

TimberTrader

news

SPECIAL!
Decking Feature



Selling decks

Decking drivers

Advising customers on a great deck involves multiple factors, but there’s an ideal timber product solution for every location.

Talk with most timber suppliers and you’ll hear a lot about house building: it’s usually the backbone of business, after all. But the sales opportunities to be gained by stepping outside the front or back door are often under-appreciated.

Decks (and their design cousins patios and boardwalks) are integral parts of Australian house design and represent a significant spend for many people. Whether installed DIY or handed over to a builder or landscaper, many represent thousands of dollars worth of timber, and it’s important to make sure your customers are buying the right product for the end use.

Successful suppliers take the time to talk customers through the range of options available to them, and make sure those attempting DIY have a clear understanding of the issues. Not only does this mean they’ll be happier with the project results, it helps to maintain trust in timber product, which means repeat business for timber the next time a similar project comes around.

If you find you’re not supplying much in the way of decking, despite stocking suitable timbers, take the time to reach out to local landscapers and create relationships, just as with builders. While there’ll never be as much timber in a deck as in a house,

people don’t rebuild their houses every few years to reflect changing fashions in outdoor living. All those reworkings add up nicely!

BOXES TO CHECK

Experienced landscapers usually know the product they’re specifying, but a lot of deck builders aren’t working from such a position of expertise. Accordingly, make sure customers address the following issues when making product choices.

Site In full sun, a deck will be subject to strong UV for most of the year. If the deck colour is to be maintained, this requires more a rigorous maintenance schedule, more resilient timbers or both.

Damp sites are more of a concern, as water is a major contributor to both rot and insect infestation. Building the substructure out of timbers with a higher durability/hazard class rating, or using a steel substructure may be indicated, along with consulting an engineer about minimum ground clearance (generally 400mm) and ventilation.

Fire risk BAL ratings for decking are determined by a combination of the site and appropriate legislation in each state. While the Australian Standard specifies a minimum of BAL-19, some states have additional requirements from other regulatory bodies. For example, the NSW RFS requires a minimum BAL-29 rating for compliance. Enclosing the subfloor space in bushfire prone areas reduces the chances of ember attack, which may lower the BAL ratings required for posts, bearers and joists.

Budget As with every project, customers should start with an achievable budget. There are a number of material options, including preserved timbers, that can deliver a quality deck at a lower cost, though there are trade-offs in appearance or upkeep needs for some.

One possibility when the budget isn’t stretching as far as hoped is to break a

If you find you’re not supplying much in the way of decking, take the time to reach out to local landscapers and create relationships.



Above: Getting the substructure right is an important part of a deck’s success.



Clockwise from top: Dasso fused-bamboo decking has great stability; sustainably sourced pencil-round spotted gum with a hand-brushed finish from Kennedy’s Timbers creates a memorable outdoor living space; Ecowood Decking proves that preserved timbers can look every bit as good as costlier hardwoods; Boral blackbutt at the Portsea Surf Life Saving Club.

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY WOODHOUSE TIMBER COMPANY AND DASSO GROUP; COURTESY KENNEDY’S TIMBERS; COURTESY LONZA WOOD PROTECTION; COURTESY BORAL TIMBERS

PHOTO: TYLER OLSON/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



project into two stages. For example, one large entertaining space can become a smaller outdoor dining area with the BBQ kept down on the lawn for now, and then extended for an outdoor kitchen in a few years when there's more money available.

Caution against economies in fixings, as these are a vital part of a deck's strength. If the wrong materials are used with treated timbers, for example, they can cause discolouration or damage where the fasteners meet the boards.

Aesthetics With literally dozens of decking profiles on the market, plus different natural timber colours, an extensive range of stains and coatings, and almost limitless cutting and laying patterns, it's all but impossible to offer customers every available choice. While some clients will have their own lookbooks torn from magazines or saved from Insta and Pinterest, others will need more help deciding what they like.

Working with trade customers to compile a series of images of decks built from your timbers is definitely worth the effort in helping to guide the decision-making process. If you have a social-savvy staff member happy to update an Instagram feed attached to your web page, great! But a physical flipbook or even photos saved to a tablet can do the job just as well.

Upkeep Timber will weather when exposed to sun and rain, even in protected locations. It's generally advised to inspect decking

annually, with most requiring re-oiling or sealing every year. Harsh conditions can decrease this interval to six-monthly, but some material choices and care products can extend it. If a customer is not a keen oiler, guide them towards options with high durability and remind them the colour will change as the UV ages the surface.

Safety Slips are one of the most common accidents on decks, especially for young or elderly family members. Rough-sawn timbers provide the best slip resistance, but this resistance can be lowered (or improved) by some coatings.

A lot of risk can be designed down by paying attention to details, such as adding a slight slope to avoid water pooling and mould forming, and size, alignment and texture of the boards. For example, aligning boards cross-wise to the main traffic directions will increase the slip resistance naturally. For full details, download Slip Resistance and Wood Pedestrian Surfaces from WoodSolutions (www.woodsolutions.com.au/publications/slip-resistance-and-wood-pedestrian-surfaces). It contains a wide range of research that is useful in domestic situations and invaluable for public builds.

TIMBER CHOICES

Durability is the major criterion for decking timbers. Whether that is a natural characteristic of the timber or a consequence of preservation treatments, decking timbers should have H3 or higher

qualities for the framing and boards, and H4 or higher, depending on location, for posts. Mixing a durable substructure with visually appealing boards can help manage a constrained budget, as well as provide the best of both worlds when it comes to site suitability and appearance.

There are multiple timber choices readily available, the following are some of the most popular in Australian uses.

Preserved timbers A wide range of preservation processes are used to enhance the performance of low-natural durability timbers (mostly softwoods, especially pine, and regrowth hardwoods) so that they resemble denser hardwoods.

Preserved timbers are more affordable than hardwoods, and much easier to cut and fix. While some preservation treatments turn timber green and require staining or painting, others, such as Tanalith E Wood Preservative, swiftly weather to an attractive warm brown colour and then age to silver grey over the long term if not coated.

Options such as Ecowood Timber Products (preserved with Tanalith E Wood Preservative) are suitable for H3 to H5 applications and safe for close contact with children and animals, including use in garden beds and play equipment. This process uses copper and azoles as preservatives to provide long-term protection against insect and rot damage without toxicity, additional water repellents can be added during the preservation process to increase its lifespan.

Galvanised fixtures and fittings can be used with Ecowood Timber Products, unlike some other popular preservation treatments; ACQ requires hot-dipped galvanised, copper or stainless steel fixtures and fittings, and MCA requires aluminium.

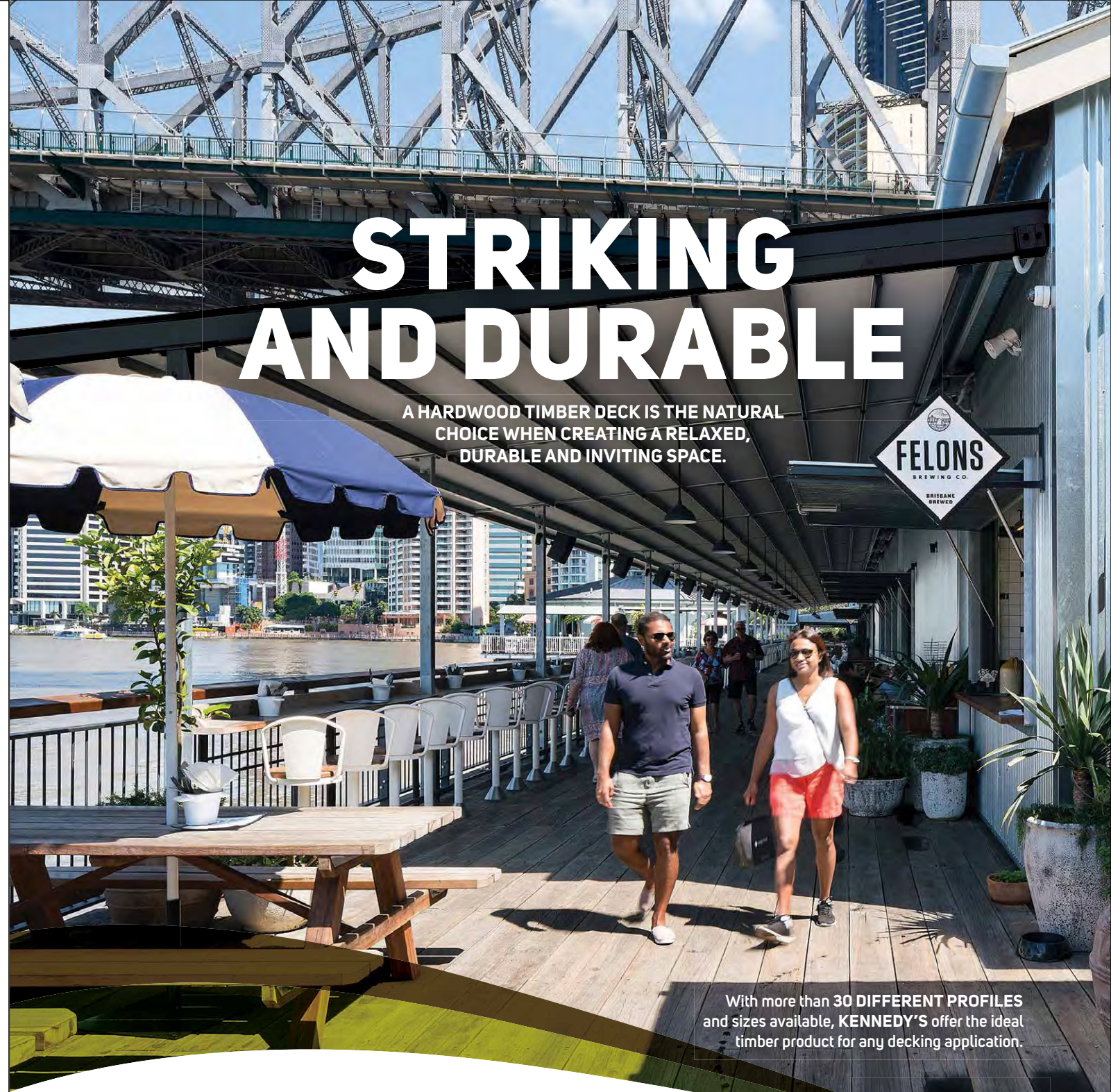
Negatives to using preserved timbers – softwoods in particular – are usually down to perception or using incorrect product: some people feel the timber is less visually appealing, which is a matter of taste. Concerns about warping are usually attributable to using softwoods that have not been preserved to the appropriate hazard class, or boards that are too thin for the purpose. In fire-prone areas, most hardwoods do have higher fire resistance.

Merbau (kwila) Hugely popular for a number of years, this South East Asian native is now also grown in North Queensland. One of the cheaper hardwoods, it ages to an attractive red-brown and has great natural strength and density. The rich colours come from high levels of tannin in the wood, so if your deck is alongside or above other pale materials, this can cause an issue, as they can be stained when tannins leach from the timber. Make sure your supplier can show the

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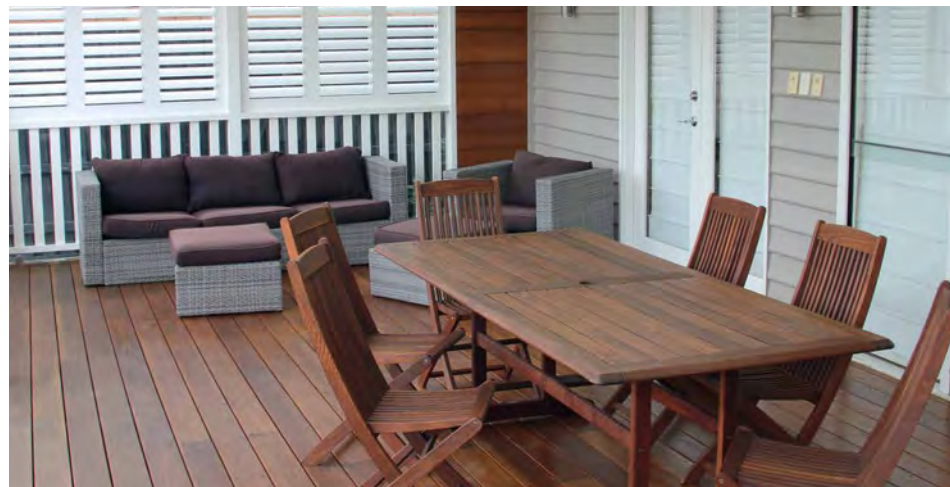
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Durability is the major criterion for decking timbers, whether as a natural characteristic of the timber or a consequence of preservation.



Above: Hardwood deck renewed with Tanacoat premium decking oil from Lonza Wood Protection.

provenance of your merbau, as some imports represent unsustainable logging practices. Look for a reputable certification, such as the Certisource DNA verification used by Simmonds Lumber, to show the timber is grown sustainably, or search for domestic merbau.

Spotted gum Sustainably grown on plantations across Australia, this native hardwood has earned its popularity through its natural durability, highly attractive colour and grain and minimal tannin leaching. It is naturally fire resistant and extremely long lasting. That strength makes installation more difficult, as holes need to be pre-drilled, but that's a one-off job. Its only real downsides are a susceptibility to lyctid borer (treated product such as the ACQ H3 from Simmonds will solve that) and the fact it's at the more expensive end of the spectrum.

For customers with deep pockets who want a deck that will last, it's ideal.

Blackbutt This quick-growing Australian native hardwood has an appealing straight grain and even texture, with natural honey tones that will readily deepen with oiling or staining. Highly durable, it is recommended for fire-prone areas – the tree's name comes from its ability to survive bushfires in the wild. Its high Janka rating means some effort will be required in cutting and fixing, but less than for spotted gum. Blackbutt does not take paint well, but why would you paint it when it takes oil so beautifully?

Recycled timbers Usually high-quality hardwoods, these timbers come with a story to tell, bringing their original provenance into your customer's home. Specialist suppliers such as Kennedy's

Timbers not only supply product in a range of finishes and sizes, but also deliver the timber's background – often an old bridge, wharf or warehouse. Because these timbers have already had one lifetime's use, they arrive stable and ready for decades more reliable action – with varying degrees of 'polish' depending on the finish you want.

Composite timber Made of wood fibre mixed with plastics (some brands feature recycled plastic content), these products have grown in popularity and improved in appearance since they were first released. The pluses for composite products are not needing regular maintenance and a wide range of colour options. Some are also quite resistant to damage and staining, depending on the brand. Negatives are mostly to do with cost and aesthetics: they're more expensive than a lot of timber products and even the best composites aren't 'real' wood, despite being a resourceful use of wood fibre. Marks can be all but impossible to remove for some composite brands. But for customers who see low maintenance as a key driver, they represent many future years with zero days spent oiling.

Modular decking Available in most of the above types of timber and more, modular decking is sold in 'tiles' rather than as boards. Often featuring a custom fixing method, modular decking takes a lot of the effort out of installation: the spaces are already there, directional patterns can be achieved with no fancy cutting, and a huge range of colours, grains and differently rated product is available. It all comes at a cost premium, but this is balanced by labour savings. Additionally, damage to modular decking is easier to repair or conceal. Instead of taking up entire boards, one panel can be unclipped and replaced, or else moved to a less-prominent position. »



Above and left: Blackbutt was chosen for its high durability in this poolside setting. A year later, it has started to grey and will require oiling if the original honey colour is to be maintained.

PHOTOS: COURTESY LONZA WOOD PROTECTION; JULITTA OVERDUK

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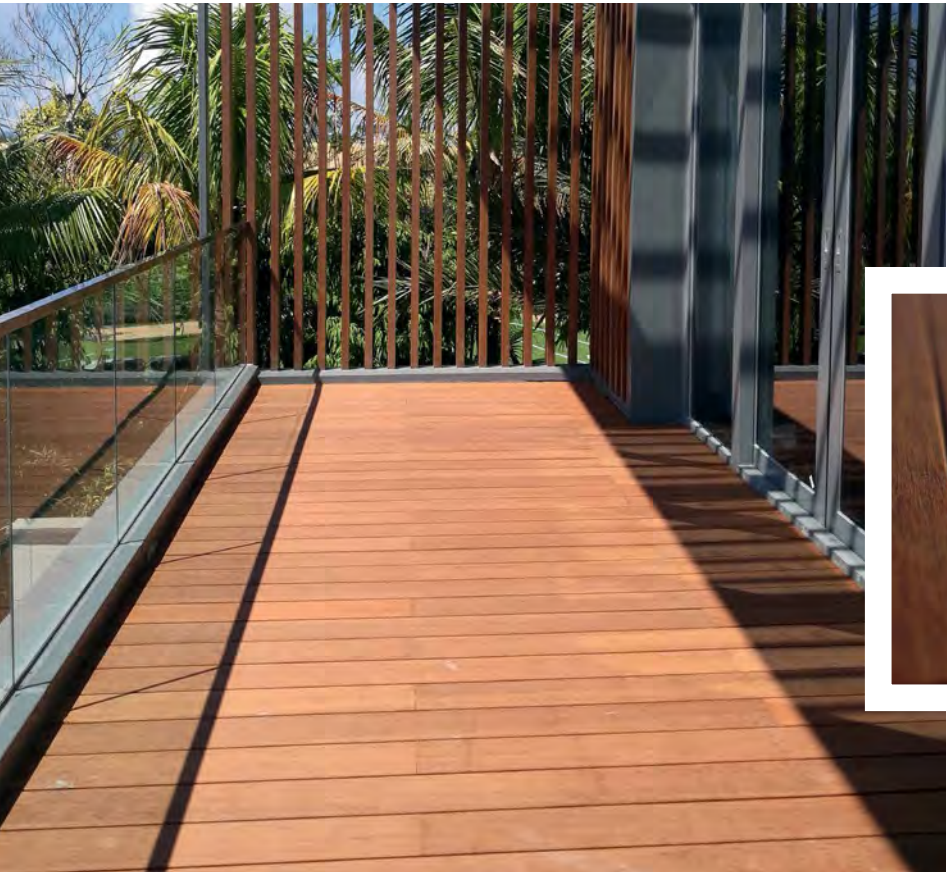


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“One of the key strengths of fused bamboo is its dimensional stability.”



Clockwise from left: Dasso CTECH fused bamboo decking in a rich cognac colour; the XTR colourway is darker espresso; a proprietary hidden fixing system means the boards run seamlessly, allowing for attractive cutting patterns.

BAMBOO TOO

With sustainability a key driving force for many consumers, bamboo has become an increasingly popular ‘timber’ option. Able to be harvested every four to six years, it’s very much a renewable resource and also a reliable carbon store.

As a decking product, leading bamboo producers have looked to create strong and stable boards using a range of processes. Dasso fused bamboo decking, distributed in Australia through Woodhouse Timber Company, is made using a two-stage high heat process. The first stage removes all the

starches and sugars from the bamboo strands, the second further strengthens the bamboo by fusing phenolic resin cells – the resins used to make bowling balls – into its cells. The end product is 87% natural, fused-strand bamboo fibres and 13% resin.

“One of the key strengths, pardon the pun, is that it’s very dimensionally stable,” says David Moody, marketing manager at Woodhouse. “Thanks to the fusion process, the boards are incredibly dense with low moisture retention, so they don’t move. And because there are no nutrients left in the end product, it comes with a 25-year



guarantee against fungi and termite attack. Plus there’s no leaching of colour or preservatives.”

Dasso fused bamboo decking comes in two colourways: dark espresso (XTR) and a more natural cognac colour (CTECH).

“Depending on where it’s located and the amount of UV it gets, the decking does require oiling if you want to maintain the colour,” Moody says. “Like hardwoods, it can be left to grey off as well and some people prefer that aged finish. It’s easy care: every 12 months give it a bit of a clean and, if you want to maintain the colour, re-oil it.”

“Because it hasn’t got much of a raised grain, you don’t have many issues like splinters, plus the product has a hidden fixing system, which means nails or screws don’t protrude – great around swimming pools and anywhere else you have bare feet.”

The proprietary fixing system has been designed for even DIYers to be able to manage and works on top of a traditional bearer and joist substructure, with spacing between planks automatically standardised by the fixings.

“Because the fused bamboo is so resistant to rot, it can be used for structures lower than traditional decks,” says Moody. “Down to 100mm. A lot of people like putting it on top of concrete or courtyards, and you can do that without needing big level changes. It just needs that little bit of airflow underneath.”

Rated at BAL-29 for decking, the boards come in 137mm by 1.85m lengths, with two depths (20mm or 40mm) that can be joined end-to-end with a tongue and groove joint. The sizing minimises waste, and the boards are easily cut for creative laying patterns based on standard 450mm spacings for attachment points on the joists.

Priced between most preserved softwoods and hardwoods, fused bamboo is a natural low-maintenance alternative to composites (with a similar price point), but has an attractive ‘real timber’ appearance that’s closer to narrow hardwood boards, so very worth throwing into the mix. »

PHOTOS: COURTESY WOODHOUSE TIMBER COMPANY AND DASSO GROUP

Get on Deck This Spring

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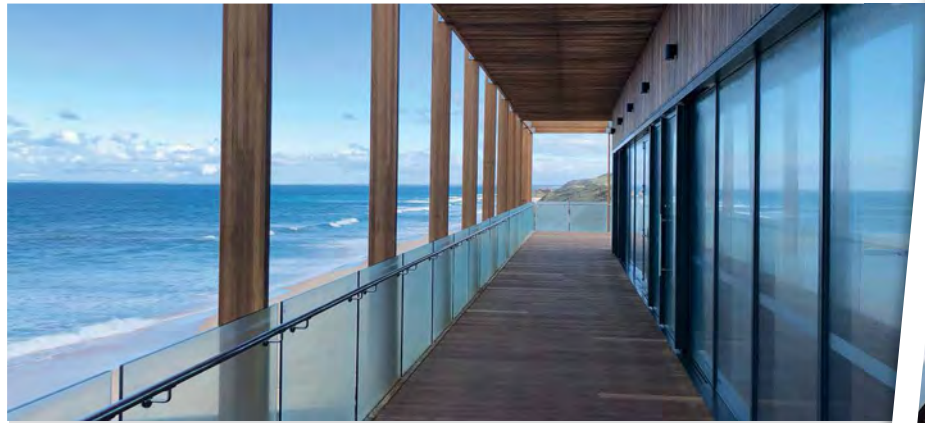
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CASE STUDY: PORTSEA SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB

When the first Portsea Surf Life Saving Clubhouse in Victoria was built in 1960, the construction material came from a packing crate. Now, a \$9 million, two-year dream project requiring a full demolition and rebuild has delivered a once-in-a-generation result in the new, two-storey clubhouse on the beach.

Situated on the end of the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, the clubhouse is located on cliff face of Mt Levy Beach, better known as Portsea Back Beach. The rebuilding project was funded through an extensive fundraising commitment undertaken by the local community, which is heavily invested in the club and the essential service it provides – as well as the camaraderie and skills it teaches through life saving training.

Built by Ireland Brown Constructions, the clubhouse sits in what is arguably one of the most unforgiving environments in Australia. It required a superior timber that could withstand salt, water, wind and extreme weather conditions. The specifications called for commercial-grade blackbutt, renowned for its durability.

Supplied by Bayswater Timber, the featured products are Boral Timbers blackbutt 135x32 decking, which is used for all exterior walkways and blackbutt F27 (KD structural seasoned hardwood).

Battens hand cut from the F27 timber wrap around the entire façade and are repeated in the overhead screening that extends out to the pergola at the rear of the club. The huge uprights and enormous pergola beams are made from laminated blackbutt, a Class 1 durability timber with BAL- 29 rating. To help deal with the rugged seaside conditions, Cutek Extreme Oil was used on all timbers, deepening the blackbutt's natural honey tones.

Major timber seller Bowens worked closely with Boral on the project, managing the supply of decking and beams. Bowens' commercial development manager, Danny Lamb managed the project and was on site weekly. "The location is fantastic. It was always good to come to a site meeting and see the tradies out on their surfboards before they went to work," Lamb said.



"They needed a very large quantity of quality blackbutt, which we were able to deliver from Melbourne to the warehouse in Hastings without any hitches," said Chris Mooney, area manager for Boral. "When they ran out of timber during the project, we were able to deliver more product straight to the site."

The distinctive location wasn't without its challenges: access to the cliff was limited and uneasy. There was only a single, extremely steep ramp leading to the site. Mike Bullocks, site manager from Ireland Brown Constructions, said, "Deliveries to site were tough. We had very limited access down to the beach, so we had to coordinate different-sized trucks just to be able to fit down the road."

While the design is appropriately austere for such a functional building – "It looks like the old bunkers that protected the coastlines in the past," Lamb admitted – the materials and finishes are lush and inviting, and have proved popular since the clubhouse's opening in April.

As Lamb said, "When people see this, they'll be amazed at the textures and colours that natural timber brings to this project."

INSTALLATION ISSUES

While most decking problems arise from a lack of proper upkeep, it's important to make sure your customers are well versed in installation techniques, particularly for DIYers. Meyer Timber has produced an excellent generic Timber Decking info sheet that can be handed on to retail customers and covers all major considerations.

While not every supplier has the media resources to print leaflets, it's worth making a point of the key details and making sure your customers are clear on them. Even

experienced builders and landscapers can be guilty of some infringements, especially not storing boards properly on site.

- Narrower boards allow for better drainage and have less expansion and contraction with moisture changes so are less prone to cupping.
- Reeded profiles are designed to be laid with ribs down to keep the board-to-joist interface dry and stop moisture retention that can occur between the ribs. Installing boards with a one-sided reeding face-up is a

common DIY error. As well as losing the advantages of reeding-down, they retain dirt and water, which is likely to cause future problems.

- Boards should be stored flat on site and in a dry position off the ground. Where appropriate for the product, pre-coating on all four sides is strongly recommended.
- Gaps between boards and between decking and adjacent walls are vital to allow for expansion and contraction. A gap of 10mm from boards to

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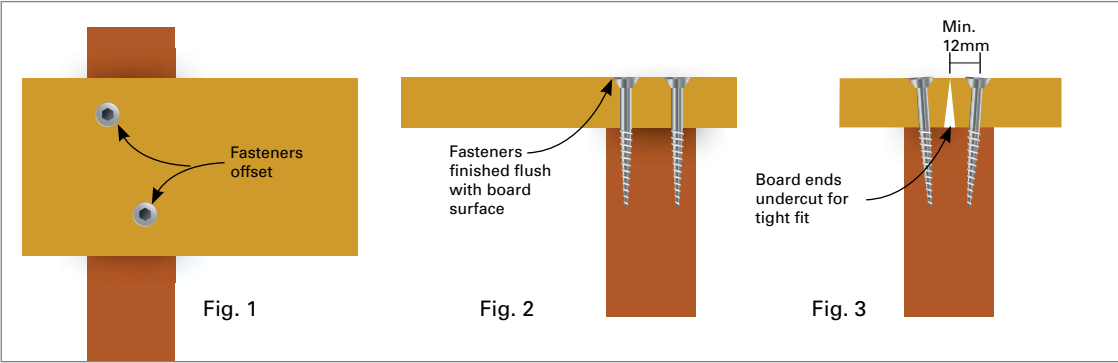
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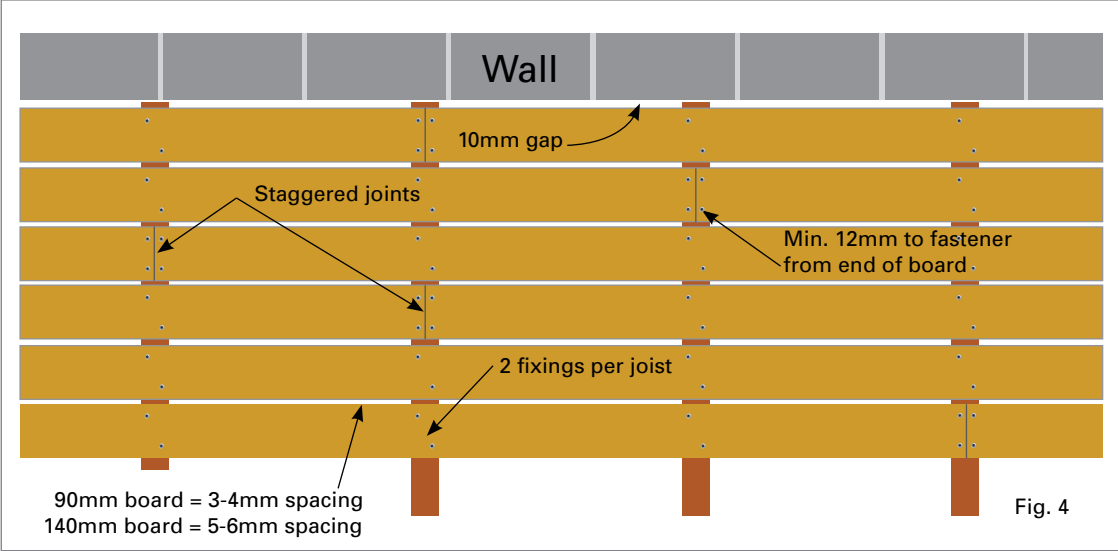


Above: Meyer Timber has a general timber decking leaflet to help consumers make informed choices.

walls is recommended, and a general between-board guide is 3-4mm for 90mm boards and 5-6mm for 140mm boards (see Fig. 4, below). If boards are laid wet, the gap will increase as they dry. Very dry boards can require larger gaps or risk cupping when wet.



Above: While timber suppliers may have specific recommendations for fastening, these techniques are generally effective.



Above: Gaps between adjacent walls and the decking are just as important as gaps between boards.

As a general rule, decking boards should be fixed at every joist with two fasteners.

- Joints should be staggered across the run of boards, with end butt joints undercut and pressed together to prevent any gaps opening up if contraction occurs (see Fig. 3).
- Appropriate fasteners will be determined by the board manufacturer and also depend on the substructure, but as a general rule, decking should be fixed at every joist with two fasteners, offset unless they are at ends of boards (see Fig. 1). Screws or nails at butt joints should be at least 12mm from the end of the board and pre-drilling is recommended to prevent splitting.
- For softwood joists, 65mm long x 2.50 galvanised flat head ring shank nails or 10g x 60mm long galvanised timber deck screws (Type 17) are

- generally recommended. For hardwood joists, 50mm long x 2.50 galvanised flat head ring shank nails or 10g x 50mm long galvanised timber deck screws (Type 17).
- Fasteners should finish flush with the board surface (see Fig. 2), both to be comfortable under bare feet and avoid creating a tripping hazard, and to avoid creating indents where moisture can pool.
 - Ventilation and adequate drainage beneath the deck is very important for the long-term health of the timber. Unless using a specialised product that can cope long-term with damper conditions, it's recommended that decks have a minimum of 400mm ground clearance, or a qualified professional is engaged to design adequate ventilation measures.

Multiple hidden decking fixings systems are also available on the market and are popular with trade and DIY customers alike, as well as easy-to-use tools that guarantee even spacings. If you have a large retail customer base, they're worth stocking.

MAINTAIN THE STAGE

If a deck is built from Class 1 durability hardwood, then the passage of decades will have little effect other than to see the colour fade to grey, even if you provide no more upkeep than the occasional sweep.

For most decks, however, some form of coating will help protect the timber and keep the colour from fading.

Coatings for decking fall into two major categories: stains and oils.

Stains are designed to change the colour of your decking. They contain pigment (mostly standard wood shades, but pale colours are also popular, especially for Scandinavian style exteriors) and are available in several types of formulation.

The intensity of colour pigment affects the amount of UV that can reach the timber underneath: darker stains will give a longer period between recoatings than less-opaque shades.

Water-based stains are popular as they have low levels of VOCs and dry comparatively quickly. Most don't penetrate into the

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Above: Specialist product and a high-pressure hose can repair surface stains on an old deck.



timber as far as oil-based stains, and it can be harder to get a perfect finish.

Oil-based stains are easier for even an amateur to get a good finish, but they take quite a bit longer to dry, leaving the deck out of action for several days. They generally 'feed' the timber underneath better, which is particularly helpful for less naturally durable timbers or in areas with more extreme climate conditions.

If you've chosen your timber specifically for its colour and grain, a stain will change the appearance, so steer clear.

Decking oils protect and restore the surface of the timber and help keep the wood fibres plump, allowing them to repel water and cope with UV and wear damage. Despite the name, decking oils are also available in water-and oil-based varieties.

Water-based decking oils dry more quickly and can last longer than oil-based oils, however the latter are usually easier to get and even finish with, and generally require less preparation. It really comes down to personal preference, though water-based oils also have easier clean-up and no odour.

Depending on the product you use, decking stains may need to be followed with decking oils or another topcoat for added protection. High-quality modern products, such as Intergrain's NaturalStain manage both jobs in the one product. By the same token, there are good quality oils on the market that contain tints, such as Intergrain's UltraDeck. While these won't change the look of boards as dramatically as a stain, they give a beautiful wash of colour that builds with yearly re-applications.

Both types of coatings need to be maintained. Despite suppliers having good guidelines, there's no hard and fast rule for

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how often they need to be reapplied as it changes depending on location, timber type and how exposed the deck is. For a tropical deck, or one in coastal conditions, six-monthly checking is recommended and you may need to re-apply every time. For decks not receiving regular waterings, annual checks are usually fine, and for protected locations and mild climates like Hobart, even less often is necessary. Until you understand your specific conditions, check regularly and re-coat at the first sign of degradation rather than waiting for the timber underneath to start to show damage.

Historically, the first coating of a deck has been portrayed as a bit of a dark art. This is down to related two factors: timber that is not fully dry, and timber that leaches tannins. It used to be the case that a new deck would have to be left for weeks or even months until it was ready for coating.

These days, popular timber choices often contain less moisture or fewer tannins to leach, but for products where one or both remain an issue, there are a range of alkaline salt cleansers that act quickly to remove tannins and moisture. Intergrain PowerPrep, Sikkens Cetol BL Tannin and Oil Remover and Organoil Wash-A-Way all use a simple brush-on, wash-off technique to speed up weeks of weathering into a single day.

Decking that is pre-oiled by suppliers is also increasingly popular. Not only does it mean the deck is ready for immediate use once installed, the even four-sided application is superior to what even professionals can achieve on site. Customers are happy to pay a price premium for the convenience and the durability benefits of pre-oiled product (for many decks, it's the last oil their underside ever receives.)

For natural timber decking products (including quality bamboo products), revitalising a deck that's seen better days is a fairly easy job and much can be managed with a high-pressure hose and spot of sanding. For surfaces with more significant damage, a specialist cleaning product such as Intergrain's Reviva should be used.

Coatings companies also produce a range of additives and surface treatments to deal with issues ranging from mould to anti-slip. Talk with your suppliers about which ones are suitable for different timber types. In

some cases, a physical solution such as more ventilation or a different finish on the decking boards may be more appropriate or longer-lasting. Every piece of information you can provide your customers for a better result equals repeat business. **T**

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- Simmonds employs full-time quality controllers at the sawmill to ensure high quality product in every pack



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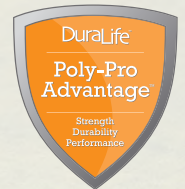
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Just like real wood no two DuraLife boards are the same.

Natural and warm looking like the real thing but without the maintenance.

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