

# Save the Forests by Cutting More Trees?

Peter Stark creates beautiful floors from small-diameter larch logs harvested from forest restoration projects.

BY BRAD WALSETH

Peter Stark's North Slope Sustainable Wood company is one of the success stories of the new green movement in woodworking. A noted author and fervent environmentalist, Stark says he became an "eco-capitalist" when he suddenly found himself the owner of a "sick" forest outside of Missoula, MT. His timberland was in poor shape because it was overcrowded with tall, thin and sickly larch (also known as tamarack) trees, densely covering the mountainside and choking the life out of the other trees.

Normally in nature, forest fires would clear these smaller trees, while leaving the fire-resistant larger trees growing in well-spaced positions, making for a healthy forest ecology. It is now believed the suppression of forest fires by mankind as our population spread westward, actually caused more harm to the forests, by not allowing nature to prune and trim the undergrowth, resulting in what Stark has described as an "unweeded garden." The overgrown state of many forests actually has increased the danger of forest fires to the public as well, since fires that start in these dense forests can more easily explode into uncontrollable blazes that threaten bigger trees, homes and lives, Stark adds.

Fortunately, recent directions at the state and national level have resulted in a movement to selectively thin forests in an attempt to restore health to woodlands. The culling of the larch trees is essential to restoring forest vitality, but the question arises – what to do with the straight, small-diameter logs of the removed trees?

Larch has long been highly prized as the hardest of the soft woods, with a hardness rating similar to cherry,



*This beautiful larch floor now graces the Montana governor's mansion.*

teak or walnut. Its appearance has been described as honey-cinnamon with dark pin-hole knots, and because of the narrow-diameter, the logs exhibit an extremely tight grain. Despite the advantages this wood offers, because of the small diameter, no one seemed to know what to do with the culled trees besides grinding them for pulp.

Stark came across a solution to this issue when he used some of the logs removed from his property to build the floor for his wife Amy's dance studio. The tight grain and resulting hardness of the larch boards were perfect for flooring, and not only was the floor beautiful and durable, but it also provided a way to use the trees left over from forest restoration. Thus, a business was born, and Stark found himself in the vanguard of the movement for the sustainable use of natural resources.

North Slope's larch wood is competitively priced and business has been brisk, with orders for floors and trim, as well as supplying blanks to cabinet and door manufacturers, keeping Stark and his business partner, Matt Arno, busy. Arno, whose father Stephen was one of the first experts to propose the value of natural fire to woodlands, has his own forest-thinning business, and the company also receives wood from Forest Service thinning as well. Support from local and state officials has been strong and growing, and resulted in the company providing the flooring for the State Reception Room of the Montana State Governor's residence.

"At that time, it had acres of white carpet with wine stains on it," Stark says with a laugh. A local business official happened to be dining with Governor Brian Schweitzer and his wife, Nancy, and the governor's wife mentioned they wanted to replace the carpet with wood floors. The resulting project, installed by Cam Brown Wood Floors of Helena, MT, was looked upon as a strong statement by the governor, showing his support for the sustainable industry. In fact, Schweitzer has proven an ardent proponent of sustainable resource initiatives in his state.

In the end, Stark expresses optimism that business and nature can coexist. "I see this as a solution to the battle between environmentalists and the forest industry," he says. "This is something that makes everybody happy."

Find out more about Peter Stark's North Slope Sustainable Wood company at [www.northslopewood.com](http://www.northslopewood.com). ☒

## Staff

**Laurel Didier** Industrial Group Publisher  
**Rich Christianson** Associate Publisher/Editor-at-Large  
**Helen Kuhl** Editorial Director

## Editorial

**Karen M. Koenig** Editor-in-Chief/ WWP  
**Brent Seehafer** E-Product Manager  
**Michaëlle Bradford** Managing Editor  
**Wade Vonasek** Assistant Editor  
**Matt Warnock** Assistant Editor  
**Brad Walseth** Assistant Editor  
**Sandi Stevenson** Graphics Editor  
**Chris Nititham** CWB Graphic Designer  
**Elliott From** CLOSETS Graphic Designer  
**Mike Wilson** Web Editor

## Support

**Jill Smith** Special Projects Coordinator  
**Adanna Oji** Administrative Assistant

## Circulation/Production

**Mike Morgan** VP/Publication Services  
**Doug Riemer** Director of Circulation  
**Donnie Deacon** Production Coordinator  
**Jeff Hofbauer** Digital Ad Processor  
**Jerry Ruscitti** Digital Ad Processor

## Advertising

**Renee Stritar** (847) 634-4347 ext. 362  
Sales and Communications Manager  
MI, MN, PA, Canada

**Kathy Carreira** (480) 706-0995; fax (480) 704-0099  
Classified Ads

**Marianne Majerus** (847) 634-4347 ext. 646  
AK, AR, DE, IA, KS, LA, ME, MS, MT, ND, NE,  
NH, NM, NV, OK, RI, SD, UT, VT, WV, WY

**Peter E. Page** (704) 442-1666; fax (704) 442-0063  
FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, TN, VA, Italy

**Chad Sypkens** (847) 634-4347 ext. 341  
CT, IL, MA, MO, NJ, NY, OH, TX, WI

**Linda Theoharis** (847) 634-4347 ext. 883  
AL, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, IN, KY, OR, WA

**Alistair Bryson** Phone 011 (49) 6061-925100  
Bryson Media  
Germany, Austria, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium, Scandinavia  
brysonmedia@t-online.de

**Eiji Yoshikawa** Phone (81 03) 3327-2688  
EMS Inc.  
Japan

**William Pang** Phone (65) 6746-8761  
Pablo Publishing  
Taiwan, Pacific Rim  
williampang@pabloasia.com

## Main Office

P.O. Box 1400, Lincolnshire, IL 60069  
Phone (847) 634-4347 • Fax (847) 634-4374  
Subscription Services (847) 634-2600 ext. 309

## To Contact Us by E-mail

Unless otherwise noted, use the following formula:  
**first initial+last name+vancepublishing.com**  
Example: hkuhl@vancepublishing.com



## Vance Publishing Corporation

**William C. Vance** Chairman of the Board  
wvance@vancepublishing.com  
**Peggy Walker** President  
pwalker@vancepublishing.com  
**Harry Urban** Senior VP/ Publishing Director, Interiors Group  
hurban@vancepublishing.com  
**Steve Lee** Senior VP/ Product Development, Data and Digital  
slee@vancepublishing.com

For reprint quotes and information  
contact Steve Hahn at Fostereprints  
(866) 879-9144 ext.187

