

Out of the Woods

Architecture and Interiors
Built from Wood



gestalten

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Terms, People, and Ideas

From Japanese wood-charring techniques to technologically advanced timber, this overview explores how we think about wood, and how we build with it, too.

BIOPHILIA

A recognition that our connection with nature triggers an innate positive response. Biophilic design, then, speaks to our desire to bring the outdoors in, and has influenced everything from city planning to interior design. Spaces with a strong timber presence have a demonstrated ability to reduce stress and make us feel safer—in other words, the intuition of nature that comes with wood just makes us feel better. (See “Closeness to Nature Calms the Mind,” page 212.)

CARBON SINK

A process or entity that absorbs more carbon out of the atmosphere than it releases—like a tree, for instance. The removal of carbon from the atmosphere is referred to as carbon sequestering. Other examples of a carbon sink include soil, as well as the ocean, where some marine animals absorb carbon dioxide for photosynthesis.

CERTIFIED TIMBER

Organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) in North America exist to ensure forest products—including both timber and paper—come from responsibly managed forests according to a set of standards, and they certify those products accordingly. In addition to concerns around sustainability, the well-being of workers and indigenous peoples are also key issues that contribute to the certification of timber.

CHAIN OF CUSTODY

In forestry, the chain of custody refers to the path timber has taken through the supply chain, from forest to finished product. Understanding this chain is an important step in ensuring the product is sourced from a sustainably managed forest and doesn't originate from a part of the world with a high incidence of illegal logging.



CHALET

One of the most recognizable architectural expressions of the Alpine region, the chalet is typically pictured with a sloping roof, shutters, and flowers blooming beneath the windows. Historically, these dwellings were built as summertime homes for farmers, but they have since become a symbol of mountain leisure around the world.

The simple form recurs in *Out of the Woods*—it is fertile ground for architects looking to reinvent a beloved vernacular form. (See “Innauer-Matt Architekten,” page 88.)

CLADDING

Timber cladding, or timber weatherboarding, is used by architects looking to finish the outside of a building with wood. Beyond its aesthetic qualities, this kind of cladding offers a layer of protection from the elements and helps to insulate the building, especially when naturally durable woods such as cedar or larch are used. But cladding isn't limited to the exterior—cladding interior walls with timber results in a warm and natural-feeling environment.

CORK

Increasingly seen as a viable building material beyond its traditional use as insulation, cork was used, for example, in the Recyclable Cork House by Matthew Barnett Howland (opposite page), which is built from cork blocks and was short-listed for a Stirling Prize in 2019. To extract cork from cork trees, only the bark—the outer layer, which grows back—is needed; there is no need to fell an entire tree to harvest the material.

CROSS-LAMINATED TIMBER (CLT)

This type of engineered timber has been hailed by some as “the new concrete.” It is made by gluing panels of wood together, one set at right angles to the next, resulting in an ultra-strong material. It is lightweight, durable, and cost-effective when compared to building with steel and concrete.

The relatively new engineered timber was developed in the early 1990s, and, 30 years later, is catching on in earnest. Architects like Oslore (profiled on page 146) work extensively with the nascent material, exploring its new possibilities.

↑ Recyclable Cork House, designed by Matthew Barnett Howland, is a contemporary example of cork architecture. Cork is fast growing and its extraction doesn't require felling the tree. ↗ An example of classic chalet architecture, historically found throughout the European Alps.



Seeing the Forest for the Trees

It can take a lot of trees to build with wood. While timber is celebrated for its potential as a sustainable building material, this is only the case if we know where the wood is coming from.



Increasing interest in sustainable design has seen wood emerge as a coveted resource. Carbon sequestering, naturally abundant, and regenerative, it has become the go-to material for climate-conscious architects. But as forests shrink and our environmental concerns grow, how can we ensure the wood with which we build is truly sustainable?

Forests are essential to a healthy planet. Complex and biologically diverse, they produce oxygen, purify water, stabilize and regulate weather and microclimates, reduce the risk of flooding and drought, and prevent soil erosion. As trees grow, they absorb and store CO₂—emissions of which drive global heating—converting the greenhouse gas into biomass through photosynthesis. This process makes forests carbon sinks—vast natural reservoirs that help mitigate the effects of climate change by lowering the concentration of CO₂ in the earth's atmosphere.

To continue to act to our benefit environmentally, socially, and economically, forests need to be managed in a way that allows them to meet the market demand for wood without compromising biodiversity or their long-term impact on atmospheric carbon levels. For architects who wish to work sustainably, appreciating the nature of this balance is key. “Understanding forestry is as important as understanding how to build with wood,” says Michael Green, a Canadian architect working at the forefront of sustainable-timber design. “Wood really only works if you have sourced it in the right way.”

Independent forestry certification systems emerged in the 1990s in response to the increase in deforestation globally. Broadly, these systems provide certification for sustainable timber while addressing illegal logging, environmental degradation, deforestation, and climate change. Today, there exists an abundance of such organizations, but the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is widely considered as having the most stringent accreditation requirements. Founded with the support of bodies like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Greenpeace, the FSC works to protect forests and their biodiversity by establishing frameworks of best practice for forestry.

← As our natural forests shrink, finding sustainable ways to grow and fell wood has never been more imperative.

A Home That Invites Nature Inside

07BEACH

HOUSE IN
KYOTO

KYOTO, JAPAN

This characterful family home is arranged as a singular, largely open-plan space with an indoor tree growing at its center. Located in a quiet residential area, the site's tight dimensions allowed no room for a garden, and windows on the external walls had to be kept to a minimum—instead, light pours in through a series of skylights.

Japanese cypress, or hinoki—a lightweight timber providing good insulation—is the dominant material throughout the home; it is a popular choice for traditional Kyoto houses due to its lemony smell, its beauty, and its functionality.

“The timbers are left in their natural state, allowing the wood’s fragrance to come through,” the architects explain. A staircase leads up from the ground floor to a corridor that wraps its way around the upper level, opening to bedrooms and a tatami room—a traditional Japanese space with a floor covered in tatami mats, and enclosed by a fusuma, or sliding wooden screen. The bathroom, with its full-height glazed partition, is a focal point; residents can bathe in “open air” in the privacy of their home.

→ The bathroom was designed so that residents can bathe openly in the privacy of their home, next to the indoor tree. ↓ The home features a tatami room on the upper floor, a traditional Japanese space with a sliding wooden screen for sleeping. →→ The clients preferred an open plan where they would be able to keep an eye on their three children.





BRANCH STUDIO ARCHITECTS

This Melbourne practice retains a close connection with the local materials available at hand, while infusing Australian architecture with a new international perspective.





INNAUER-MATT ARCHITEKTEN

Two seemingly simple steps have kick-started this young Austrian practice: understand the local forests, and know the people who manage them.





← Interior surfaces are clad in pinewood and either painted white, stained gray, or treated with a transparent oil wax. ↑ The house was designed for the architect's mother, a librarian, so ample bookshelves were created.

Slow Living in New England

STUDIO RICK JOY

BAYHOUSE

NEW ENGLAND,
UNITED STATES

On the East Coast of America, stately waterfront homes have shaped New England's unequivocal sense of place. Visitors may find themselves gawking at houses, and no wonder—the architecture in this region is exceptionally

varied. For this grand American home, a colossal roof with an irregular pitch creates high wooden ceilings inside, and carves a distinguished appearance from the stunning natural landscape. Here, the contemporary and traditional are in unity: the angular house takes visual cues from the historical architecture of the region, while also inventing its own aesthetic.

There's much design diversity on display: from the subdued exterior, with its slate roof tiles and granite slabs punctuated by recessed windows, to the warm interior—Douglas fir boards line the ceilings and seem to stretch on for meters. The rich tone of wood is continued in the chairs, table, flooring, and cabinetry, with complementary seating upholstered in creamy hues.

→ Perched at the water's edge, this American home features expansively high wooden ceilings. ↓ Dramatic lighting at night creates an ambient atmosphere amidst the tranquil natural landscape.



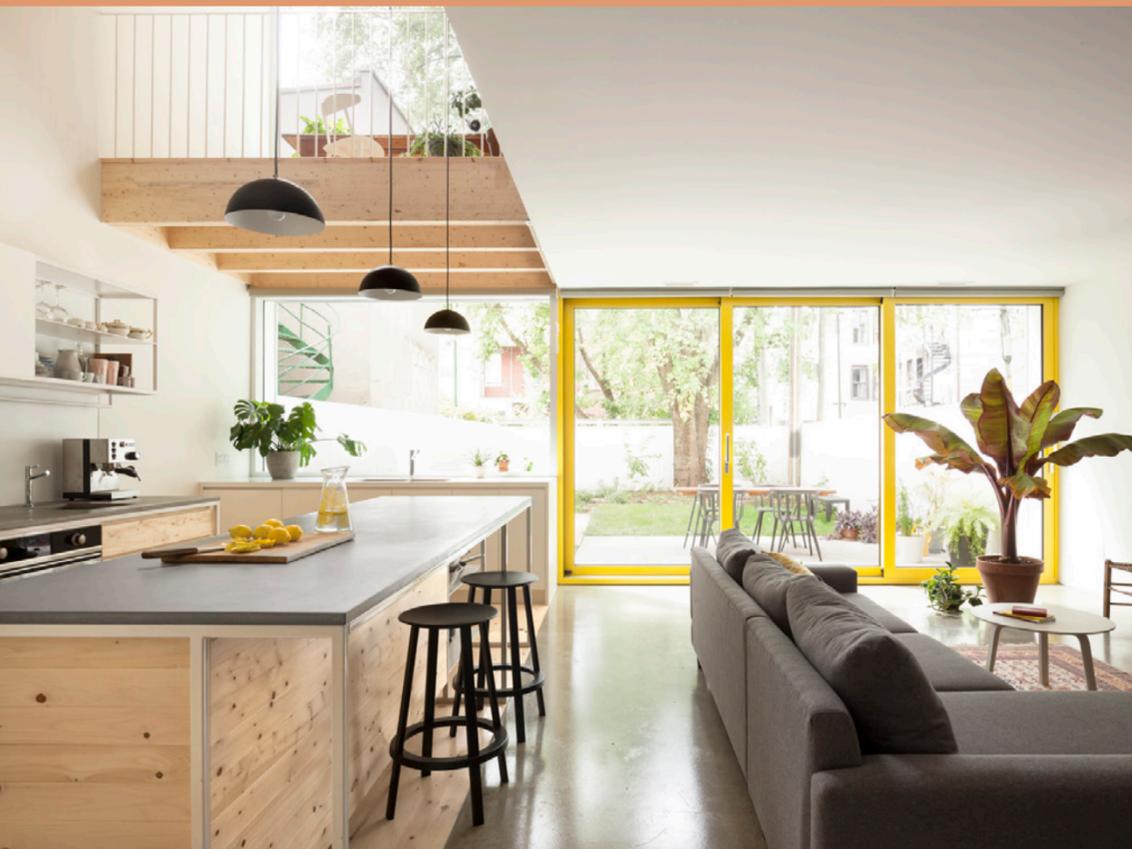




← Wood and glass are used extensively throughout the home. A large kitchen-island bench with skylights above provides a light-filled space for entertaining. ↑↑ Lake views can be enjoyed from the freestanding bath tub. Floors and windows are painted dark in contrast to the wooden bathroom. ↑ A charcoal-colored fireplace keeps residents warm in winter. Most areas of the house contain glass walls that provide views of the scenery.

LA SHED ARCHITECTURE

In abundantly forested Canada, working with timber has a long history. This Montreal-based practice is upholding that tradition, one wooden house at a time.





↑ James Barber's conceptual project embraces biophilic design by utilising natural materials and opening to expansive views of Norway's Lyngen Alps. → Comprising three levels, each delineated by a contrasting material, the Vertical Bath would include a shower, sauna and cold water pool.



ALEXIS DORNIER

From Berlin to Bali, this German designer reset his practice alongside local craftspeople amid the Indonesian jungle.



← Composed of prefabricated A-frame modules made from CLT, Farmhouse is a concept for a new kind of inner-city living developed by Fei and Chris Precht. ↑ The prototype addresses the industries of building and agriculture—the two largest polluters—and offers the start of a solution: build up instead of out, use carbon sequestering materials, and practice self sufficiency.



↑ The subdued interior provides an ideal beachfront experience regardless of the season. → The aim was to create a comfortable home with pleasing lines and modest materials that reflect its connection to the surrounding landscape.