for 40 years. We connected over the internet and mailed each other samples to show how our materials behaved. Jennie gave clear explanations of what to expect. We shared images and sketches of imagined and real northern light. I supplied samples of bonded veneers showing the curves and colours achievable. I researched how to attach ceramic to wood. We understood the project to be about learning as much as the possibility of producing a finished item.

Jennie loves the translucency of parian and wanted to work out how to incorporate backlit colour. She knew that a thin material gave a more translucent effect, a thick material felt warm and safe.

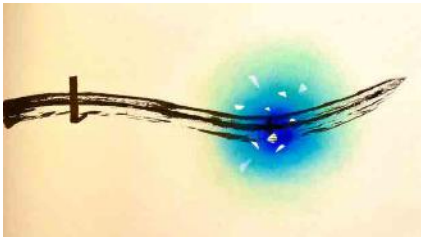
From my experiments I found how to bend the veneer in two directions. It produced a beautiful flowing frame using steam, patience and some inventiveness with clamps. It also required accuracy in scribing the laminate with a router so it was no thicker than 0.25mm at the point of the bend. The exact width and angle of scoreline was critical to produce an edge with no breakout.







Northern Light



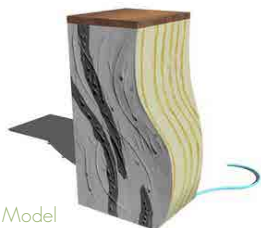
Sketch Northern Light



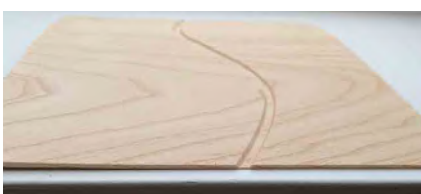
Parian Translucency



Folded Card



Aurora Model



Veneer Score Full

To work remotely with a ceramicist meant I had to step away from precision and predictability. I made templates for Jennie's work which had a suitable tolerance to fit the frame I was making. Ceramics were too hard to sand using any of the usual abrasives but the flat sides of a waterstone could make a good edge for gluing. WEST epoxy with colloidal silica worked to glue and fillet the ceramic sides together; 5mm inserts and 3mm screws fitted nicely into the wood once 3mm holes were drilled in the ceramic sides using a diamond bit.

Experimentation is expensive in time and emotion. When it doesn't turn out quite as hoped, finding a reflective and thoughtful place to recharge to start again is essential. Looking for solutions can be an end in itself.

I asked Jennie last week what she found most difficult and most enjoyable. This is what she said.....

"I love a challenge, and when Jonty and I decided to collaborate I could only imagine the problems we may have to overcome with the limitations and strengths of our contrasting materials. However, such challenges excite me to push the boundaries of the the parian I love. This material is a form of porcelain, much loved by the Victorians to create dolls and puppets with the soft look of skin. When fired to a high temperature it has a waxy marble like texture and is highly translucent.

My first step was to stain a batch of parian in the colours of the Aurora Borealis. Using a blend of black, white and coloured strips I created slabs, using the templates provided by Jonty, carefully cutting my shapes to fit

Exact shrinkage in parian is uncertain and my experience helped me to assess the amount for this project, probably the hardest of all the tasks and where our combined crafts were likely to conflict.

The next problem was ensuring that the slabs would dry slowly enough to prevent cracking or splitting. The clay is fired twice in the kiln - once to a stage that it can withstand final sanding and second to the point of vitrification where it becomes translucent. It can fail at each of these stages.

Artists love to experiment, especially to develop techniques to enhance self-expression and this part of our collaboration was a joy. I found it takes a deep understanding of the materials involved and an ability to communicate to get to an outcome acceptable for both our standards.

This gives me pride in my work, especially when I make something with someone else and it all fits together snugly. In this project, the light has yet to be switched on. A moment to look forward to."

I think it pays in the long run to experiment, especially if you don't feel an expert in the field you are experimenting in. The thing which remains critical is to accept only the best and reject what doesn't meet your usual standard, whatever the cost.



Written by,

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Angus &amp; team on Collect 2020 - credit Omar Shamma

## EXHIBITIONS IN VIRTUAL VERSUS REAL WORLD

### Real versus virtual exhibiting

We have just finished exhibiting virtually, with Design Nation at Collect 2021: International Art Fair for Craft and Design and it has been very interesting to compare to Collect 2020 held in Somerset House, London when we exhibited with Craft Scotland just before pandemic. Then, we were in close physical contact with thousands of people. Collect is a prestigious annual exhibition of contemporary craft organised by the Crafts Council (UK) where galleries from across the globe present their collections to visitors, including buyers for public collections like the V&A and serious private collectors. It happens in early March each year and the 2020 show was just before our lock-down for the pandemic and this year was a virtual show. We live in hope, but don't go expecting to sell anything - and rarely do we sell - so why do we go?

### Experimental, one-off showpiece.

Events like Collect are an opportunity to create a new one-off speculative piece of work. As most of our work is to commission this is a refreshing change for Angus. The rest of the year commissioned work takes priority, as that is our income. However taking time to do something more experimental develops your practise. For example the series of one-off river benches shows a progression. The Tay Bench for SOFA Chicago (2012) with CraftScotland, was the first steambent spiral made in two parts. The Forth Bench for Collect (2015) with Contemporary Applied Arts was the first complete structural spiral (sold to Glenmorangie in 2019). We first used CAD to create the Quercus Pods for Collect (2018) with Craft Scotland, and this technique led to private commissions for Citrus Tables, and Sutherland Chair for Collect (2020) with CraftScotland. For this years virtual Collect Angus showed the Waterfall Bench, a sculptural design which fortunately had been commissioned during lock-down. It was shown as Number 2 of a Limited Edition of 3. It was a nice change not to spend all of February creating a new sculptural piece for the show.

### Collaboration

We usually do a few live shows each year, ranging from local events like Perthshire Open Studios to national events often held during London Design Week (September) or London



Sutherland Chair in progress - Angus Ross



Quercus Pods - Susie Lowe





Making Sutherland Chair - credit Omar Shamma



Sutherland Chair at Collect - credit Lorna Ross



Forth Bench - credit Angus Ross

Craft Week (May or October), and at these events we are in control of our own space and logistics. However being part of a group or gallery is a pre-requisite for Collect and we are members of Contemporary Applied Arts London, CraftScotland and DesignNation who have all acted as galleries at Collect. Being part of a group has many advantages. Firstly it is more affordable as there might be ten makers in a larger space than we could ever afford. Large pieces of furniture create visual impact when placed alongside smaller ceramics, glass, metal and textiles. And it is more refreshing than all timber showcases for the visitor. There is always great support and a lot of learning occurs showing alongside other designer-makers, who are experts in their own fields. It is also great to share the costs and logistics involved in setting up, taking down and manning stands or booths.

### Building confidence in your brand

We all need sales whether selling timber or furniture and we were certainly concerned about lost opportunities to connect with potential clients in the real world. Many of you probably feel uncomfortable with the word brand but I think it is very helpful when thinking about the steps involved in anyone buying from you whether in person or when moving into digital selling.

1. Potential customers have to know about you. Events, whether real or virtual, help people to discover you. They may generate vitally important press as well as sales.
2. Potential customers have to be interested and excited - your spectacular one-off at an event may be unaffordable but shows what you can do, helps people to remember you, and they may purchase a smaller more affordable item or commission later.
3. Potential customers have to want what you offer - Scottish furniture makers are often doing a very difficult thing - in that they must create a demand for something that people don't know they want. When we arrived in Scotland there wasn't a demand for curvaceous steam-bent furniture made in Scottish hardwood but having been at events for almost twenty years - now there is!
4. Potential customers need to trust you. This is crucial and being part of national and international shows is a key way people validate us. The press that is sometimes generated reinforces this



5. Potential customers need to commit to actually getting in touch, a crucial first step in placing an order, and shows and events whether real or virtual creates a moment in time when it feels like the right moment to contact you.

6. Existing customers, followers and supporters like to be vicariously involved in glamorous events. So we always invite them and we want to show them we care about them. We are proud that a lot of our customers are repeat customers - sometimes over decades. Therefore events like Collect are part of marketing and selling and help structure newsletters, social media and articles like this.

We have worked hard this year to improve what we offer digitally and have just launched a new website and for the first time this includes an on-line shop - which has even had some sales! We have also improved our use of CAD to create 3D sketches which can be shared on-line, replacing model presented in person (although Angus prefers this). We have seen an increase in enquiries during the pandemic, and it has been vital to progress private and public enquiries through all the steps to an order, doing it all on-line using email, CAD and zoom.

### Real versus virtual.

Buying furniture is usually a tactile experience. People want to see, and feel, and interact with furniture before buying. It is huge step to replace this with a virtual experience but it can be done. It reminds me of writing by Peter Korn in *Why we make things and why it matters* (2013) on stages in the life of a piece of furniture. It starts in the makers mind, and moves through the process of making, as it is wrestled into being. The second stage is when it is appreciated by another person, perhaps your buyer, and when it is seen through their eyes it subtly changes into something else - perhaps it may even become 'their object'. Then there is a third stage when it becomes a virtual object and many might know it through photographs, film or even writing. There may be further changes at it moves through the lens of gallerists, journalists, photographers and stylists who all add their layer of influence and meaning. If your furniture reaches this level it can be very powerful and it certainly helps your bank balance as you move from being a local

Sutherland Chair - credit Angus Ross



Waterfall Bench - credit Bluebell Ross

maker to a desirable "name" with more people wanting your work, prepared to wait for your work and prepared to invest in your work. In the new digital world it is possible to create this third stage yourself, through your website, social media, newsletters and blogs.

Collect is usually a busy, exciting place to visit whether you love or hate the objects on show. It is only on for a few days, expensive to visit, and there is a limit to the number of people attending. However this years virtual Collect had the same number of "live" days but then stays on-line for a month (until end of March). When Angus gave talks at Collect in the Saatchi Gallery there were perhaps 100 people in the room. Some of this years virtual talks had a 1000 people logged in live, and many more will watch recordings later. Some of the galleries at real-life Collect are a bit intimidating and unfriendly, and cloak and dagger about pricing, as they quickly size you up to work out if you are there to buy. This years was in many ways much more democratic and transparent, with most galleries publishing prices on-line and most talks published. Sales were definitely down but the cost of attending was greatly reduced and we could take part without leaving the workshop! So we will go back to live shows - definitely - but we will also continue to develop our business on-line. As I doubt anything will quickly go back 'to normal' and buying behaviour has probably permanently changed.



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## SCOTTISH FORESTRY UPDATE

I wrote in the last edition of the Full Circle that I was really looking forward to seeing the Working Woods Scotland Course happening, but unfortunately this will not be happening this spring for obvious reasons. Although a lot of training events have moved on-line the strength of this course is the hands-on approach and the strong interactions between everybody on the course and the trainers. That quality cannot be replicated via Zoom, so we all felt that postponement was the better option. I am hopeful that it will happen in Sept/Oct 2021, and annually after that. Scottish Forestry are keen to see other training opportunities to encourage people into the industry as employees or self-employed wood processors. This is a good time to take on more staff as there are a lot of enthusiastic people and there are government initiatives such as Kickstart or the Youth Guarantee that will support companies taking on young unemployed people. If you are interested please get in touch.

One event that has been transferred on-line is the next Scottish Furniture Makers Association exhibition "Adapt/Adjust". I am looking forward to being able to see some of the pieces showcasing the expertise of the SFMA members and their innovative uses of Scottish timber. One of the species of interest to us at the moment is ash. It is unfortunately now obvious that ash die-back will have a huge impact on woodlands in Scotland and a lot of ash trees will be felled over the coming years. It would be great if some of that timber found its way into better uses than just firewood. Over the coming year Scottish Forestry will be working with ASHS and the SFMA to think of ways we can encourage the use of ash by makers and encourage the public to consider ash when specifying wood. Any ideas welcome.

Given the on-coming increase in ash availability it will soon be time to consider applying for a Harvesting and Processing Grant. The next round will soon be open with a closing date of 30th June 2021. If you are interested then the first step is to register your business with the Scottish Government (<https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/your-business/business-registration>).



In fact, I would like to encourage all ASHS members to get a BRN (Business Registration Number) so that they can apply for funding in future without delays. If you're thinking about possibly applying for a Harvesting and Processing grant, it is worth contacting your local conservancy office. Details of the scheme can be found at - [www.forestry.gov.scot](http://www.forestry.gov.scot).

The wider commercial forestry market situation is currently very buoyant. The demand for all types of softwood timber is strong and prices are reaching record highs. As its economy grows again, North America is importing more softwood sawlogs from Scandinavia meaning that less is being landed in the UK. In Ireland softwood felling has slowed dramatically due to environmental NGOs appealing felling licences and hence Irish sawmills are trying to source more timber from the west of Scotland. All these factors are pushing up prices and this in turn means that prices in the forest have increased. Hopefully ASHS members are also seeing a growing demand for their products as we come out of the Covid crisis.

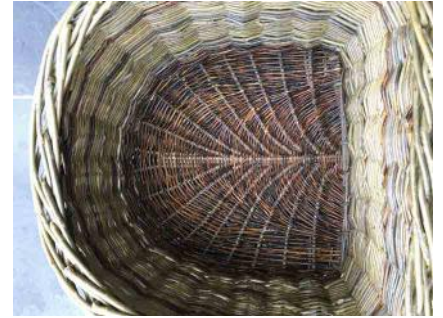


Written by,

Jason Hubert

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*Local. Ethical. Sustainable.*

### **TIM PALMER – BASKETMAKER**

Here we showcase the inspirational work of Tim Palmer, basketmaker and recent SWW licensee. There are now 33 sawmillers, furniture makers and basketmakers licensed to use the Scottish Working Woods label, which is now widely recognised as a guarantee of sustainably produced Scottish woodland products.

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[www.timpalmerbasketmaker.co.uk](http://www.timpalmerbasketmaker.co.uk)







Dovetail Scotland - Steve Mclean

## ASHS VISUAL STRENGTH GRADING NETWORK

Several years ago, ASHS members started reporting problems selling structural timber. Architects and engineers were asking for certificated strength graded timber, and were increasingly reluctant to use the old standby of massively over-specifying structural timber in order to minimise the risk of structural failures.

Something needed to be done, or ASHS members would miss an important market for their sawn timber. With help from the (then) Forestry Commission, we helped two ASHS members go through the Visual Strength Grading course at TRADA, High Wycombe. On return they did carry out some VSG work for their businesses and one (Trevor Bechtel) gave a demonstration to ASHS members at an AGM. However, demand was very intermittent and in the end neither did a great deal of grading.

Things have changed over the last 5 years, however, as people have become more aware that high-quality Scottish timber is available and more houses are being built by small building companies. There is a regular flow of enquiries for strength graded timber and until recently we have not been able to meet it. Our friends at Napier University have been working on relating VSG grades to the standard (machine-graded) strength grading systems and there are now standards for Spruce, Larch, Scots pine, Douglas fir and Oak.

Iva Usalj at Abbey Timber was, until this year the only person in Scotland who carried out contract VSG work for other sawmills and it was impractical for her to travel the length of the country to carry out grading work. So we asked Scottish Forestry if they would support the training of more graders and fortunately they agreed. This year, five people were helped to undergo the training in Scotland and we have identified another member who already has the skills.

We intend to publicise the network of VSG contractors who will travel to other sawmills to carry out grading, on the ASHS website and through other publicity. We're also producing booklets on Visual Strength Grading for sawmills. These are introductory booklets, aimed at helping sawmills cut timber that should achieve the required grade, so that when the certified grader visits, there is less risk of a batch being rejected, wasting a journey and a fee.

If you need to have some timber strength graded, check whether the grader is certified for hardwood, softwood or both. Try to have a good quantity of sawn timber ready for the







grader, to make their travel costs and fee worthwhile, and in case some of the pieces fail to achieve the required grade. And, most importantly, don't argue with the grader - their job is on the line with every piece of timber graded and they really don't want to be held responsible for a structural failure.

We are very grateful to Scottish Forestry for their support for this VSG project, which we expect will significantly increase the amount of Scottish timber from ASHS members going into the construction sector. We hope that, as demand rises, we will see more contract graders across Scotland so that all areas will have their local grader, enabling local building firms and local sawmills to compete more effectively with the large companies that dominate these industries



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## BUILDING AFFORDABLE RURAL HOUSING FROM LOCAL TIMBER

Life in Scotland's remoter rural areas can be challenging, with costs inflated by distance from market, limited employment opportunities and poor infrastructure all being daily facts of life. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues and demands new and radical thinking to enable these communities to become more self-sufficient. The lack of affordable housing is a major contributor to demographic decline and the ability to build new, high-quality, energy-efficient homes within the resources of local economies is fundamental to the future sustainability of small and often isolated settlements.

### What are the issues?

Lack of land availability and the ever-increasing price of plots that do come on the market are the primary obstacles to affordable rural housing. Inadequate utility supplies - if a site is inconveniently located (ie, far from a main road) - can also introduce substantial additional infrastructure costs and delays to the build. Another significant expense is the cost of materials and add-on delivery charges when these are procured from distant factories and suppliers. Combined, these issues have resulted in a general consensus that it is more expensive to build in remote rural locations than in more urbanised situations where infrastructure already exists to serve larger population bases.

This consensus looks to the individual price of a new property which, in isolation, is effectively a bespoke home, often designed and built to a non-standard design and invariably expensive to construct. This is a very different challenge to that faced by small, remotely situated rural communities. Here, existing homes can be few in number and are frequently older, inadequately insulated, and poorly constructed properties, meaning high running and maintenance costs. In many of these places, full-time employment is scarce and available part-time jobs seasonal, meaning income levels can be low. In these situations, older properties merely contribute to the numbers of rural inhabitants experiencing fuel poverty.

Without affordable new homes, population decline continues apace. Local building companies are usually small and often unaware of, or disinterested in applying, modern methods of construction (MMC). The rural construction modus operandi is traditional and weather-dependent which, when combined with long lead-in times for deliveries of small volumes of materials from distant suppliers, too often result in delays to the build programme as well as claims for unforeseen costs. There is little or no competition from volume house builders in these locations since the affordable housing market is, ostensibly, too small and too problematic to ensure consistent margins or of sufficient scale to make the effort worthwhile.

But is the market really too small? Certainly, the individual home or the small numbers required in a single community at any given time would suggest this, but the cumulative market tells a different story. Every council authority in the country is obliged to maintain forward

projections of housing demand within the boundaries of their statutory local plans, as well as the likely timescale by which new housing in each community should ideally be delivered. For some time, however, many authorities have attached conditions to planning permissions that require a proportion of affordable homes be included in any new housing development. The cost of this, though, is simply loaded into the price of the homes for sale, causing further inflation in local property values. Irrespective of the propriety or otherwise of this approach, it is a stratagem that offers no benefits for remote rural locations.

### How can timber help?

**The delivery of rural housing comprises three inter-related challenges:**

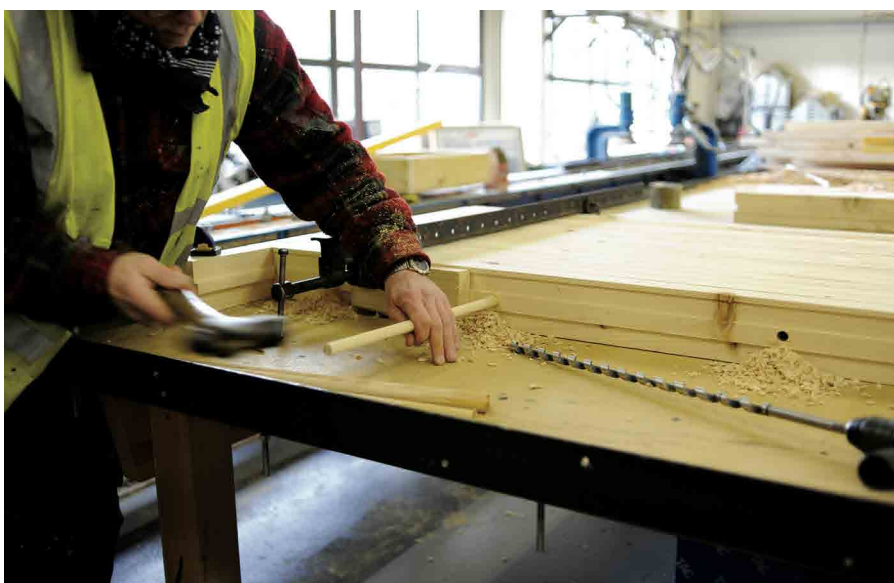
- land ownership
- appropriate construction solutions
- access to finance.

**It may seem counter-intuitive, but increasing numbers of remote rural communities have three assets capable of addressing these issues:**

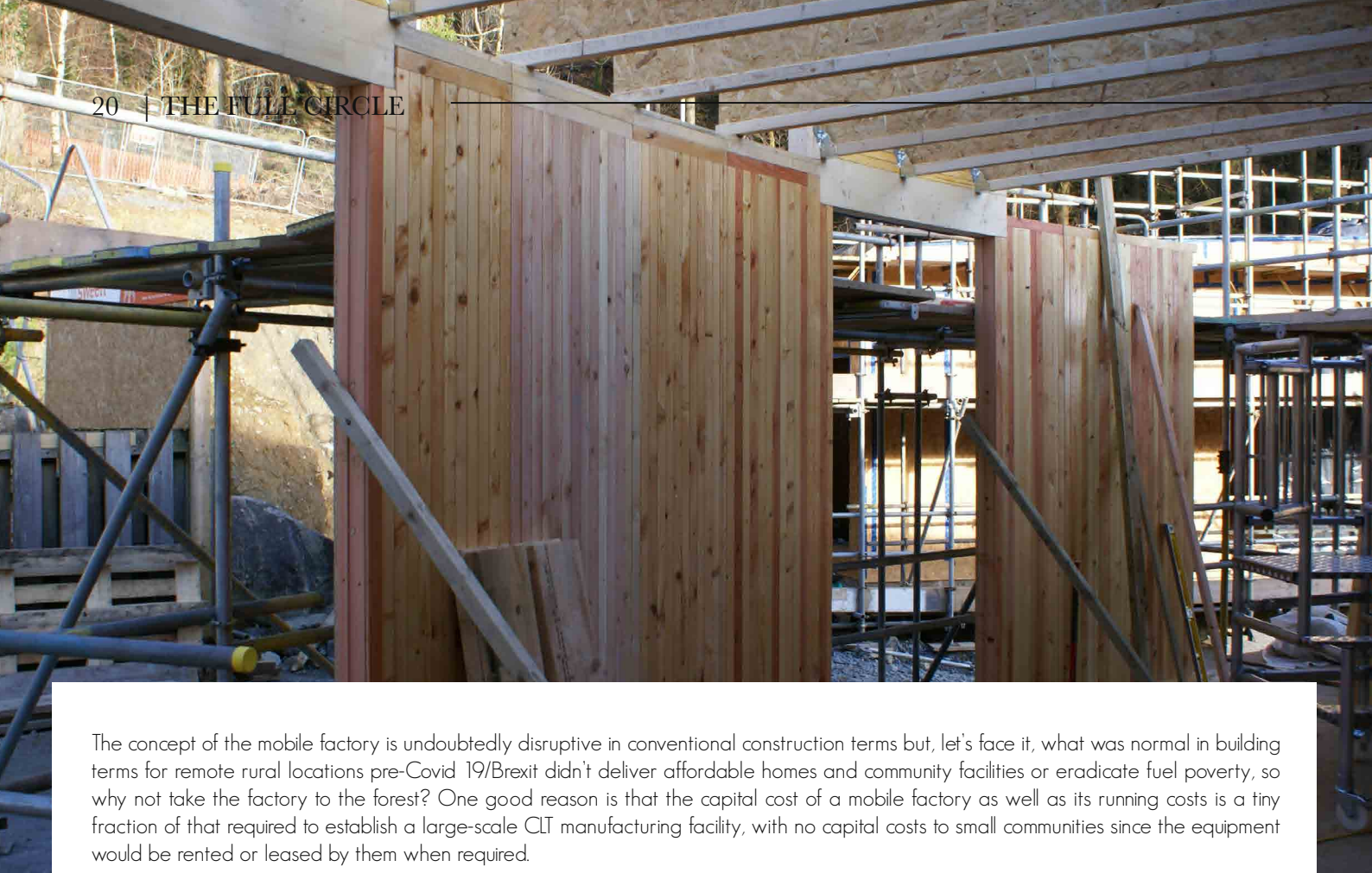
- the opportunity to own the land themselves (through community buyouts, as a result of successive Land Reform Acts in Scotland)
- the possibility that the land acquired is already forested with production species
- the potential to apply the community's own labour to manufacturing and construction processes that embrace the use of locally-grown timber in the production of energy-efficient structures for new, affordable homes and other community facilities.

### Taking the Factory to the Forest

The challenge is how best to use the timber from the local forest. The application of MMC and off-site manufacture (OSM) approaches normally implies fabrication in a distant factory which, for rural communities, means expensive transportation to their area. Buying-in skills can also be costly, whilst conventional construction is weather-dependent. One possible answer lies in taking OSM onsite by making a modern, high-value construction product locally from timber sourced from nearby forests. At this point we need to think about the potential value of a mobile factory - a fabrication facility that can be moved from location to location as and when required. Many of the component elements of such a factory already exist, e.g. mobile sawmills or, like solar powered kilns and CNC cutting machines, can be adapted to transportable form.







The concept of the mobile factory is undoubtedly disruptive in conventional construction terms but, let's face it, what was normal in building terms for remote rural locations pre-Covid 19/Brexit didn't deliver affordable homes and community facilities or eradicate fuel poverty, so why not take the factory to the forest? One good reason is that the capital cost of a mobile factory as well as its running costs is a tiny fraction of that required to establish a large-scale CLT manufacturing facility, with no capital costs to small communities since the equipment would be rented or leased by them when required.

In this scenario, dowel-laminated timber (DLT) is an eminently appropriate fabrication method to produce solid timber panels that provide excellent levels of airtightness and thermal efficiency. This non-glued solid laminate technology may be less well known than other forms of mass timber but, in the right circumstances (one of which being rural communities), their potential value is immense. Most importantly, local manufacture at small scale is a benefit not available with glued mass timber systems such as CLT. DLT, by contrast, requires no glues, nails or screws: the moisture content of the wood does all the work. In DLT, the layers of a timber panel are held together by hardwood dowels inserted into holes in the softwood lamellae. When produced manually, however, the dowel insertion process can be extremely time-consuming. Creating a mobile machine/press radically alters this to an efficient production method, automating the hole drilling and dowel insertion process to deliver structurally strong, stable panels of a manageable size. Making high-quality solid panels in this way has the potential to raise the value of the timber employed and thus deliver a positive contribution to local economies as well as creating new opportunities for skills development and sustainable local employment.

## Making it Happen

The one small snag with this scenario is that a mobile, automated dowel lamination press does not yet exist. The technology certainly does - there are more than 20 DLT manufacturing facilities operating in Europe, producing various types of panel (stacked plank, cross laminated or diagonally laminated): the challenge is how to reduce the automated fabrication process to be portable and to produce panels that are easily manipulable by a small number of people. It is a challenge that's been taken up by the Build Back Rural project, a research and development initiative responsive to the changing circumstances in which rural communities currently exist. Traditional construction has proved itself impotent in the delivery of genuinely affordable housing in the remoter parts of the country, so will this new approach provide a practical and economically viable solution?

Along with partners, Timber Design Initiatives Ltd has been developing all aspects of this innovation project for more than 18 months and aims to begin prototyping the dowel lamination press this summer. Further, the company is looking to work with ASHS' members to adapt their excellent research and development work on solar kilns to produce a transportable version. Consultation with remote communities and relevant public agencies is also part of the business and marketing plans being prepared in parallel with the technical advances required. We hope to provide an update on progress before the end of this year, but more information on the project as well as regular reports can be found on the Build Back Rural website - <https://www.build-back-rural.com>



Written by,

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To find out more,  
visit [www.build-back-rural.com](http://www.build-back-rural.com)  
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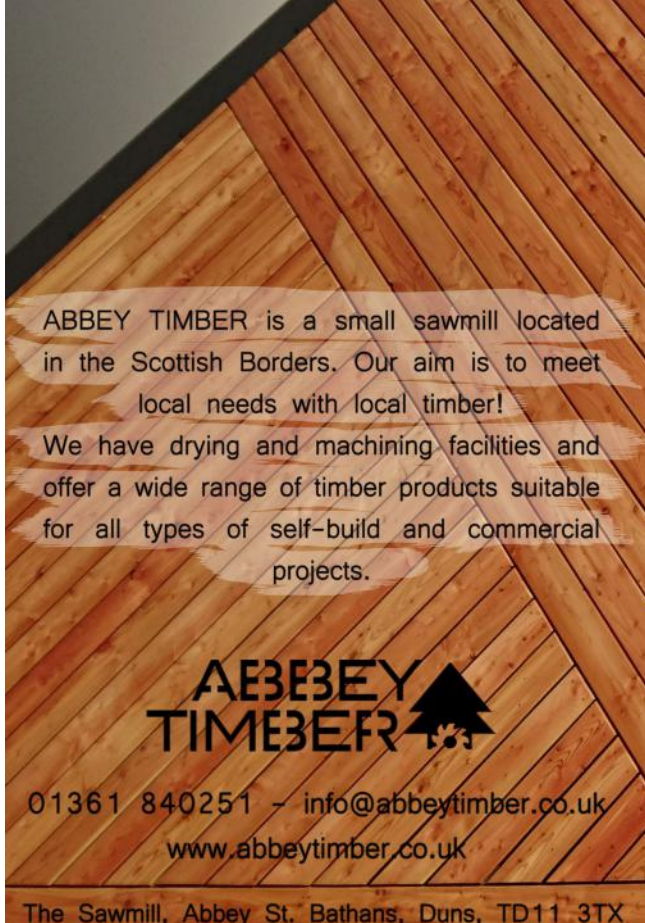


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ASSOCIATION OF SCOTTISH HARDWOOD SAWMILLERS

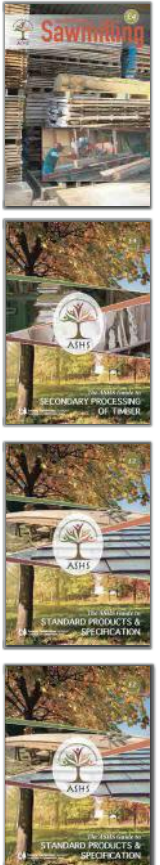
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## WOOD-MIZER'S SLOGAN "FROM FOREST TO FINAL FORM" TAKES ON A NEW MEANING

"Wood" - is a word that provokes many ideas such, as a small cottage house made from pine logs, a beautiful set of oak furniture for the dining room, or a perfectly flat larch deck hidden in the backyard. Millions of people in the world can live better thanks to this friendly and sustainable material. It takes a whole lot of passion, hard work, and a dream to craft all those beautiful wood products. Oh, and let's not forget about proper tools to finish the work "From Forest to Final Form" - The Woodworking machines from Wood-Mizer.

It's been more than 30 years since Wood-Mizer started its European operations in Kolo, Poland, offering to the wood-processing industry a wide range of premium quality machinery. The company has grown a lot over the years, expanding across global markets, investing in new production facilities, and helping thousands of customers to fulfill their goals of working with wood. It's their unique products that helped to build the Wood-Mizer Family, a wonderful team of workers, professionals, and customers who share one passion - the passion for wood.

Today Wood-Mizer sells sawmills and woodworking equipment in more than 100 countries worldwide, offering equipment from portable to stationary sawmills, horizontal and vertical band sawmills, log processing lines, edgers and multirips, resaws, blades, and sharpeners. Those products are an excellent choice for working with wood in almost every environment - from an enthusiast's shed to small business workshops and to large industrial facilities.

Recently, Wood-Mizer has expanded its offering by adding moulders and planers, or simply Woodworking Products. The new woodworking machines include models MP160, MP180, MP200, MP220, MP260, MP360, and MP365. With these compact and versatile machines, the slogan From Forest to Final Form is taking on a new meaning, allowing customers to make their final wood products in an easy and profitable way. Products may range from boards, floors, windows, stairs, banisters, steps, doorframes, doorsteps, picture frames, and other decorative elements. The sky's the limit for what you can build with Wood-Mizer Woodworking machines!



Wood-Mizer woodworking products have been manufactured in the local factory in Kolo since early 2020. The production site has a global reputation for making top quality sawmills and wood processing machines. No wonder that soon after purchasing the intellectual property for woodworking products from the Swedish manufacturer Moretens in 2017, it was decided to use this valuable experience and begin the production of these products in the Polish Wood-Mizer factory.

All manufacturing processes are supervised by highly qualified and experienced workers. Wood-Mizer has gathered much expertise during 30 years of the company's work, and now they are confident in applying this vast knowledge to manufacturing woodworking products. Technical designers constantly improve the technology used in them, production engineers supervise all activities on the production floor, and every machine is checked in detail at the final inspection.

The basic engineering design was to create a very functional product in a compact size, using the best quality materials possible.

**Wood-Mizer moulders and planers share these characteristics:**

- A multi-cutterhead (top, bottom, right, left) allows getting a desired shape of the board after only one pass through the machine.
- Individually engaged electrical motors for each cutterhead, helping to decrease power consumption and reduce noise.
- Each cutterhead has easily replaceable knives.
- Solid feed table made of stainless steel, ensuring the precision of processing and comfort of work.
- Cast iron planing table is highly durable and resistant to deformation, abrasion, and tension.
- For thickness, the adjustment is made by a quick-access hand crank.
- All control functions are accessible from a convenient operator unit.
- Sawdust and woodchips generated during the cutting process are directed to the exhaust ports, so the workshop areas remain clean.
- The steel body of the machine protects inside electrical motors (separate for each cutterhead), feed rollers, and the adjustment mechanism.
- The machine is lightweight and compact, so you can move it around your workshop without much effort.

All Woodworking Products are accompanied by a wide variety of cutting accessories – Wood-Mizer TOOLS, made from top quality European steel and carbide. Among them, you can find HSS cutting knives, carbide-tipped HM cutting knives, double-sided Tri Metal HSS cutting knives, profile HSS knives, dedicated cutterheads with replaceable HM profile knives, kits of HM brazed cutters with carbide tips, 2/3/4-knife cutterheads, and for special customer orders, Wood-Mizer can design custom profile knives or side cutterheads. You may order them online or at your local Wood-Mizer representative. Wood-Mizer ensures top quality customer technical support and service along with a 2-year warranty for every woodworking machine. There is a great number of instructional materials available on



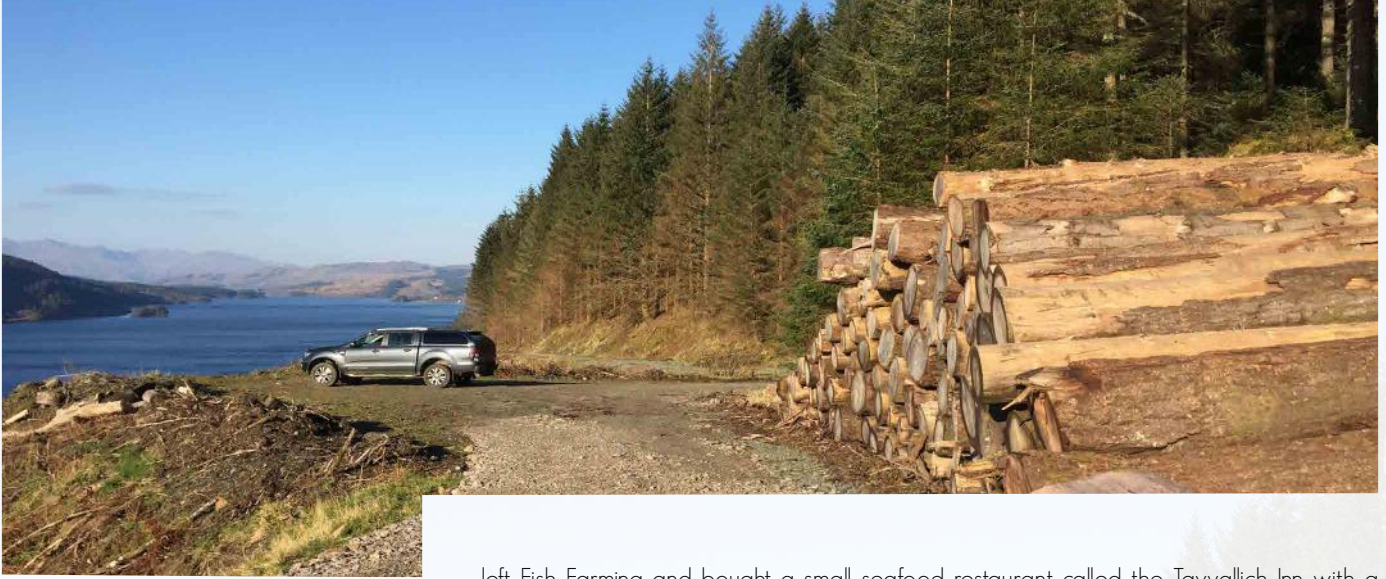
YouTube, interviews with customers, guides, and practical advice at your disposal. Search at YouTube by keywords "Wood-Mizer moulders planers".

The launch of Woodworking Products proves that Wood-Mizer continues to develop new technological solutions and inspires its customers to work on more and more creative wood projects.



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## LOCH AWE HARDWOODS

Loch Awe Hardwoods is a small sawmill business located in the heart of Argyll on the south shore of Loch Awe. With two part time employees and me, we supply local hard woods and quality softwoods to a variety of customers from small DIY projects right through to high end furniture makers and kiln dried timber for major bespoke projects as well as cladding, fencing and shed building and boat building materials.

It all started around 15 years ago when a couple of large European Larch were blown over on a piece of ground that we own. A friend from Perthshire with a Logosol chainsaw mill milled them for us and I thought that being able to convert fallen trees into beautiful boards was one of the coolest things I'd seen! Not long after this I bought my first Alaskan Mill and a big Husqvarna 3120 chainsaw. From that point onwards I'd be milling everything that I could lay my hands on.

I've always had a fascination for wood but never thought that I'd be in a position to take it forward as a career until my personal circumstance allowed me to edge slowly into it. My background is in trout farming with my early career being spent in my home area of Galloway. In 1988 at aged 23, I moved to Argyll to manage a trout farm on Loch Awe. After 18 years in this post I took a regional management role with the responsibility for 14 sites, predominantly on the west coast from Galloway to Skye. In 2009 I

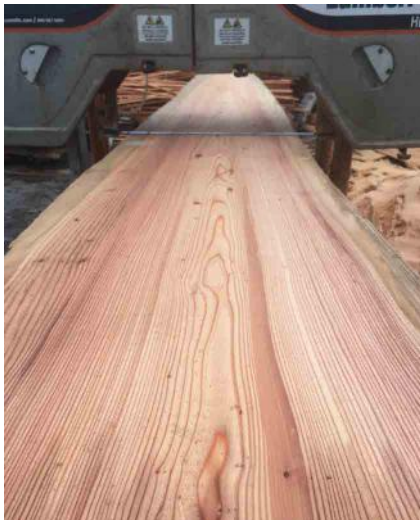
left Fish Farming and bought a small seafood restaurant called the Tayvallich Inn with a friend of ours. This was a bold move given that it was just after the financial crisis of 2008.

After a couple of years we had it running pretty smoothly and efficiently and decided that we would now work a rota system of 7 days on and 7 days off. This was just the opportunity that I'd been waiting for to forge ahead with my fledgling wood business. I started making and selling outdoor furniture, then progressed to indoor pieces like shelving units, coffee tables, dining tables etc. By this time I'd already built up a good supply of boards with my Alaskan mill. My first big project was a refurbishment of the bar in the Tayvallich Inn. This was made out of burr elm with a mirrored whisky shelf and bespoke wine rack. Soon after this I replaced all of the tables in the bar, each one from a different type of local hardwood complete with a brass name plaque with wood type and provenance. This went down well with our customers which ended up with a flurry of orders. My 7 day off rota soon became just as busy as my on rota. This continued for another four years until it became apparent that this was no longer sustainable.

After much deliberation we decided to sell the Inn, so in February 2017 we sold the business and Loch Awe Hardwoods was born. Two years prior to this I took a lease on an old heather nursery site which is where I operate out of today. I purchased a Norwood HD36 band saw mill in May of 2017.







Although my heart is in hardwoods I needed a regular turnover of cash to keep the business sustainable so I made the decision to start milling softwoods as well. This got off to a relatively slow start, which suited me fine as I had a backlog of furniture to make. I started doing a fair bit of contract milling for Cromartie Timber, predominantly Douglas fir for construction with a bit of Japanese Red Cedar in there as well. Japanese Red Cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*) is some of the most beautiful softwood that I've had the pleasure of milling. This was bought locally through the Forestry Niche markets initiative and was planted just before the second world war as an experimental plantation to test the suitability of this wood type as a commercial species. It was sidelined for the preference of spruce and left to grow for a couple of generations of the more commercially viable Norway and Sitka. The timber from the Japanese cedar is incredibly light but is as durable as both Larch and Western Red Cedar. The heart wood can vary in colour from a light salmon pink to a deep red with a light citrus smell. Mostly it was sold for external cladding, picket fencing, shed building and garden pergolas. I now only have a few tonnes left out of 70.

The business grew steadily until I decide to start my Facebook page under ***“Loch Awe Hardwoods”***. Once I got this off the ground in mid 2019 I started to get frequent enquiries for both furniture and milled timber. One of my biggest customers for kiln dried hard wood is “Michael Acey furniture and bespoke interiors”. Based locally in Oban, Michael is finding that his customers are increasingly interested in using hardwoods with a local provenance and as such he's able to pin point the location of the proposed timber on a map and has the option of a trip to my yard to show them the actual timber for their project. Another volume customer is Paul Hodgkiss of Paul Hodgkiss Designs based in Glasgow. I enjoy working with these guys and can't help but get excited on hearing of their new and varied projects.





I'm now at the stage where milling and timber sales are taking up the majority of my time but I still like to take on a few bits and pieces of bespoke furniture. A couple of my bigger commissions over the last few years have been the design and manufacture of an oak bench for a local community orchard. The premise was to design a bench in keeping with a dry stone dyke with a turfed top. It had been built with a curve both horizontally and vertically. The design I came up with was to follow those curves and make it essentially a twelve seater bench with a king and queen seat in the middle, each seat made at 5 degrees to the next to form the curve with a 100 degree angle to the back from horizontal with pinned through tenons from seat to back. Not long after this I was asked to make a bar top for the Social club at Dalavich which is just across Loch Awe from my yard. This started as just a bar top but quickly grew to a complete bar rebuild. Like the Tayvallich Inn bar, I decided to make this out of elm again with a heavy emphasis on burrs for the front panels and back whisky shelf complete with mirrors.



Being based in the middle of a heavily forested area of Argyll, my business is best situated to capitalise on the abundance and variety of the timber grown here. The damp, mild climate produces some fabulous specimens of Larch and Douglas fir. These two types of softwood are the most in demand but in my yard I also have some Western Hemlock, Noble Fir and some Western Red Cedar ready to mill, I also have some Sitka Spruce which

is really just set aside for masts for boat builders. The vast majority of my hardwoods are sourced locally as well. These are sourced through local farms, estates and increasing more so from firewood processors who are buying job lots of mixed woods which quite often contain some gems which are too big for their machinery to process. I've also made contact with some tree surgeons that occasionally come across some lovely hardwoods through their line of work.

Through this avenue I've recently bought a couple of large Elm trees as far away as Stranraer and some gun barrel straight oak near Stirling. I'm finding that I need to travel out of Argyll for decent oak as west coast oak, more often than not, tends to branch out into huge limbs from a relatively low point in the trunk. In hardwood my biggest sellers by far are Olive Ash and Elm. A couple of years ago I commissioned a kiln so can now offer kiln dried as well.

My plans for the future include upgrading the mill, purchasing either a two sided or four sided moulder and I'm currently in the process of building a purpose built shed to house a permanent slab flattening jig and spindle moulder. At some point shortly I'm hoping that my business will be able to sustain at least one full time employee. Although, as I write, the country is in lockdown again there seems to be a surge in demand for home DIY projects like shed builds and fencing as well as amateur furniture making and crafting. I feel that if we can meet this demand with a quality product and service then the future seems bright for mine and other small sawmill businesses.



Written by,

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## JULIAN SCHAD- TREE SURGEON AND PART TIME SAWMILLER

I've been working with trees since 1988, having started in the Scottish Borders with Roger Cowper, a very knowledgeable and capable tree surgeon. After that I worked as the principal climber with an arboricultural firm in Hamburg, Germany, where I was greatly surprised to find how respected our profession is over there. Later I went to Merrist Wood College, near Guildford, graduating with Distinction and then started my own business in and around Dunblane in 1992.

I have been blessed with having some amazing clients over the years, and have worked as far afield as Rostock, Germany, Ringwood, England, and some of the very best locations in Scotland. We have been charged with looking after trees in various Castles, ancient buildings, Cathedrals and heritage sites in extremely diverse locations, sometimes being challenging to access. In some cases, we have to be rowed out to various small Islands to deal with the tree issues around the heritage sites.

Many of these sites have veteran trees, which always leave me in awe of them and I can't help but wonder what they have seen over the years. One of my favourite collection of old trees is a small group of ancient Sweet Chestnut trees growing on the island of Inchmahome on the Lake of Menteith which are so gnarled and twisted and full of wisdom. Some of the old estates and Arboretums were planted in times when manpower was cheap and plentiful, and it can be challenging to make the differences I would like to make to bring these sites back to how they would have looked.

When I'm not acting as an unpaid tax collector, saving up to pay my income tax, Corporation tax, Vat tax, National Insurance, and Pension for myself and my staff, I have some time left over to work alongside my staff cutting hedges, pruning and felling trees, grinding out stumps and planting trees. I aim to provide the full service of tree works with my team of three employees. Thankfully at the young age of 53 I'm still climbing and my son has recently joined the team and is currently learning the ropes, pun intended. We have been so lucky to have been able to keep working through these Covid times, working outside in our remote locations seems to have kept us safe, so far!!







Obviously, most of the trees we fell are diseased, rotten or unsafe, and generally are only fit for firewood, but we have been involved in the restoration of an old arboretum which lay uncared for seventy years or so and had many fallen trees. These, alongside others which were felled to make way for new planting, led to a large amount of timber being stockpiled and I then began to look around to see what was available. I chose a Norwood LM29 sawmill, and once I put the whole kit together have been very busy with the mill. I intend to sell to craftsmen, cabinet makers and others who want bespoke pieces for their own projects. I have found it challenging but most rewarding and having sold a good quantity of boards already think that it will be a good string to my bow going forward. I can't think of a more suitable way to create a more balanced business, where we recycle all our material and waste none, and provide a small amount of useable wood for craftsmen.



Going forward, age apart, tree surgery should become easier on the one side, better, lighter chainsaws (we are using battery saws for much of our pruning), lighter equipment and access platforms where appropriate, on the other hand our industry is plagued by tighter and tighter regulations making time in the office more necessary filling in various forms to keep some jobsworth busy, and then the army of new kids in the industry, buying so much bling and cunning expensive climbing aids and having watched too many YouTube videos of the excitement of working in trees with a noisy and dangerous chainsaw. Working with trees is an honour and a privilege and one I intend to enjoy for many years to come.

Written by,

*Julian Schad*

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## THE WOOD YARD STIRLING

Dave Mackay calls himself a collaborator rather than a carpenter or a joiner - he collaborates wood, stone, metal and glass materials together to make fine furniture and other useful items. The company as David views it is simply.....conception collection creation.

They have no limits to their creations and no limits to ideas or applications: "we will make almost anything that we are asked to make". He tries hard to give customers what they want and not always what he's comfortable producing and that's taught him some good lessons as well as being a good foundation for a successful business.

***"Fortune favours the brave"***

says Dave.

Dave started life as a carpet fitter and was a self-employed from the age of 21. He started his own flooring company at 22 and ran it for about 8 years then realised a change was needed: the requirement for more diversity and creativity in his life.

So after visiting a local wood yard, Macarthur and Sons, and falling in love with Yew wood, he started making furniture as a hobby in his garden shed 9 years ago. After producing a coffee table for the house and a throne for the hell of it, he was hooked!



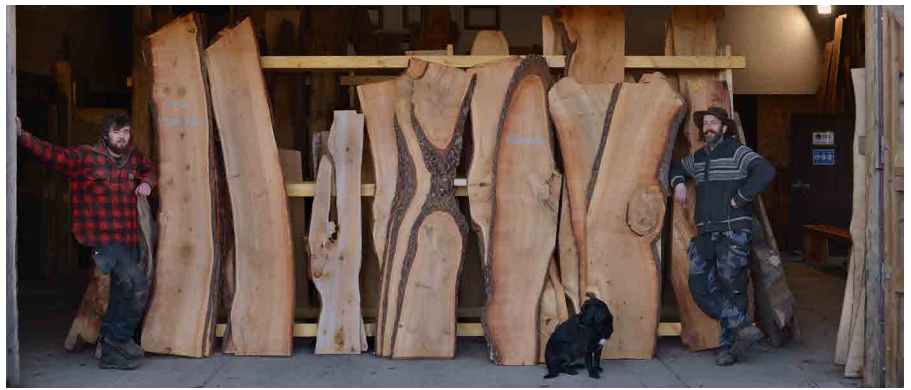
He made a few more pieces of furniture and put them on Etsy where they sold well and for good prices. He made pieces in quiet times of the year (when there were fewer orders for carpet fitting) and sold them during the rest of the year. He's never been trained (he says: "I'm a carpet fitter with a table-saw.") and has learnt all of his techniques by trial and error, but nevertheless produces natural, attractive, functional furniture. David's remit for his creativity is it must have a purpose, a use, an application.

At this point all his wood came from Scottish Wood and he was so grateful for all of Jim and the boys help and for actually being there doing what they do with a showroom full of wood to inspire and enable him in his creating.

Our first milling tree came to them one day - a man in a wood offered Dave a tree so he asked his dad "can we mill this into boards" and his dad being his dad said "yes" and him and his dad set about milling it with their 65cc chainsaw and chainsaw mill. It was an olive ash gifted to them by a local company. It had blown down in a patch of woodland near Cambusbarron. This tree was a learning process (especially since we thought it was an oak before we cut it) but the experience was enjoyable and we produced a good amount of stunning boards which were made into furniture and sold as far as London, Switzerland and the USA in the years that followed. We used the chainsaw mill for a few years running on a Husky 395. We milled about 1200 boards in total with the chainsaw mill until we decided enough was enough one day after milling a monster oak and we purchased a very broken bandsaw mill.

After a complete rebuild and a steep learning curve the bandsaw was an amazing upgrade. However, I would say it's harder to mill bent crazy shaped timber on a bandsaw and we like crazy shaped stuff here, so we still use the chainsaw when appropriate.





David is keen to acknowledge the help he's had: His father, a mechanical engineer, has helped him throughout his business from his first dining room table onwards and especially in restoring the Forestor Jacko bandsaw from a complete wreck into a fully functioning sawmill with a complete hydraulic kit.

Also, he would like to thank his mum for doing his washing, cooking his dinner, helping with paper-work and all the other things his mum does in order to help the business. And to my big sister and all my friends and the people that have worked with me over the years a big thank you for all your help.

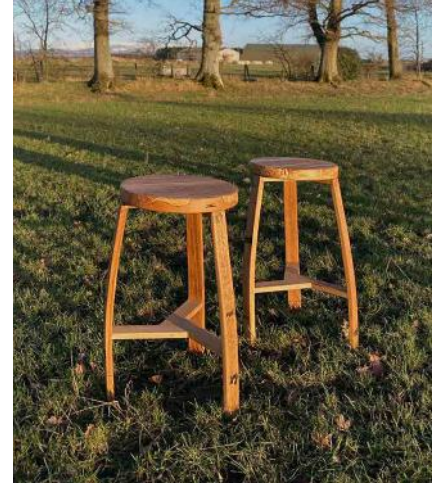
He describes his involvement in timber construction as starting from installing a post to hold up a porch for customer and now friend, Richard Cooper, then the same chap asked him to make a bookshelf in his house and then twisted Dave's arm into making a "wee" barn for him: knowing full well Dave had never even made a shed before! "It's just a big bit of furniture" says Dave. So last year Dave built a barn,



his first full-sized building. And not just any old barn - this was T shaped building 15x18 meters 6 meters high with an 18 meter lean-to incorporated into the T shape. Built as a post and frame inside old stone walls incapable of bearing the load of the roof but structural enough to remain in situation. They milled every single piece of the barn from a full load of Douglas fir from the Forestry Commission in Aberfolye and 10 specially selected extra long Scots Pine trees from David's own forest (producing 8.5 meter 350x250 tie beams).







The construction took 13 weeks in total. And was built by Dave (the carpet fitter) and Scott (the Michelin star chef). It has 8 bifold doors, a pizza oven, a garage and a 10 meter glazed-in viewing area, so not really your run-of-the-mill barn.

The Wood Yard Stirling and David's other company Sticks and Stones Furniture are in the process of moving into new premises near Kippen. Their old unit was an 80sqm industrial unit and a large barn 10 miles away and their sawmill was located where the trees were. The new premises are slightly larger, 650sqm in total. Encompassing a 144sqm timber showroom two 135sqm workshops and a 235sqm room to park the van or the telehandler or the landy or the trailer or all 4. Plus a 3000sqm Yard allowing them to have all their tools under one roof at last. His machines include 3 table saws, 3 thicknessers, 1 spindle moulder and vertical bandsaw with Auto feed, the Forester Jacko bandsaw capable of 8 meter long cuts at 80 cm wide and a telehandler to load the mill. He's planning to build a new kiln in the new premises to produce kiln-dried planks.

As well as barns, tree houses, boat parts, stair cases and furniture of any kind, they supply sawn timber as well, as at the new yard we will also be able to produce cladding, beams and structural timber, bespoke fencing, mouldings and firewood.

All of his wood comes from within 25 miles of Stirling and Dave knows where each tree grew and why it was felled. None of their trees are felled for the wood - we just make sure it get used for a good purpose. Most of our wood is storm damaged or dangerous trees. Provenance is very important for Dave and his customers. He'll cover the roof of his new sheds with solar panels to make the business as carbon-neutral as possible. At the moment he works with one self-employed woodworker Geordie and they have an apprentice starting next month

In his view the customer is king, but everyone must know the rules - customers can visit the yard by appointment only please. But he'll set aside time for each customer help people select timber and process the timber for them to any point in the construction like planing it or sizing it or sanding - he says that if someone understands the process that goes into a piece of furniture, they'll enjoy the process much more and so will the maker than if they just buy it off the shelf. He has confidence in his words and in his team and their ability to create anything!



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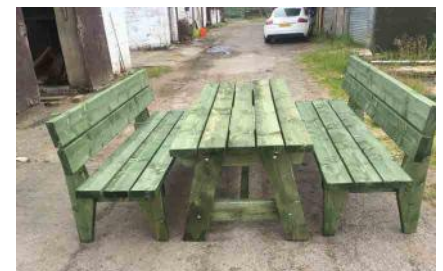
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I've never gone for grants as there's too much paperwork involved, so everything has been paid for out of income from the mill, which makes developing the business slow, but then I like what I do so there's no need to grow much more. The main difficulty is getting timber. I use mainly Spruce as well as Larch and it's increasingly difficult to buy in the small amounts that I use, especially Larch. Otherwise, it's pretty straightforward and I'm happy to keep it that way.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM KIRKWOOD

### Tell me about your business

I make garden furniture including tables and benches as well as fencing panels; furniture in summer and fencing in winter. I started this business in 2002, initially as part-time as I already had a full-time job in a bigger sawmill, but the business went full-time in 2010. I started off just making fencing but that became repetitive and so I branched out into garden furniture, which has grown gradually. I don't have any employees - just me and occasional help from friends. The business is based in a large shed which I rent from a farmer.

### What did you do before?

My sawmilling career started in 1977, with my first job as a sawmiller working for a big mill. I worked in a variety of mills including Bernd Pinamonti (ex-ASHS member) in Braco, when I lived in Perthshire.

### What machines do you have?

I started off with a Forester bandmill and got a Norwood LumberMate LM29 in July 2020. It took a bit of setting up but I'm very happy with it. The blades have to be kept sharp and I'm getting a sharpener and setter soon to save time and money. I also have a cross-cut saw, a small firewood processor and a dipping tank for treating fencing timber. I have a simple set-up and I like to keep it that way.

### How has the business developed?

I'm very grateful to people like Frank Gamwell and Eoin Cox, who were ASHS members and helped me when I started out. Also Jim Birley, who's hosted some very useful ASHS training events, as well as other ASHS members.

I do a few other things including cutting spruce beams for repairing farm sheds. I tried making high spec American-style garden sheds but there was no demand and everyone buys very cheap garden sheds from superstores. I'd be interested in trying new lines like bespoke buildings but this is the wrong area - not enough people with income to spare.





## ECOWOODWORKS

So, about 10 years ago, I decided to go self employed, following a nice sequence of opportunities, I stopped teaching and started building. I probably spent more time thinking about a name than I did about changing profession, and Ecowoodworks seemed to fit my ideals

I originally started out as an engineer, I worked for Rover for a while, and Mira showers, but despite loving the technical side, knew I wasn't cut out for a 40 year career. For a variety of reasons I decided to retrain as a teacher, Steiner education had always been something that drew my interest and following a year in Germany, I became a full time PE teacher in a Steiner school in Sussex. I loved teaching and spent 17 years very happily playing games.

I won't bore you with details of the Steiner approach, but it is worth mentioning that practical skills and a relationship to "doing" learning rather than sitting in a classroom are an essential part of the education. I soon offered to help out with the schools building program that ran for three weeks fulltime for the older students, and after a few years was a regular, teaching groups in the summer term to build a whole range of projects.

The reason I mention this is that it formed a key part of my reasons for starting Ecowoodworks. I found I loved building, and found particular satisfaction in helping students go from lacking the confidence and belief that they could build a cycle shed, or timber frame extension, to genuine wonder at what they were capable of after three weeks working outside.

This led to a number of requests outside of school, from parents or friends, if I could help them with a building project that they had planned but didn't have the confidence to tackle alone. So during a sabbatical in 2009, I took on a couple of projects, building a garden studio for one family and a giant log store with a friend.

It was clear that I was being presented with an opportunity to consider another career change, I had always assumed I would remain a school teacher, but really didn't want to look back and feel disappointed that I hadn't given it a go. So, I decided to take the plunge, go self employed, and start planning what it was I wanted do.

I knew that I wanted to be as sustainable as possible, and that my work should reflect my own choices and beliefs. The most obvious decision was to ensure I only built using locally sourced and untreated timber. This was an easy choice, as there were two or three good local sawmills, that I was able to build up a good working relationship with.





The south east is quite well forested and I had a good range of timbers to choose from. Douglas Fir and Larch became the main stay for most frames, with Western Red Cedar probably the most popular for cladding as it was widely available. There was plenty of oak, for more specialist jobs, and I particularly enjoyed using Sweet Chestnut, and although it tends to twist and bend, it was great for cladding and frames, and a very under rated timber. I loved becoming familiar with different timbers.

It was a surprise to me how little people were aware of the possibility or availability of untreated, naturally durable wood, and how most assumed you could only use treated softwood outside, let alone any relationship to its provenance. As I worked on my website, I wanted to include some information on timbers and my approach. If I was to go down the locally and untreated route, then I also knew I wanted to be as chemical free and as natural as possible. This meant avoiding; adhesives, expanding foam, MDF, or non natural insulation etc. wherever I could. Although I had been aware of natural building methods for a while, it soon became clear that it isn't the easiest or the cheapest way. Sourcing certain materials is challenging, as it can often only come from specialist suppliers, whatever that is; wool insulation, Warmcel, sheet material without formaldehyde etc.

Despite a slowish start, and occasional concerns about when the next job was coming (although isn't that the same of anyone self employed) there was a definite market for my work. For the six years before moving up to Moray, I am very proud to look back on a whole range of projects; decking, sheds, workshops, log stores, a tree house, studios, garden rooms, a couple of chicken houses and more. All of them using local timber, generally from within a 20 to 30 mile radius, and milled by capable saw millers.

Probably two thirds of all the projects were built with clients, and I soon realised that this was another niche area that most builders weren't prepared to take on. It has been really interesting to discover how uncertain many people are about taking on projects they believe only professionals can tackle. This is when I realised, that it's not so much to do with skills or techniques, but like teaching students, you are actually imparting a sense of empowerment and self confidence that allows someone to visualise what is possible. Sure, they won't start building their own house straight away, but they soon realise that they are capable of much more than they thought, and that you can get a great sense of satisfaction from even the most simple building projects.

Then, four years ago, came another opportunity, and with our children grown up, my wife and I moved up to Moray. I have to say, despite loving being here, it's not been easy to restart my business. In Sussex, I had a ready made clientele from the school community and was relatively quickly able to build up contacts and business interest. Having said that, I would say there is much more acceptance and understanding of the benefits of using good local, native timbers in Scotland.





Having a local source of wood, is essential to that, and I have been very lucky to have Logie Timber start up, just 20 minutes away, I've also used Cromartie Timber and Abbey Timber. I am proud to say I was probably the first customer for Logie Timber, and have loved seeing their business expand.

Gradually I have been taking on more projects, and have done a number of builds with clients, and am hopefully getting a reasonable reputation. There is no question, that I still get the same feeling of excitement before a new job, and always love the process of building and the satisfaction of seeing good wood turned into a new deck or workshop.



In parallel with the challenges of being self employed and establishing myself in a new area, the next chapter presented itself, with the purchase of 1.2 acres of farmers field overlooking Findhorn bay....but that is another story.

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**Read on...P36**





## ECO HOUSE SELF BUILD

If you read my article on how I came to be working with wood and forming Ecowoodworks (PP 33-35), you may remember that I moved up to Moray in August 2016 (yes I'm an outsider, what saves me is my middle name, Mclellan, which in my eyes makes me a little bit Scottish).

My wife is an early years teacher and had a job in Forres, while I started to establish my business. We began to explore the area, and having sold our three bed semi in Sussex, started to look for a building plot or project to take on. I'm very aware of the advantages of selling down south and buying up here, but it allowed us to realise the dream of building our own house, and this was to be our new home.

We stumbled on a plot just outside Forres, with a view over Findhorn Bay, Moray Firth and the Highlands in the distance. It seemed too good to be true, 1.2 acres, fairly flat, fantastic views and affordable. There had to be a downside, and there were actually two. The first was in the name, Bogs of Blervie, part of the land was quite boggy, but a ground condition survey didn't raise major concerns. The second was the A96 dualling, with one of the proposed routes coming quite close. This gave us a negotiating position, and we secured the plot for a decent price in July 2017 and started on the hard work of planning our build.

We found a great local architect, and with the location and space we had, decided to put in an application for two single bedroom holiday cabins and a two bed house for us. Those of you who have had any experience of the design and planning process know this takes it's time. Even with me dedicating much of my time, it took until Dec 2017 to get planning permission, we then broke down the building warrant applications into three, drainage and groundworks, holiday cabins and the house.



I took the rash decision to focus as much of my time as I could on the build, and in Sept 2018, once we'd got the first warrant, started groundworks. First job was getting the electricity diverted underground, into 150m trench, my digger driving skills soon improved. Then I dealt with the site access, land drainage and water. We picked up an old static caravan from one of the local caravan parks, got it transported on site and connected up. One of the complications with the site was not being able to have soakaways, so we decided to go for a reed bed, and with some local help had the full system in place and planted by November 2018.

Then the fun part began, following Christmas in the caravan, I started on the first holiday cabin. The plan was to get this built, move into the cabin and then tackle the house. One winter in a caravan was going to be enough. The cabin was the biggest structure I'd built at approx. 4m x 11m, pitch roof, with open roof space, and proved to be perfect preparation for building the house. It was a stick build, suspended timber floor on concrete piers, Warmcel insulation and Larch cladding.

I worked hard to source materials as locally as possible. The ridge beam and support beams needed to be graded and the only place I could find to do the grading was Abbey Timber, so following a long days drive past Edinburgh, I came back with a heavy trailer load of lovely Douglas Fir beams. The rest of the timber for the frame I got from James Jones, because their Sitka Spruce for standard timber comes from Scottish forests. Then the Larch for the cladding came from Logie Timber, a very convenient 20 minutes away.

I had help with the frame, from two ex-students from the school I used to teach in, and my son, who is a tree surgeon, and by April 2019 the frame was complete. I then plugged away throughout the summer, getting the building dry, installing windows and planning the interior. By autumn it was clear I needed some extra help, so arranged for some help with the roof and cladding, and employed a great local guy for day a week.

Having had the Warmcel insulation installed, the interior started to take shape, with first fix plumbing and wiring to go in. The plan then was to divert my attention to the house, and get the foundations in by October 2019 before finishing the cabin for Christmas. Looking back I'm so pleased I did this, although it stretched my reserves, working with a great local groundworks engineer, we got the foundations, blockwork and slab in place by early November 2019.

The day of the pour turned into one of those nightmare scenarios. The forecast was good all week, and we planned to pour on Friday 1st November. The first delivery came on time, and within 45 minutes the slab for workshop was finished, and it looked great, a really satisfying moment. The rest of the load went into start the house, so by midmorning we were feeling smug and drinking coffee looking at the view waiting for the second load. An hour later, looking at our watches the next load was clearly overdue, and by midday a phone call confirmed the lorry had broken down and there was no replacement. A very worrying three hours later, the second load eventually arrived, much longer and we could have been in serious trouble. By now of course, the dry weather forecast had dramatically changed and the last load didn't arrive until 5.30, with a very unhappy driver. By then it was completely dark, we were all very wet and cold, what should have been a great day, turned into a miserable experience. It was by far the worst moment of the build, and in hindsight maybe a good thing to have gone through. In the end the slab didn't turn out too bad, amazing what you can do with a head torch and lots sandwich boxes do bail out the worst of the water.

The focus was then to complete the interior of the cabin by Christmas 2019, which we managed with hours to spare! I then spent early 2020 completing the cladding on the cabin and preparing for the house. I realised how much I enjoy getting my hands on timber, doing the interior details is ok, but finishing the cladding was satisfying and I was really looking forward to starting the house.

It was very satisfying to know the foundations were in place, and I felt surprisingly confident about starting the house, the approach would be the same as the cabin, the same team on the frame and clear choice of suppliers for materials.







So, early March 2020, a pile of untreated ( we did use treated for sole plates) 145mm x 44mm timber was waiting for the exterior structural frame, lots of fixings and a willing team to get started. Frames are great to build, because you get such a quick result, and within a week, we had half of the ground floor walls up. The first snag we hit was getting delivery of I beams for the joists and rafters. This should have been straight forward, as the manufacturer is in Forres, but no. There was an issue getting the quantity, because a single build is very small fry for a large manufacturer, and we had to get split packs for the sizes we needed. Once we got through that complication, I then couldn't believe that the beams are distributed to Glasgow and then had to be shipped back up here, we live with 1.5m of the factory, madness!

As we all know too well, coronavirus was on the way and lockdown was looming. I panicked, not easy for me, and was desperate to get the ridge beams on site. Having hassled Abbey Timber I was lucky enough to collect the beams the day before lockdown, and a long drive to Edinburgh and back allowed me to deliver three huge 200mm x 325mm Douglas Fir beams.

So we were lucky enough to be able to continue working during lockdown, my team were living on site in the caravan, and by the end of April we had much of the frame finished, ridge up, with the help of five strong men, and the rafters going on.

As many people found, sourcing materials was very difficult during lockdown, and although construction was allowed, many suppliers were shut, or on limited capacity. I spent a couple of worried weeks ringing round and eventually with some help was able to get hold of OSB, sarking, breather membrane and battens. I was concerned about the life of the webbing in the I beams when exposed to the weather, and also the frame was only temporarily braced and the site is exposed, so getting materials on site was a great relief.

Unlike many people, once I had materials on site, lockdown turned onto a bit of a gift. I just worked on the house, the team had gone back down south, but I kept my friend, Majk, for a day a week and we just plugged away; sarking, sheathing , membrane and batten, got the building dry by the end of June. I had tried to avoid setting too many targets, but as we were doing well, planned to get the exterior finished by







autumn. That meant getting roofing (sheet steel), windows and cladding done. This time there was no problem ordering, and materials arrived on time, the roof was on in July, windows by early August, counter batten and insect mesh in September and cladding (Larch from Logie) finished by the middle of October. I even got the guttering up!



Without doubt one of the most satisfying moments I have had was finishing the exterior of the house and having a building dry and secure, no more carrying tools backwards and forwards to the container each day. The budget was feeling stretched by now, so I took on a large deck in Lossie, a customer keen to be involved and we had a lucky window in the weather during November and finished a 6m x 12m raised deck in Larch with Douglas Fir frame, and Larch batten skirting around a static caravan.

So now we are into 2021, still lockdown, and still luckily able to get materials. January saw the inner frame complete, we went for a double frame system which avoids cold bridging, creating a 300mm thick wall. February got the frame lined with OSB in preparation for insulation and as I write I am recovering from a couple of days getting a few hundred bags of Warmcel insulation blown into the walls. The weather is calm and sunny, and the house is warming up quickly, I know the theory of solar gain, and using concrete as a heat sink, but it's still great to feel it happen.

The next stage is now first fix, I'll do as much of this myself as possible, with help from electrician and plumber I used on the cabin. It means for a while losing my day a week injection of support from Majk, but he will come back for plasterboard.

I need to balance now taking on enough work to help finance the last stages, but not become so busy that the interior drags on. All being well, finishing by autumn this year should be possible, then we can move out the cabin and start letting it out. The next phase will also be a balance, do we build the second cabin, to get the income, or get the workshop done. The slab is already down for the workshop, so I think it would be sensible to do that next!



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# DISCOVER NORWOOD SAWMILLS

## LumberPro HD36

36" Max Diameter;  
28" Max Board Width

20ft Bed Length; 17ft  
Cutting Length  
(Extensions Available)

23HP Briggs & Stratton  
Petrol Engine (7.5kW  
Electric Option Available)



## LumberMate LM29v2

29" Max Diameter; 24"  
24" Max Board Width

20ft Bed Length;  
17ft Cutting Length  
(Extensions Available)

14HP Kohler Petrol Engine  
(7.5kW Electric Option Available)



## LumberMan MN26v2

27" Max Diameter;  
23" Max Board Width

16ft Bed Length;  
13ft Cutting Length  
(Extensions Available)

13HP Briggs & Stratton  
Petrol Engine



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