

A Journey for Gold!

"Come to Tasmania with me," said John on the telephone, "and we'll buy some Huon for that furniture we've been talking about."

Having known John for such a long time, neither the request nor its spontaneity surprised me. Actually, it wasn't all that spontaneous – he'd been talking about it for years. It's just that suddenly, according to John, it was time.

John has always been big on visions and plans. "You've got to visualise what you want right down to the very minute details. Then you have to plan and take steps to make sure it happens," he'd repeatedly advise me. He's practised what he's preached repeatedly in the time I have known him.



Initially, he collected Victorian antique furniture, which we dutifully restored for him. Then he planned and built his replica Victorian style house in the Gold Coast Hinterland. Naturally, before the house was built, each room was visualised fully furnished. Additional collecting of Victorian antiques and bric-a-brac followed on to fulfil the vision splendid!

Though he searched far and wide, not every piece he had in his mind's eye was available. So more recently, he began to collect together pictures and sketches of what he still required. It was then that he requested reproduction furniture to be made in timbers he truly loved. He is quite convinced that the reproduction furniture is as good a quality, if not sometimes better than antique furniture. He did, however, stipulate that he wanted the reproduction job hand finished, so that even



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an expert would be left wondering whether they were antique or not.

This story focuses on the Huon pine furniture we built for him.

It all started with my agreeing to go to Tasmania with him. We decided four days would be sufficient to achieve all we had to do. Our trip required me to find an instant winter wardrobe so I could cope with the Roaring Forties weather down there.

We used the first afternoon to see a couple of long-term clients, and to research Georgian and Victorian houses, and in particular, their stables. John's next project involves the building of a stable and mounting yard to complement the existing house. He's thinking he might use it for an art gallery and wine tasting downstairs, whilst having a private library upstairs.

That evening we drove out towards The Olde School House in Hamilton, the last real stop before our destination, Queenstown.

I was quite shocked and appalled at the state of the countryside, or rather the nuclear wasteland, around Queenstown. I, like many others, was led to believe that Tasmania is all clean and green and bountiful with nature. Unfortunately for all living things existing in this area, someone decided it was a good idea to have a smelter there. The widespread effects of the pollution made it feel like I was at the end of the world.

We arrived in Queenstown mid-morning and ended up spending all day looking at the timber. First of all we were shown fairly poor quality timber, and we were told this was all that was available. However, after eight hours of polite conversation and four sittings of tea and biscuits, we were shown another shed with better quality timber. After a further four sittings of tea and biscuits, we were finally shown "the good stuff". Good as gold!

We bought both plain and very ornate grained timber in varying sizes. We only bought the exact amount which was required as the timber is particularly high in cost and waste was not an option. The cost of the timber is attributed to the fact that availability of it is very low. This is because Huon pine is only rarely permitted to be cut from live trees due to environmental concerns.

Consequently, most timber sold through merchants these days, is reclaimed fallen timber from swamps and gullies in the forest. A lot of this fallen timber has been lying in



this state for over 100 years. This is actually some of the best timber due to its age.

Some of these trees were old and twisted (giving interesting grain patterns) and therefore not commercial to mill. They have simply been dumped out of the way. Other trees may simply have fallen the wrong way once cut and could not be retrieved using teams of horses or bullocks due to the difficult terrain and boggy swamps. We were fortunate to arrive at the merchants shortly after a batch of these old logs had been brought in.

One fitch of particularly rare and beautifully grained Huon pine was considered by us to be of such value that we were not confident to send it back to my workshop by commercial transport. Instead, we transformed it into a very heavy, large, wrapped up suitcase which travelled with the rest of our luggage on our plane.

It was nearly dark when we left the timber merchants, so we stayed that night in a Queenstown motel. In the morning we went back to Hamilton, up to Bothwell and still further to Longford where we stayed at the Racecourse Inn. The next day we went to Woolmers, which is one of the best examples of a colonial Tasmanian farm. It has been owned by the Archer family since 1823. This was followed by quick stops at Evandale, Ross and Oaklands. We went back to Ross for our final night, where we stayed in a charming stone cottage.

On our way to Launceston John brought some silver from a dealer who at first thought we were going to rob him. This was probably due to my bearded appearance and our big coats. We spent so much time in antique and bric-a-brac shops that we barely got to the airport on time. We took off for Brisbane on the brink of a huge storm after which the airport was closed for 24 hours.

Although it was rather a whirlwind trip, it was well worth our while. The Huon pine furniture in these photographs demonstrates how we achieved the best results from our selected plain and fancy grains. Note the panels featuring the best of the grain patterns. The most attractive of these timbers were split and quartered to achieve extremely ornate panels – for example, in the bookcases, bed, and bedside cabinets.

Naturally, all my expenses were paid for. It's such a hard life!

Next!

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