As “rediscovered” wood, Triton products are certified by the Rainforest Alliance’s finished furniture, will satisfy the requirements of even the most rigorous eco-conscious environment.” Godsall said. “They want to know that what they’re buying is not destroying the environment.”

“There are a lot of people out there who want to feel good about what they own,” Godsall said. “They want to know that what they’re buying is not destroying the environment.”

Godsall hopes that Triton’s products, which include basic lumber, wood paneling and finished furniture, will satisfy the requirements of even the most rigorous eco-conscious shoppers.

As “rediscovered” wood, Triton products are certified by the Rainforest Alliance’s.
SmartWood program. The Rainforest Alliance, which runs the SmartWood program, employs tough standards to make sure that the wood it certifies has been harvested in an environmentally responsible way.

Triton wood qualifies for this certification for several reasons. Since its wood is already dead, the company is not destroying live forests, which provide a habitat for wildlife and absorb carbon dioxide, a gas that would otherwise contribute to global warming.

"We don't disturb fish habitat," Godsall also points out, because an underwater forest is not a natural marine habitat.

Also, Triton's harvesting has little effect on the surrounding ecosystem since the company uses roads and infrastructure already in place around the reservoirs and the underwater operation makes less noise than aboveground methods.

Since it can be difficult to obtain high-quality old-growth timber without damaging the environment, green builders are welcoming Triton's expansion.

Robert Thiele, a San Diego architect, said he looked at a lot of wood before he custom-ordered Triton's Douglas fir poles. He used them as support for the pavilion roof of a multimillion-dollar house he is building in La Jolla for a client.

"The wood is special because the material has been suspended in time; the grains are very tight," he said. "I'm not sure how to get poles like that out of regular lumberyards."

Although he's had trouble finding the high-grade material he likes, he said that it's getting easier now, as the market for eco-friendly products has exploded in the four years he's been using sustainable design materials.

"It's like the whole trans-fat thing," Thiele said. "People are getting the message that there are benefits to buying this stuff."

Escott Norton, a Los Angeles-based green builder, said that being able to buy Triton wood online will save him a lot of time looking for reclaimed wood products, many of which come from old barns in other regions of the United States.

"Unless you want old railroad ties, it's hard to find locally," Norton said.

Still a niche market

Wood harvested in an environmentally sensitive way usually costs Norton about 10% more than conventionally harvested wood, but he says he uses energy-efficient technology in his projects, which saves money down the line.

Most consumers, however, may not take this long-term viewpoint. Higher costs have historically made homeowners reluctant to buy eco-friendly building products, said BuildingGreen's Wilson.

Triton's products currently cost from 5% to 25% more than noncertified land-logged lumber, but Godsall feels Triton can eventually be price-competitive.

After all, there are an estimated 200 million to 300 million trees under water worldwide, and Godsall said it's just a matter of building enough Sawfish — which cost more than $1 million each — and training enough technicians to access them.

"We will be supplying 250 million board feet within five years, putting us in the top 20 producers in Canada," he said.

So, rather than having a grandmother's tea service as a conversation piece, homeowners may one day be showing off and discussing the provenance of their floors or support beams.

As long as consumers are making eco-friendly choices, environmentalists are happy.

"People might use it so that they can tell their guests at cocktail parties where it came from," Wilson said, "and that's OK."

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Eco-friendly resources

For more information on green building and products:


• BuildingGreen Inc., http://www.buildinggreen.com, is home to the newsletter Environmental Building News and provides information on green building practices and resources.

• Forest Stewardship Council, http://www.fsc.org, identifies and labels products that support responsible forest management worldwide.

• Rainforest Alliance, http://www.ra.org, is an environmental advocacy group that also provides forest-sustainability certification through its SmartWood program.

• Terra Mai, http://www.terramai.com, is a broker for reclaimed wood.

• Build It Green, http://www.builditgreen.org, promotes energy- and resource-efficient buildings in California, connecting consumers and building professionals with tools and technical expertise.

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