

SLOW WOOD®

CRITERIA



Slow Wood® is both a way of production and the resulting material that has resulted from a way of production, that sees and treats trees as living, autonomous beings and forests as living, autonomous systems; that heeds and respects the lives that have ended or been taken; and the representation of the life and death in the material we now enjoy — be it for a sheet of tissue with which we wipe our noses, a simple box in which we bury our dead, the wall of the skyscraper in which we spend our lives, or a Stradivarius with which we play Mozart.

Slow Wood is embedded in, and mindful and thoughtful of, the taking, processing, transforming, using and discarding of wood and wood-derived materials.

Like any consumption of elements of the living world in which we evolved, trees — and the resulting wood — exist in a fluid spectrum of situation. The needs of predator organisms are varied. Life within any ecological system is informed by guidelines, rather than explicit, unequivocal rules. For humans, guidelines are discovered, learned and reminded through understanding, trial-and-error and experience, and taught through culture and heredity. This is as true for us as it is for squirrels and bacteria.

Just as with cultural guidelines, which differ across the spectrum of human cultures around the world, ecological guidelines vary from place to place and depend on the geographic location, the ecosystem type and history, and even the season. A behavior or activity that will work in one situation might never work — or even lead to a catastrophic extinction cascade — in another. And, especially given the current and increasing stresses on ecosystems, what might have been sustainable in a place 20 years ago might not be sustainable today.

Given the current ecological emergency, it is now necessary to assess nearly every action taken by nearly every human on Earth. Civilization has constructed a cultural, physical and ontological world where nearly every activity, nearly every ‘tradition’ and convention — and even our thoughts and dreams, if fulfilled — would be detrimental to the long-term viability of humans and most other life on Earth.

For us to survive the avalanche of causata of the machinations of our own culture, we must redesign our existence. We must re-embrace the need to abide the guidelines of living within a

biological, ecological system, accept and commit the time it takes to avoid destructive effects of our actions and consumption, and realign our strategies for living lives of quality today and beyond today. We must live with intent and learn to be mindful of the costs of everything to the future of humans and all life on Earth.

But there is joy to be had all around us, as we embed in greater interaction and greater care... as we go deeper into relationships with materials, the stuff of other Earthlings.

In effect, we must trade-in our ambition of escaping the mud for living embedded in it; replace our otherworldly dreams with direct communion with the Others with whom we share our wondrous and only Earth. Slow Wood is a way to attain this with trees and forests.

Criteria for Slow Wood consider all aspects of the use of wood, from the killing of a tree or trees (and often the resulting disturbance to the forest) to the discarding of the parts of those trees in whatever form or substance into which we have converted them.

With these guidelines in mind, one reality that soon luminesces is that an enormous segment of the uses to which we put wood, and products we make out of it, are simply not, and can never be considered, Slow Wood. A few of these are outlined below. Were we to shift all use of wood to Slow Wood globally, these products or uses would: 1) Cease to be made, in which case we will have to embrace the hard truth that we just can't have those things anymore, if life on Earth is to continue to thrive; 2) would be made in such limited quantity as to be considered most precious and of the highest value, having been made at great cost; 3) would be made from other substances (in some noteworthy cases, those alternative substances are readily available — and should have been utilized long ago).

Thus, museums of the future will perhaps include exhibits of viscose clothing, industrial wood pellets and magazines made from living trees, the production and trade of those things long having disappeared. As well, anything made of wood could become an uncommon item, as living trees — and even dead ones — are seen as much more valuable as harbors of biodiversity and rare organisms, as means of moving carbon from the atmosphere to the earth... and as examples of how to live on Earth.



The following are the main areas considered for the use of wood or wood products:

Taking

Production

Transport

Use

Fuel (Firewood, Biofuel, Charcoal)

Paper

Fabric

End-of-Use

Reuse, Salvage and Reclaim

Landfilling

Incineration

Composting

TRANSPORT OR KILLING



In killing or salvaging single or multiple trees: Minimize the loss of biological diversity, including zero species extinctions and zero loss of High Conservation Value species or individuals; minimize peripheral damage to other trees (preferably to zero); minimize peripheral disturbance from felling or access; choose the tree or trees to be killed based on ecological understanding of the ecosystem or site and always working towards greater biodiversity, resilience and zero loss of rare, uncommon or keystone individuals; fell with acknowledgement and respect of

the life or lives being taken, the lives they lived, the roles they served in the ecosystem and the benefits they conferred upon the rest of the ecological community.



In general, the infringement on and disruption of Earth's ecological systems is the most critical aspect of the use of wood and must be ascertained and considered. Initially, some key questions should be asked:

- How old is the ecosystem that is being disturbed or broken?
- What is the age of the tree or trees being considered for taking? What role has it (or they) played or does it (or they) play in the ecosystem or area?
- How much of this type of ecosystem remains in the area, in the region and in the world?
- Is this ecosystem too rare or critical or fragile to be disturbed — at least for this reason?
- What other beings reside in or require this ecosystem or species — globally or specifically — to thrive?
- What other individuals reside on or use the tree or trees being considered for taking? Are those species rare, critical or is their existence in that place fragile?
- Are there methods available to minimize any disturbance, or will any large disturbance irreparably (beyond a human lifetime) harm the ecosystem?

TRANSPORT



In transporting equipment to the killing or salvaging site(s), moving equipment during killing or salvaging, transporting logs and other tree parts, lumber or any other harvested wood products, manufactured wood products and wood products being discarded or reused: Minimize disturbance to ecosystems, the use of materials (such as petroleum derivatives or other fuels or components of transport equipment) and polluting emissions, including CO₂.

In general, the transportation of stuff around the planet generates greenhouse gases and contributes to road-building in otherwise intact ecosystems. Initially, some key questions should be asked:

- Is the ecosystem further disturbed by or during moving the resulting logs, lumber or wood product, not only from the site of production, but throughout the cycle of modification, conversion or alteration; use; reuse and disposal of the material?
- If so, how can those disturbances be eliminated or minimized (i.e., the distance traveled)? What other materials, including fossil fuels, are used, or ecosystems disturbed, to move the resulting material?

- At what distance from the source to the point of use is it no longer likely that the use of the material retains the awareness and understanding of the impacts on the forest, or the appreciation of the trees and other life form that depend on them?

PROCESSING



In converting trees to wood and wood products, and further-processed products: Honor the loss of living trees during their processing; minimize disturbance to ecosystems, minimize the use of more materials (such as petroleum derivatives or other fuels or components of transport equipment) and eliminate polluting emissions, in the manufacture, transport and use of any equipment used in the processing of logs and wood.

In general, the processing of raw materials into products generates significant quantities of greenhouse gases as well as demands further intrusions of ecosystems from the extraction of more materials, especially steel and other metals, to manufacture the machinery and tools. Initially, some key questions should be asked:

- Is the tree and the death of the tree honored and respected during the actions taken to turn parts of the tree into useful objects?
- Does the human-tree interaction during production tend towards greater understanding of trees and forests and the beings that depend on them?

This component of the chain of consumption is critical. In some cases, production can be assumed to be sustainable (and Slow) depending on how the Taking component. For instance, if one obtains a stump created during the clearing for a road, other than the energy used, it might not be significant if one uses machines to process the wood.

While we would prefer that every human interacting with the wood resulting from the stump have a chance to connect with the tree in a meaningful way, our current reality often necessitates efficiency. As we transition from this often-horrific reality to one where people can enjoy more-direct interaction with the beings and substances they use, the shift will

necessitate some degree of working within the current economic system. One would hope that the transitioning to Slow production can become a broader goal of systemic change, as we embrace the need to honor and respect all components of Earth that we consume.

- Can the equipment employed be obtained from a pre-existing source?
- If new, is the equipment employed as material-efficient and as possible? Can it be made from lower-impact materials?
- Is the equipment employed as energy-efficient and as possible? Can it be run on renewable, low-impact power sources? Are there zero-fuel options?
- Can non-powered hand tools be employed, instead of fossil-fuel-powered tools? This last question can also result in a greater direct interaction with wood — and the subsequent more-in-depth relationship with the tree — that can be further obscured with the use of powered equipment.

USE



In using wood and wood products, and materials derived from wood: Honor the living trees and the forest from which the wood or wood product originated; honor the other life that used or depended on that tree when it was still part of the

forest; honor the crafter or artisan that made the product or otherwise made it possible for you to use it; use only products that have been made adhering to Slow Wood guidelines; only use wood products for durable, long-lasting uses; avoid uses that are ephemeral.

When considering materials, there are no existing material certification schemes of which I am aware that actually consider a particular use of the material off-limits, or precluding certification. Every certification regime of which I'm aware focuses almost entirely on the production-end of material — that is, how it's made and who made it. There are, of course, some programs that are focused on the extreme other end of the equation: the disposal of things. These have to do with toxins that might be present in that thing, or avoiding certain problematic results of methods of disposal. But there seem to be none that consider whether

the use of something must be ‘allowed’ for its production in the first place, much less whether it gets certified.

For Slow Wood, there are many uses that are, in general, out-of-bounds of what can be considered sustainable, in our current collective reality, and therefore whether they can be even considered as Slow Wood™. While one could argue that if a tree is harvested with only minor damage to the forest, or even no damage, that should be the only consideration, and what material results, and the use to which that material is put, is irrelevant. If this were 16,855 B.C., that might be true. And if we were still components of a globe harboring humans made up entirely of foragers, living within Earth-abiding bounds, it might be true. But today, with the overall use of wood fiber being twenty to forty times greater than what’s ecologically sustainable, with many wood-based industries relying on underpaid workers (in some cases even indentured or slave labor), and with myriad alternatives available that are derived from waste, Earth now implores us — and ecological thinking now demands — that we reconsider our use of wood for a multitude of applications and hundreds of thousands of products for which it is currently employed.

Initially, some key questions should be asked:

- Is the use of this material essential?
- Will it bring more balance to Earth, or at least more benefits to life on Earth than the disturbances or destruction caused?
- Is this the most-effective use of this material? That is, will it meet the needs of the most people, while generating the least ecological harm?
- Are there other materials that would be as effective for the considered use, and generate less harm to ecosystems and other life?
- How long will the use being considered last? Is it an ephemeral (disposable) object, or a semi-permanent installation?

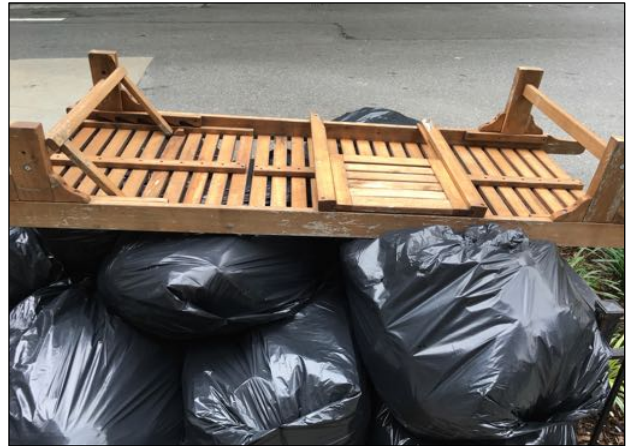
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There are two material categories that are products of wood that currently consume the majority of global wood production: wood fuel and paper. A fourth, viscose fibers, is increasing so rapidly that it will soon rival biofuel (the third) in terms of quantity of wood fiber consumed. Given the levels of demand and the methods of production, there are only rare instances where any of these products could be considered to be Slow Wood. [These wood uses are further explored in posts on slowwood.info.](#)

END-OF-USE



In disposing of wood and wood products, and materials derived from wood: find an additional use for the wood or wood product to extend the useful life of the product; compost the wood**; store the wood. Avoid burning the secondary material unless it is directly supplanting the burning of fossil fuels; avoid landfilling the material.*

A major component of material use that must be factored into any consideration of sustainability is what happens at the end of the useful life of that material. So-called 'waste' has become a major issue in the world, as the vast majority of the materials Civilization has created have either 'leaked' into the surrounding environment ('pollution'), been discarded into massive pits-become mountains, or been burned, sending a litany of toxic or harmful gases and particulates into the atmosphere and eventually raining them down onto ecosystems and unsuspecting communities of people.

As well, depending on the method or methods of disposal of wood, its final demise can either help mitigate the damage that was done to procure, process and transform it, or it can add insult to injury, exacerbating the litany of harms caused.

Thus, with Slow Wood, the material's end-of-life is considered and taken into account throughout its production and use. This should and will dictate considering, and eventually dealing with, any elements that are going to be, or have been, attached or applied to the wood. Those elements, be they nails, screws or finishes, should either be removable, reusable or biodegradable and, when one is ready to dispose of the wood, should be removed (unless they are completely biodegradable and non-toxic).

As with all materials, the best way to 'get rid of' it is to make sure it gets used again, remaining in the circle of useful life, as well as offsetting the current reality of assured extraction of new materials. For wood, an added benefit is that whatever percentage of original carbon that was lost during the felling of the tree and the subsequent degradation of the forest, will be retained in the product. For an individual wood product, that amount will be minimal, percentage-wise. But, as with any product's individual use, it adds up, when more people act.

Unfortunately, for wood used in buildings, the vast majority of building demolition currently results in the landfilling or incineration of all the wood that was employed within the building. This is a significant additional carbon or methane burden.

Ending the mass demolition of buildings is therefore critical to 'decarbonizing' the forest economy. Buildings should be carefully deconstructed, employing skilled people. This must and will be one of the most important job-creation opportunities of the 'green economy'. The costs of this should be incentivized by governments, but also must be incorporated into the full cost-accounting of the construction of all buildings. A deposit should be set aside and retained by a carbon-credit bank (see the following paragraph), and can be returned to the developer, builder and construction contractor(s) upon the successful and certified deconstruction (dismantling) of the building. Added incentives for repayment of the full deposit can assure that the deposit repayment doesn't create an incentive to demolish the building before the full pre-emitted (embodied) carbon is re-sequestered by forest growth ('early' demolitions will pay out only a percentage of the deposit and additional credits can be deposited, ensuing upon the building remaining in operation — and the forests restored with the carbon bank remaining healthy — beyond the full EC-re-sequestration date).

Deposits in the Carbon Bank can be put to work to restore forests (not just to plant trees, which isn't the same thing). Added deposits can be obtained from taxes for any number of carbon-negative activities, such as new extraction, clearing of trees for new construction, and taxes on new material sales, transportation of products, etc.