

(re)source

sustainable resources

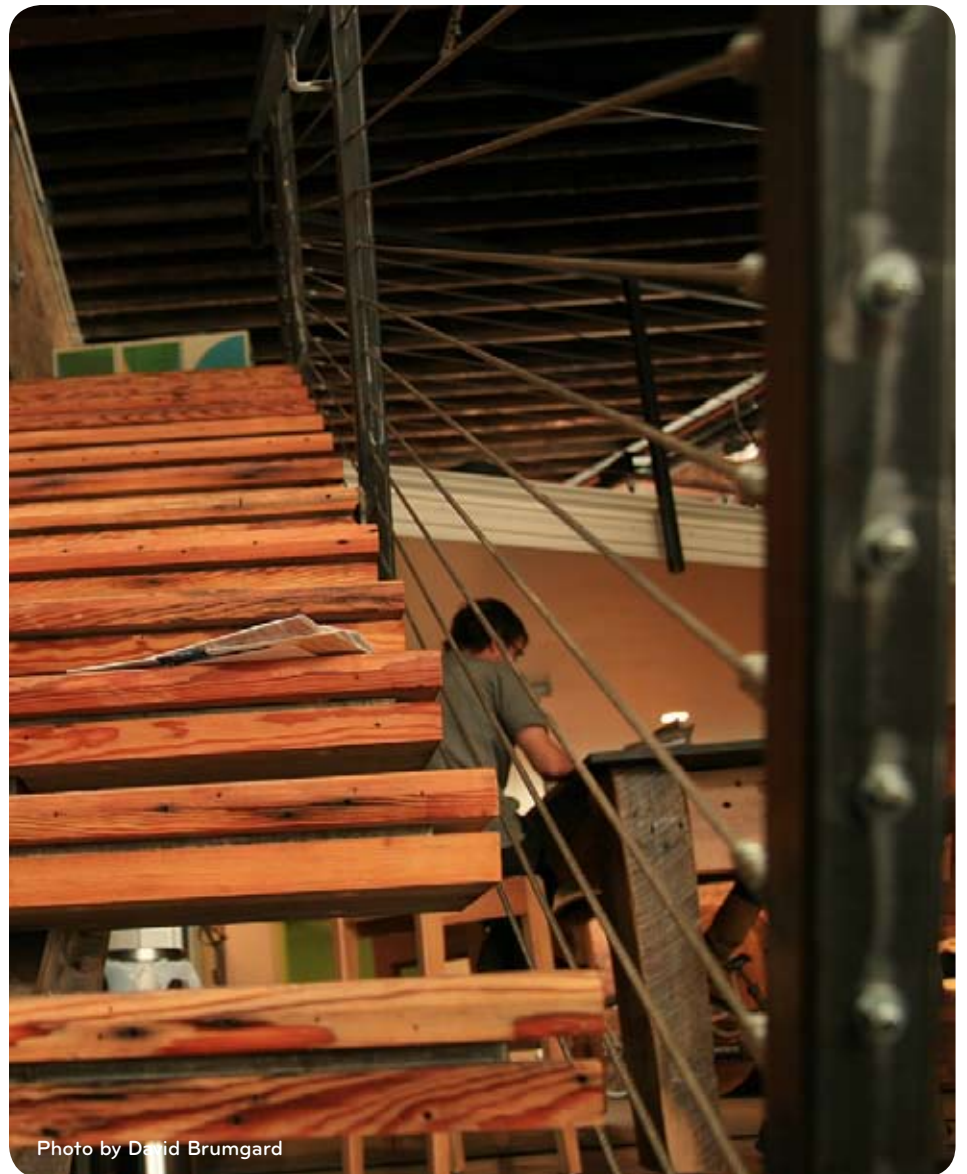


Photo by David Brumgard

sustainable resources

A Whole Systems Approach means re-thinking the construction process from material selection to finish carpentry. Unfortunately, product labels are no help for choosing green products and materials. So before we think about purchasing products and materials for their greenness, we ask some questions. Here are 5 easy questions to ask when choosing green products and materials.

Where and how is it manufactured?

It's not green if the methods for producing and distributing it have a negative effect on our environment. A manufacturing process that results in little or no material waste is always preferable. Some products are made using less energy and fewer mined materials. And if possible, buy local. Choosing locally manufactured and sourced products helps reduce CO₂ emissions because less energy is needed for transportation.



Photo by Christian Rushing, designer and developer

Is it rapidly renewable?

Choose resources that regenerate themselves rapidly and without our help. And without us meddling with local eco-systems. Cork, bamboo, and wool are common examples of rapidly renewable resources. In each case, the harvest rotation is 10 years or less—meaning that supply trumps demand. Though some resources travel quite a distance to get here, those miles are worth protecting natural habitats, reducing the over-production of new materials, and preventing landfill waste.

What is its life-span?

Some green products are neither locally manufactured nor rapidly renewable. Like Siberian Larch or Zappone Aluminum. Well, these products are still considered green by industry professionals and green rating systems. Why? Because a product's longevity contributes to solving numerous environmental problems. Extremely long lasting materials help reduce landfill waste and decrease the unnecessary production of new materials. And in many cases, these products are made with recycled content and are 100% recyclable as well.

Is it recycled? Recyclable?

Recycling feels good—whether it's a glass bottle or an entire house, knowing that we've been able to redirect a material's seemingly inevitable path to eternal landfill stagnation...well, it just feels good. And choosing green products can feel good too. Roofing, siding and decking materials are among the most commonly recycled/recyclable products available. Fiber cement siding is often comprised of fly ash, a byproduct of electric generating facilities; aluminum and copper siding/roofing are often made with recycled content and are recyclable as well; and composite decking also contains recycled content.

Is it breathable?

If it smells like it's killing brain cells, and if it feels like it's killing brain cells, then you should probably err on the green side. VOCs or Volatile Organic Compounds are commonly found in paints, caulks, and adhesives. The problem is that these compounds emit unhealthy gasses into the air, and concentrations of many VOCs are up to ten times higher indoors than outdoors. The best way to find out how to avoid VOCs is checking out the EPA's website.