

Reclaiming the Past



*Crossroads
Recycled Lumber
Revives Old Wood
with LT40SH*

Most people, viewing an old warehouse, a wooden bridge, or an outdated manufacturing plant built 75, 100, or even 150 years ago, see only a worn out edifice ready for the dust bins of history.

To Marc Mandel, owner of Crossroads Recycled Lumber in the Sierra Nevada town of North Fork, those constructions represent a forest to be reclaimed. In recycling wood from them, Marc contends, all the blood, sweat, and tears that went into the originals are honored and preserved to the benefit of a new generation. “Forests fell and, sometimes, men died, in producing that lumber,” he says. “Workers invested their lives and skills manufacturing it. It seems wrong to waste the labor and energy of the past when we can, today, reuse the wood to provide continued benefit to our community.”

Crossroads Recycled Lumber is the result of Marc’s passion for reclaiming the past by recycling lumber recovered from old structures. The company, using a Wood-Mizer LT40 Super Hydraulic and a variety of planers, sanders, and other finishing equipment, reworks the old fiber into finished boards. Then the lumber is resold for use in elegant new structures where it will serve for additional tens, maybe hundreds, of years.

The Wood-Mizer is important to the business, Marc explains, because thin kerf band maximizes recovery and because, “We

take pride in sawing straight and square and in consistently putting out an accurately milled product. If you keep that Wood-Mizer lined in, it cuts beautifully.”

Marc was recycling lumber long before it became an “in” thing to do. Nearly 25 years ago, he met a man who wanted a house torn down. Out of work and anxious, Marc took on the job and resold the lumber through an ad in the local newspaper. That led to other opportunities and Marc was on his way.

Marc’s entry into the business came at an unexpected time. Helped along by increased awareness about the environmental benefits of recycling and a desire by architects and builders to provide unique “looks” in their building designs, Marc has managed to build what was once almost a “seat of the pants” operation into a highly professional firm with a national clientele including some of the nation’s most respected designers and builders. Lumber and timbers exiting Crossroads’ plant lives on today in elegantly designed landmark structures, in some of the nation’s finest new homes, and in other buildings that will someday be considered community treasures.

While benefiting from good timing, Marc hastens to point out that building a company like Crossroads has not been easy. “Lumber reclamation is a business with a lot of opportunity,” he says. “But it’s also a



Top: Wood-Mizer LT40 used to cut lumber. Bottom: Lumber after it is sawn.

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business with great potential for failure. It is hard work and you really have to focus on learning everything you can about your trade to succeed.”

To some, Marc’s business might seem pretty simple. Old timbers are purchased, metal is removed, the wood is resurfaced on the Wood-Mizer, then the lumber is sold as a high value end product.


“Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work that way,” Marc contends. “You’re often surprised in this business, no matter how much you think you know.”

By way of example, Marc says, timbers dropped during deconstruction can shatter internally, leaving no visible evidence. Rocks, insect damage, or other flaws can also be hidden. “You can lose most of the value in a timber you’ve already paid for,” he continues. “So many things can go wrong that haven’t been anticipated.”

Failing to expect the unexpected, Marc says, can lead to the death of a business.

According to Marc, the keys to success in a business like his are learning everything possible about deconstruction and its impact on timber, and learning how to accurately scale timbers for likely yield. Additionally, discovering how to describe reclaimed lumber in language customers understand so they accept “character marks” such as holes, stains, and other marks that some consider enhancements and others consider blemishes. Equally important to success is milling consistently straight and square timbers, and operating the business professionally in ways that maximize production while demonstrating reliability to the customer.

A lot to handle?

Absolutely, Marc would say. But also a business offering rewards above and beyond the financial. Few things are more satisfying, he puts forward, than seeing something special created because your company has had a part in reclaiming the past in order to enhance the future. 

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