



There are actually more trees growing in North America today than 100 years ago.



As a building material, wood is the construction industry's most important renewable resource.

Back to nature

Wood framing still a smart choice

BY LISA SCONTRAS
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Silk flowers, cubic zirconia, plastic surgery, synthetic fabrics, composite materials, genetic-engineered everything ... whatever happened to the good old-fashioned real thing? Things like earth, fire, water and air? Home-made soup? Butter? What happened to the days when a dollar was worth a dollar and memory was something you had plenty of and not something that was abracadabra'ed onto chips from the Silicon Valley?

You may not think it, but there is a growing ground swell of folks who are returning to their non-synthetic roots and surrounding themselves with nature's exceptional beauty.

Natural stone comes in gorgeous granites and luscious limestones, and wood is being used in a whole assortment of new applications including countertops and sinks.

"Exotic woods have really become popular," says Janet Scheffer, spokesperson for the Hawaii Lumber Products Association. "There's just something about natural wood that adds warmth

and character to a home. It's a stability and architectural quality that you just don't get with other materials."

And despite the fact that, according to the Hawaii Pacific Steel Framing Alliance, approximately 62 percent of new-home construction on Oahu used steel framing last year, wood framing is still preferred by a growing number of consumers for its natural environmental qualities.

A recent study released by the Consortium on Renewable Industrial Materials — a non-profit corporation made up of 15 research universities — showed the results of an extensive study of building materials and sited wood as being the material requiring the lowest energy consumption and having the lowest environmental impact as well as being the industry's only renewable resource.

"Lumber is a renewable resource," says Terry Inglett, president of Honsador — the largest importer of wood in the state. "Forests are grown by nature, the sun and the rain."

The quest to save a tree has

been successful as well, according to the HPLA statistics. "There are actually more trees growing today in North America than there were 100 years ago," claims Scheffer. Tree farms are replacing our natural forests to harvest lumber these days. "The industry got smart and now plant trees as if they were a crop."

Even termites are a problem of the past, according to Scheffer.

"Building codes require the use of properly treated wood," she says. "Houses are not falling down due to termites anymore. If someone is having problems, most likely it means that someone built it not according to code. Nearly all termite damage in Hawaii is to untreated wood."

On a pure note, some experts say that using materials in their natural form brings a sense of honesty to the design. Even the unaltered colors of wood, stone, brick and tile give a grounded, earthy overall feel. And while many imitations are everywhere providing choices for consumers at different price points, no one is better than Mother Nature at creating beauty.