

# IS WOOD GREEN?

Those warm shimmering hues... Oh! how I love the beauty of wood! As I feed this addiction – am I contributing to deforestation, environmental degradation and global warming? Am I evil because I love wood so much? Should you be asking “So, Catherine, when are you going to stop demolishing the tropical rainforests of the world because you like how they look cut and sanded with a nice clear coat over the top?”

Wood can be sustainable, and it has a very low embodied energy, but buying wood indiscriminately can do a lot of damage to the environment. More than anything else in this house, wood was destined to be my worst temptation towards ethical downfall (and it isn't too fun to admit a lapse). We wanted a lot of beautiful wood, and weren't sure this could be done without serious compromise of principals. So did we manage to put so much wood in the house in an environmentally sustainable manner?

Well... yes, and no. We tried, but maybe not hard enough.



First the good news. FSC certified wood is available, and that is the majority of wood that we used in building the house. The FSC, aka [The Forest Stewardship Council](#) is an independent non-governmental certifying body that evaluates and certifies the sustainability of wood products. Wood grown sustainably is just that – a sustainable resource that is being farmed rather than “mined”, does not include irreplaceable old growth trees, and it works with local

growers all around the world to create not only a sound environmental practice, but strong economic base in wood growing areas.



The FSC certified white cedar in the soffit

What's not to love? The FSC is the most credible certification system (alternatives like the timber industry-backed Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) are around, but they lack a certain independence that seems necessary). FSC wood usually costs more because it has "Chain of Custody" certification in which the wood is in the custody, from harvest through the saw mill, of certified FSC companies who agree to certain standards, and are regularly audited for compliance. There are some critics of the FSC system saying that it is too lax in its oversight of some logging operations, and that there is corruption in some areas where loggers can bribe the certifiers, but overall, despite the lapses, it seems to me that when problems are discovered and pointed out to them, they de-certify violators, and the pressure that FSC certification is bringing to bear on the timber industry around the world is a strong positive force. We specified that all of our framing lumber, soffit wood, plywood and engineered lumber in the house be FSC certified. Likewise, Kolbe, our window and sliding door manufacturer could provide FSC certified wood for the frames.

But not all woods are available with FSC certification, so we deviated from purity.



Reclaimed Walnut flooring

Our best deviation is using wood which is “salvaged” from old timbers from deconstructed barns, or “reclaimed” from agricultural fruit and nut trees when they are cut down for replanting orchards. Using wood from these sources is an excellent way to get beautiful wood without contributing to deforestation. Reclaimed wood is not eligible for FSC certification as there is no logging portion, but as it is not contributing to environmental degradation, it seems just as good and just as “green”. We decided to put in reclaimed walnut flooring in the upstairs rooms and walnut stair treads from [Restoration timber](#) which is an excellent resource for reclaimed wood.



Someone else's cabinets made out of lyptus



The front door in Honduran mahogany

A little bit more of a grey area is the kitchen cabinets which are “lyptus” – a brand-name for a particular type of eucalyptus wood grown and supplied by a company called [Fibria](#). Lyptus is a fast growing, plantation grown tree which has PEFC certification of sustainability (which seems great until you realize that PEFC is that industry certification system, so maybe not the *best* choice, but after some belated research, it really does seem like a relatively sustainable wood).

The choice I made that I am the most conflicted about is the Honduran Mahogany doors we had made. That’s right: *Honduran Mahogany*. When I first started looking into wooden doors for the house, I looked at many different species of wood, and stumbled upon a great company on line with beautiful door designs: [Mahogany Doors Honduras](#).



The wine cellar door

I entered into a lengthy email exchange with Gary, the owner in Honduras, about the sustainability of the wood, the process by which they obtained their logs, kiln dried them themselves, fabricated the doors, and then exported them (I'm sure he thinks I'm crazy). He assured me they exported with CITES certification because they handled everything from the logs to export of the doors. Great! everything was grand, I ordered the doors, excellent price, great communication, (a bit of delay) , but they finally came and they are BEAUTIFUL – really really beautiful.

But I had probably stopped my research a bit early (once I had the answer I wanted, I will admit, I didn't look any further). In my research for the blog entry, I dug a little deeper, and I probably would have been happier not knowing. CITES is an extremely shortened acronym for "Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora". Yeah, *endangered* species. My doors may be certified, but the wood is still an endangered species. Best spin: the CITES certification process provides a sustainable local industry to an area that wouldn't otherwise have a legitimate local economy and might need to resort to poaching and destroy the trees anyway. More realistic: those trees probably shouldn't have been cut down, no matter what the certificate says...

Source : <http://www.301monroe.com/?p=595>