

CASE STUDY

RECLAIMED WOOD HAS ROOTS IN PAST

BY MIKE MEIER



While the debate about forest certification programs and green building continues to rage, one important fact remains true — use of reclaimed or salvaged wood from deconstructed buildings or sunken logs provides a valuable source of usable timber. An added benefit to using reclaimed wood is the rich and vibrant history that it can bring to new projects. One such example is wood reclaimed from the Scotia “Mill B” site in Humboldt County, Calif.

After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, increased demand for lumber helped Pacific Lumber Company (PALCO) grow and prosper. Headquartered in Scotia, Calif., the company opened Mill B in 1910, which to this day is the world’s oldest and largest redwood sawmill. The mill provided redwood and Douglas fir throughout the 20th Century. During the 1980s, controversies emerged nationally regarding the harvesting of old-growth forests. PALCO entered in to discussions with the State of California about dramatically reducing timber harvesting on the North Coast. The lack of logs eventually led to the closure of Mill B in 2001. The 500,000-square-foot facility sat idle and was slated for eventual demolition.

Rather than simply demolishing the mill, PALCO allowed North Cal Wood Products to harvest the usable wood, windows, fixtures and many other antique items. The building contained an immense cache of vintage redwood from old-growth trees harvested long ago. Deconstruction involved the carefully managed dismantling of the building with the goal of preserving valuable building components, including exceptionally large dimension timbers and flooring planks no longer available in new wood. Deconstruction projects such as this provide timbers up to 36 inches by 26 inches by 50 feet, and siding in widths to 20 inches.

Reclaimed wood such as from the deconstruction of Scotia Mill B helps preserve the unique history associated with buildings constructed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. More importantly, the reuse of old-growth wood from 200- to 600-year-old trees helps demonstrate a true commitment to sustainable building practices.

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