



# Real-World Environmentalism

**T**here's a surprising battle cry rising from a new breed of environmentalists: Use more wood.

Yes, you read that correctly. They want you to specify more, not less, building products made from trees.

The man leading the charge is none other than Patrick Moore, Ph.D., former director of Greenpeace International and author of *Green Spirit – Trees are the Answer*.

"Wood is the most renewable, environmentally friendly building material we have," explains Moore. "But architects and designers have been guilted out of specifying it by eco-political groups who play on their love of trees. Concrete, steel and plastics are much more environmentally damaging; but they don't have the same emotional appeal."

After spending more than 30 years at the forefront of the international environmental movement, Moore knows plenty about leveraging public sentiment. As a founding member of Greenpeace, he led campaigns to save the whales, protest nuclear warships and end ura-

nium mining and toxic waste dumping, among many others. He's been arrested while protecting baby seals, testified before Congress and traveled the world on numerous activist expeditions.

"One of our main objectives was to raise mass awareness of environmental issues, and I feel we accomplished that. I got tired of fighting against everything and wanted to be for something," he notes, explaining his departure from Greenpeace.

## **PLANT MORE TREES**

These days, Moore devotes his energies to building a "sustainable future." His consultancy group, Greenspirit, favors collaboration and consensus over media-centric opposition efforts.

Make no mistake: He still has plenty of fire in his belly. He squeezed in this interview before heading to Brazil to "rile up" local soybean farmers about bans on seeds that reduce soil erosion and fertilizer use.

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*Growing up on lush Vancouver Island provided ecologist Patrick Moore, Ph.D., with a deep appreciation for trees. This large Sitka spruce supports rich biodiversity while growing back after logging roughly 100 years ago.*

Moore's main focus, however, is on reconciling environmental goals with real-world constraints. Within the building sector, he readily recognizes that cost, performance and aesthetics are primary criteria for material selection. He strives, however, to add "environmental impact" to the list.

"I'm not saying it's bad to use concrete, steel and stone," he qualifies. "But they are non-renewable, so they should be used only when wood won't work."

This philosophy runs directly counter to the Sierra Club's "zero cut" policy and other popular sentiment about reducing wood consumption.

"These programs have nothing to do with science and ecology," he explains flatly. "They sound great; but every day, 6 billion people wake up needing shelter and fuel. If they don't use wood — a highly renewable resource — they'll have to use other non-renewable resources that have far costlier effects on the environment, including carbon dioxide emissions. The better, more realistic answer is to grow more trees and use more wood."

#### **GREEN WOOD**

Composite panel products such as medium density fiberboard (MDF), particleboard and hardboard rank high on Moore's list of green products. "They not only come from a renewable resource," he notes, "but they

also make beneficial, value-added use of wood chips and sawdust that would otherwise be waste or used for a lesser purpose."

Moore encourages architects and designers not only to consider the raw materials in the products they specify, but to consider the energy required to produce them as well.

"When manufacturers burn sawdust to produce the energy required to make engineered wood, they can have an almost 100 percent renewable system," he explains. "In contrast, it takes massive amounts of energy to move stone from mines to construction sites."

Moore's "plant more trees; use more wood" strategy places him at odds with provisions of the U.S. Green Building Council — specifically those about rapidly renewable resources.

"The word 'rapidly' was added to exclude the construction lumber industry," he explains. "In reality, their longer growing cycles help promote native biodiversity. Providing incentives for using bamboo flooring, wheat grass cabinetry and board made from sunflower seeds is a perfect example of political correctness gone crazy. They're made from short-rotation crops that don't support as much biodiversity as trees. It's a classic case of good intentions ending up in a perverse outcome."

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#### **IT'S NOT DIFFICULT BEING GREEN**

*For more details about Patrick Moore's philosophies on forestry and many other environmental topics, visit [www.greenspirit.com](http://www.greenspirit.com).*

*He also recommends [www.beconstructive.com](http://www.beconstructive.com) for its source list of green building products and [www.forestinformation.com](http://www.forestinformation.com) for links to other environmental sources. The Wood Promotion Network sponsors both sites. The Canadian Wood Council ([www.CWC.ca](http://www.CWC.ca)) provides building plans for basements and foundations that substitute wood and insulation for concrete.*