

By Chris Parker

A RECYCLED TIMBER KITCHEN



Chris Parker built his kitchen from recycled timbers to utilise an undervalued resource. The end result was a pleasing finish and a low financial outlay.

Three things motivated me to make this timber kitchen. Firstly, my developing love for the natural beauty of Australian hardwoods, in particular the magnificent colour and figure I was finding when planing the grey weathered layer off old 4 x 2's in second-hand timber yards. I wanted to incorporate these hardwoods into a feature piece of cabinetry in my home. Secondly, I have always loved timber kitchens, especially those with the warmth and beauty of timber benches. And lastly, with only a \$1000 budget, my wife and I needed a new kitchen in our recently purchased house.

In this era of massive destruction of our global forest resources, the whole notion of reusing timber that was going to be burnt, buried in landfill or left to rot, was also not insignificant in my decision to use recycled timber. With this in mind (and perhaps in heart) this choice was quiet satisfying.

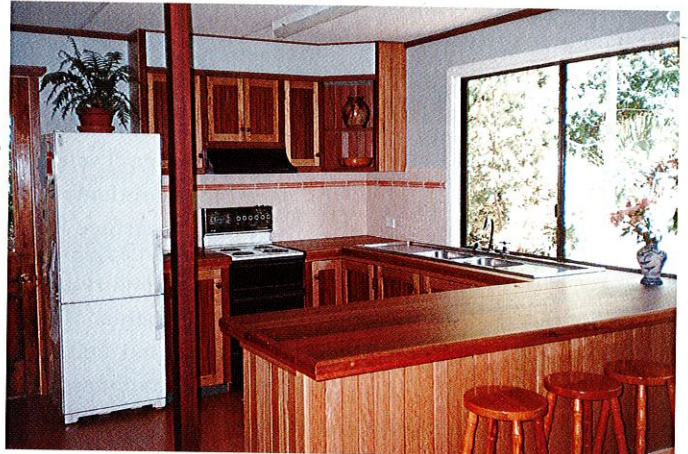
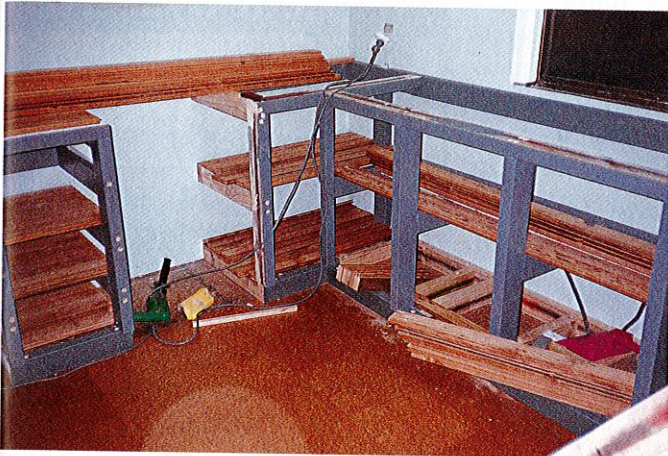
The timber purchased from recycle yards, along with bits and pieces I had lying around, gave me an assort-

ment of species. The benchtops were a mixture of rich red Australian hardwood 4 x 2's (notably jarrah and Sydney blue gum). I used old Tasmanian oak tongue and groove floor boards for the cupboard door frames. The door panels were jarrah; the shelves used oregon tongue and groove boards. The trims, plugs and knobs were vari-

ously made from coachwood, Tasmanian blackwood, red cedar, brush box and silky oak.

My workshop is not professionally equipped, however I had what I would consider the minimum tools essential for this project, including a table saw (I used a *Triton Mark III*), a 6" jointer, 12" portable thicknesser, electric sander





(I used a belt sander, but a powerful orbital would be preferable), drill press and plug cutter, metal detector (the hobby type), router (preferably mounted under a table) and a biscuit joiner, which I borrowed. Although I could have crosscut on the tablesaw, I borrowed a compound mitre drop saw for the project. Having this set up in the kitchen was a great advantage.

Buying Recycled Timber

More and more second-hand building material suppliers are springing up all the time and most deal in softwoods, particularly oregon. Hardwoods are available in the form of old flooring bearers and joists, ceiling joists, studs and some floor boards.

Usually the oregon is sold de-nailed, however the hardwoods come 'as is'. Most of the timber is in a very seasoned and weathered state. Consequently, when I go in search of Australian hardwood for joinery I take a small bench plane, a hat and sun cream and allow a couple of hours searching for the sort of grain and colour I like. I am always surprised at the natural beauty which lies beneath the grey exterior of these construction timbers.

Preparation Of Timber

The first task in preparing the timber is to get those darn nails out. The nails were most probably driven in when timber was wet and the wood fibres have subsequently shrunk around them. Some of the metal may also be quite corroded. This task requires patience, a claw hammer and a reliable set of pincers.

Before cutting the timber to approximate lengths and passing two alternate sides over a jointer ready for the table saw, you must be absolutely certain that there are no nails lurking under the surface. I use a metal detector for this task. Mine is not an expensive one, but with a little fine-tuning it performed the task well—I didn't find one nasty surprise while milling. After sawing to the desired sizes, a light pass through a sharp thicknesser was all that was required to dress the timber.

Carcase Construction

For the floor cupboards, I decided on a solid timber frame construction that relied on the existing walls of the kitchen for support and rigidity. This would suit my budget constraints as

well as my level of skill and tooling.

I had previously purchased some recycled radiata pine 4 x 2's and, although they were larger than necessary, they were easy to work with and their size added to the rugged and rustic aesthetic of the kitchen. They were painted a subtle grey, as radiata pine was not sympathetic with the other timbers used. The overhead cupboards were plywood carcasses screwed to the wall studs. To cut costs, I bought second quality plywood and painted it the same colour as the walls.

Benchtops and Shelves

To gain the rugged effect I was after, and to highlight the colour and figure of the machined recycled hardwoods, the benchtops were made from 4 x 2's dressed and laminated edge to edge. Due to cost considerations I used building adhesive (instead of epoxy) and a series of thread rods sitting in holes drilled through the middle of the members. Over a length of two metres I placed five equally spaced rods. Because of the variety of species, and hence colour grain and texture, patience and creativity was needed when

arranging the order of the laminates. The shelves were constructed from old 3" wide tongue and groove boards. A light pass through the thicknesser showed these boards to be ideal for use inside the cupboard due to their lighter colouring.

Making The Doors

The frames of the cupboard doors were made from 3" Tasmanian oak floor boards. These were chosen to contrast with the deeper reds and browns of the panels and benchtops. The frame members were butted and biscuit joined. The panels in the doors were jarrah 4 x 2's, milled down to 40 x 10mm with two bevelled edges. These were then cut to length and placed into 10 x 10mm rebates cut in the back of the door frames on the router table. The slats were pinned (not tightly) into place with panel pins to allow for any movement due to varying humidity.

Finishing

All trimming on bench edges and fixing of benchtops to carcasses was done with screws and plugs. The plugs gave

me an opportunity to add to this smorgasbord of Australian timbers with some more of my favourites—NSW coachwood, silky oak, Australian cedar and Sydney redgum. The exterior ends of cupboards were panelled with 75 x 19mm blackbutt bull-nose decking that was ripped to halve the amount of boards required. The cupboard knobs were turned from Tasmanian blackwood.

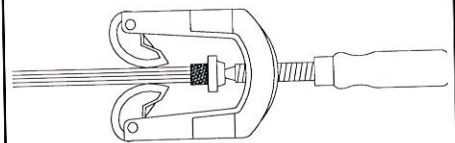
Consideration was given to the amount of wear, the colour and the lustre required when the finishes were chosen. Benchtops require a hard wearing oil-based polyurethane, however a gloss surface (the hardest wearing) was not sympathetic to the aesthetic of the kitchen. I settled for an oil-based matt polyurethane realising that I may have to resurface it more often.

It is important to seal both the top and underside of a benchtop to prevent unequal acceptance of moisture. On the cupboard doors the combination of not wanting the timbers to darken significantly and the lower require-

ment of wear made a water-based polyurethane an obvious choice. The same finish was also used on the existing cork floor.

The many positive factors in this style of construction—the recycling of used timbers, the showcasing of Australian hardwoods, the ease of construction and the extreme cost effectiveness—made this one of the most satisfying projects I've ever completed. □

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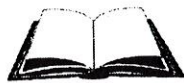
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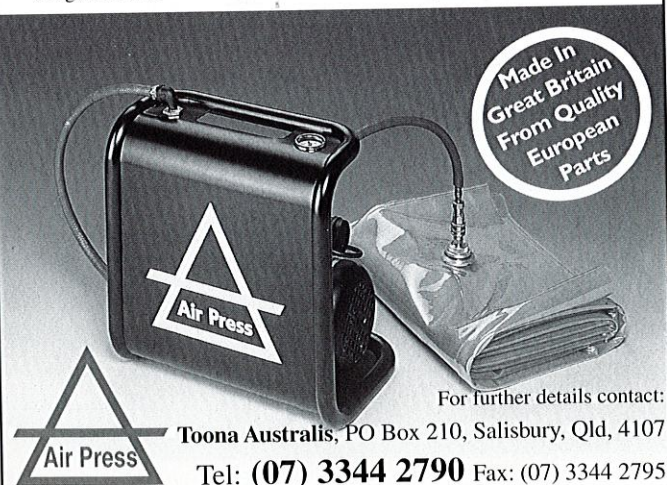
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