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By Charley Coury

## **Understanding Green (Certified) Wood**

(Forest Certification)

The call for “Green” wood is picking up steam. I view this as a trend, not a fad. In this article I plan to give a brief, sometimes technical, explanation of “Green” wood certification. If you are going to represent wood products, you should know something about this subject.

### **Why should we market Certified Forest Products?**

Besides the promotion of healthy forests, a financial reason exists to head in the green direction. Why? Because there is a potential niche in certified millwork (wood ceilings). How large is the market niche? I don't know. The good news is that our first Chain of Custody project, a 2000 SF grille ceiling in San Francisco is with the Packard Foundation.

When I first started in this business, I had anticipated architects driving the issue. Time has clearly proven me wrong: it is client initiated. This simple fact provides representatives an opportunity to bring another area of expertise to the A/D community.

In addition to providing a knowledge base on the subject, WoodCeilings is also responding to this demand in other tangible ways. Last year WoodCeilings became an official Non-Exclusive Certified Chain of Custody Manufacturer. We even have an official number: SW-COC-70. What does this mean? Let me explain first by providing an overview of Certification.

### **Background on green certification**

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo means that when you find their mark of certification on a new Gibson guitar, the practice courts of the Portland Trailblazers, the new Jimmy Hendricks museum, or even wood ceilings at the Packard Foundation headquarters; these products come from wood harvested responsibly from an eco-friendly commercial forest. How do you know? The Forest Stewardship Council says so. This international group oversees organizations that certify well-managed forests and their wood products. The operative word is **well-managed** when talking technically about certified wood.

The environmental movement birthed independent, third-party forest certification. The idea was that if they could guarantee consumers the products purchased used wood from well-managed forests they could create market demand. Market demand, not government intervention, would be the ultimate safety net for the world's forests. They needed a way to verify or “certify” responsibly managed forestry operations. They also needed a labeling system to recognize the products from those forests.

The non-profit SmartWood Program, the world's first certifying organization, was founded in 1989 as an administrative arm of the Rainforest Alliance (NY, NY). We have recently affiliated with Smart Wood. Shortly thereafter, the for-profit company Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) (San Francisco, CA) was founded with a focus that extended to a wide range of products. Their forest certification program is called Green Cross.

Soon other independent, third-party forest certification programs threatened to mushroom out of control across the globe. Desperately needed was an umbrella authority establishing standardized principles and criteria for forest certification. The world wide Forest Stewardship Council was created in 1993. Remarkably, many divergent forces (from logging interests to environmentalists) came together and actually agreed to create and submit to this organization.

Three global criteria were developed to evaluate a **well-managed** forest:

1. Healthy maintenance of the total forest ecosystem
2. Production of wood on a sustained, renewable basis
3. A positive social and economic impact on surrounding communities

### **Second Party Certification**

Second-party certification, or industry-certifying-industry, is an essential strategy of the large timber companies in the US. This is the big boy's current answer as they grapple with the growing call for certification. Representing roughly 90% of industrial timber companies in the US, the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) has created a self-policing program called the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Environmentalists cry foul on several fronts: Second-party certification criteria doesn't go far enough to protect ecosystems. It doesn't have real, on-the-ground verification but relies solely on landowner reports. Finally, full public disclosure for the annual performance reports is not required.

### **ISO 9000 (quality control) and ISO 14000 (environmental management)**

Another stream in the certification river is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Sourced primarily in Europe, it has weighed into the fray with its own System Based (as opposed to Product Based) standardization program. This is particularly important in emerging European markets. In the end, I think American industry may prove more responsive to ISO than to the Forest Stewardship Council, perhaps because the environmental influence is felt less keenly.

### **Chain of Custody Certification**

As of July 1998 WoodCeilings is a Chain of Custody Certification manufacturer. This means that every piece of wood in a ceiling project can be traced step by step (much like an animal pedigree) back to its original timberland. We were qualified based on an inspection of our plant facilities and the demonstration of our ability to track, separate and mark the flow of the certified wood coming into our plant from the source forest to the final project. Since we feel the third-party Forest Stewardship Council accredited programs are still the most respected and credible, we went in that direction. When we decided to formally apply for Chain of Custody Certification, we approached the SmartWood program, administrated by the Rainforest Alliance.

### **Why should clients pursue and architects specify Certified Forest Products?**

Today it is still more an altruistic desire rather than a market driven decision to pursue the use of certified "Green" wood. Of course, certification people hope that one day this situation will be reversed. But for now, it comes down to an organization deciding to pursue certification, either to enhance its image or to expand its market niche or, believe it or not, to try to do the right thing for our forests and for future generations.

Doing the right thing according to certification people, means selecting green products that come from forests that have been independently audited and verified as **well managed** (the operative word again).

**Update: January 2003**

By Lanny Berg

### **Supply-**

The supply chain for various species is still developing. This means that the availability of a specific species should be researched prior to specifying that particular species. Additionally, some owners have even authorized the purchase of currently available material in advance of the completion of the project to ensure that the quantity and grade is available at the time when the material is required.

**Specifying Veneers and the 80% rule-**

Certified veneers are available in a wide range of species. However it is important that a Certified substrate (core) be specified as well. There is an 80% rule that states 80% of a product must use certified material in order for it to confer the FSC certification. Because veneer is so thin it does not come close to 80% of the final amount of material when it is laminated to a substrate. Therefore, it is important that a certified core be specified as well.

**Class 1A Fire Rating and Certified Veneers-**

In our particular business a Class 1A fire rating and Certified Veneers creates a unique situation. Much of what we manufacture is specified as requiring a Class 1A fire rated core. Currently, to the best of our knowledge, there are no FSC Certified Class 1A Fire Rated cores being manufactured. Therefore, due to the 80% rule, if a Class 1A is required we cannot pass on the FSC certification. Thus, the required Fire Rating should be carefully assessed and the local code requirements should be consulted to see if a Class 1A is actually required. If the client still desires the use of FSC veneers, nothing prevents us from laminating these veneers to a non-FSC Class 1A substrate.