

Ted's News

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Someone thought using plastic/wood flour decking in a high traffic area was a good idea. You can see the decking is sagging under its own weight yet it is supposed to be able to carry a very high load with very minimal deflection. One board was even broken. If you think, "it is only a broken board," [read this newsletter where I report on a deck fatality](#). Appropriate timber, appropriately installed would have been a much better, and safer, solution. Timber alternatives are all well and good so long as they are a true alternative and there in lies the problem.

Nick Milne, Chairman of [TRADA](#), in a talk entitled 'Optimising Timber Structures', concluded by saying, "When someone invents a material that is renewable, reusable, biodegradable, whose production cleans the air and water, sequesters carbon, creates oxygen, provides habitat for us and other species, gives us a material that is strong, light, diverse, versatile, beautiful, ubiquitous and inexpensive then I'll embrace it. until then, I'll use wood wherever I can."

Use of Larch in Australia



The image above shows a swing made from larch poles by UK Manufacturer Jupiter Play and Leisure. If you are a fan of the tv show Grand Designs, as I am, you would have heard the presenter wax lyrical about larch's durability. And, from what I can gather, it is durable in the UK where the climate and agents of attack are different to ours. I was recently asked about its suitability for some poles in a playground in Queensland. In our much harder conditions, larch would be very unsuitable.

One very good and free "go to" source for information is

[Construction Timbers in Queensland](#) and for anything in Queensland related to the building code, it is the law, not a suggestion. It classes larch as an In Ground and Above Ground Durability 4, i.e. the same as untreated radiata pine which even a novice would not use. To get some durability you need to treat it to Hazard 3 and if you have bolts close to the ground as in a stirrup, say 200 mm, in my opinion that would be Hazard 5 which is, for all intents and purposes, CCA. This is not permitted in new playgrounds. The point is irrelevant as one importer is saying their material contains virtually no sapwood and you need at least 12 mm to preserve the timber. Also a very good source of information is the [Qtimber website](#) which is an online searchable form of the books. I recommend you look it up.

[Check here for my comments on Robinia in Australia where the argument is expanded.](#) Remember, trust no one but your mother. Do your homework. Robinia is more durable than larch.

The reason I have chosen this particular image is to explain how well Jupiter Play and Leisure have detailed how the posts engage with the ground. Firstly there are four posts. I have fabricated many two post swing sets for another manufacturer. I expect most were set in concrete and the soft fall would further have retained moisture at the ground level. Decay has to follow. With 200x200 ironbark, the minimum weight of a collapsing two post swing set will be 250 kg. I take this very seriously as a brother of a friend was killed by something very similar that decayed at ground line. With four posts the structure is safe. Note also how the posts do not engage directly with the ground but are supported above it in a metal bracket. There is a healthy gap under the post. For Australian conditions I would add an additional corrosion resistant paint system to the galvanised steel.

If you have a two post swing in your inventory, probe it at groundline. [See this newsletter for details refer second article](#)

Spreading the word in Canberra



I am in Canberra spreading the word about excellence in external timber design. It is a hard slog I don't mind telling you, "send a sample and we will put it on file." But still some architects are interested in hearing. When you step out of Canberra Airport and look at the magnificent bollards they have used there you think that the establishment is enlightened. Having spent many years building one off bollard designs prepared by Queensland landscape architects, and my own, I have a fairly high expectation. But I know, beyond the airport, it is a "design wasteland" as far as bollards are concerned, and external timber could be done an awful lot better. The two images below show what I am talking about!



Less than imaginative bollard designs in central Canberra.

To go to university for years and not even know that you need at least to have a water shedding top as a very minimum is very disappointing.



If you are looking for something better than the two images above consider this bollard, the Shore, which I designed for Outdoor Structures Australia a couple of years ago as part of a range of upmarket bollards. There is even one inspired (but not copied) by the Canberra Airport bollard.

New Coastal Decks Course

I have now completed my coastal deck course. The main part of the day takes you through the design checklist in my *Deck and Boardwalk Design Essentials*, line by line and explains and illustrates why that line is there and why that aspect of the design must be attended to. There are three supplementary sections:

- A look at the alternatives to traditional hardwoods and discuss their weakness and strengths (if they have any)
- A look at two very different boardwalks in Cairns and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each design
- A look at boardwalks I built at Point Cartwright in 2000 and Jacobs Well in 2003



Unlike the free CPD sessions, there is a charge for this course but it is "very small bickies" compared to what you could spend if you get the basics wrong and end up with a very unsatisfactory result. From the course you will see just how logical and easy it is to do well. Contact me on 0414 770 261 or [email me](#)

New CPD Course now available through eClassroom



Andrew Marston of eClassroom was so impressed with a course I delivered that he asked me to prepare one for his online training site eClassroom.com.au is a web service specifically developed to provide high quality, multimedia online distance education services to building design professionals throughout Australia. The first, of hopefully a suite of courses, is *TS1912 Outdoor Timber: Design & Specification Basics*. It is not one of the courses that are delivered free courtesy of Outdoor Structures Australia in the Brisbane area. [Here are details of the course](#). The targeted learning outcomes of this new course are:

- To understand the importance of climate in the selection of timber for outdoor use
- To appreciate the extent to which the species plays in the performance of timber outside
- To appreciate the issues associated with determining suitable timber grades
- To gain an increased understanding of what the Australian Standards mean, or don't mean, with regard to timber suitability for specific outdoor requirements
- To increase awareness of how to design for timber performance; be aware of the Seven Deadly Sins of outdoor timber design
- Understand the importance of verifying, the timber, treatment and design of a job.

The one hour course is available as a standalone segment for \$59.95 or as part of a 5 hour [bundled course with other timber subjects](#) for \$249.00.

Need a Timber Consultant or Expert Witness?

I have over 40 years' experience in the industry and can assist you with many of your timber needs.

- Inspection – I can assess timber products on their performance, fitness for purpose or cause of failure. I also examine whether best practice was used in design and construction.
- Grading - Quite literally, I have written the book on the subject
- Design - I can provide detailed technical drawings and advice.
- Reports - I have authored many books on timber and can prepare a report providing recommendations and practical instructions on to how to rectify issues.

Please note as I am now employed a Senior Timber Consultant with the firm BCRC all large and complex consultancies and requirements for an expert witness will be handled in conjunction with them. Existing consulting arrangements remain unchanged and I am also available to assist on small projects. For more information see www.bcrc.com.au



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