



‘Good Stuff Lasts’

Longwood Antique Woods gives ancient Kentucky wood new life

Text and photos by Abby Laub

Walk into Lexington’s Longwood Antique Woods showroom and you’ll first notice either the shop’s plethora of inviting reclaimed wood displays beckoning to be installed in your home or owner **George Gatewood’s** 140-pound St. Bernard named Huckleberry. “He goes on all of our trips with me,” George said of his lovable, slobbery friend.

Huckleberry must have a nose for reclaimed wood, too, as George and fellow Longwood owner **Vance Evans** have been in the business for 20 years and agree reclaimed wood is more popular than ever. Thanks in part to partnerships such as its latest with garden designer **Jon Carloftis** for the America Reclaimed Garden Collection, Longwood preserves history one piece of timber at a time.

“People are certainly more green conscientious,” said George. “It’s recycled, it’s historic, it’s got warmth and charm, and it’s got better quality than what you can get new.”

Longwood’s pieces can be found in homes, gardens and businesses all over the state and even the country. George joked that reclaimed wood used to be just a part of the green movement for hippies, but now it’s become a lifestyle for anyone looking for unique, sustainable ways to build or decorate. “It’s painstakingly more expensive because you handle each board 16 times by the time you take it off the barn and get it out to the end of our mill,” he noted, adding that the quality of the old growth is unparalleled by modern wood.

He explained America had an abundant supply of old-growth trees until the Industrial Revolution. The wood used to build structures hundreds of years ago utilized old-growth timbers—native trees that grew taller and stronger in untouched forests. Now, such structures are reclaimed by Longwood and can be up to 400 years old, since they were built 200 years ago using wood that was already 200 years old in the forest.



Opposite, Longwood Antique Woods' owners estimate they have removed 2 million nails from the wood of more than 1,000 reclaimed structures; top left, some of the many pieces of reclaimed wood awaiting new homes; left, co-owner Vance Evans inspects wood in Longwood's shop; above, door from Faraway Farm, birthplace of Man o' War's son War Admiral.

Stately timbers from these ancient trees lean on the walls in Longwood's processing area, in preparation for projects where they will be appreciated again. Each piece of wood that comes into Longwood's facility is put through a rigorous process of planing, de-nailing and much more.

"Some of the best wood in America is in Indiana and Kentucky, as far as virgin-growth lumber," George said. "And the thing about Kentucky is that it has always had a romance to it, especially central Kentucky. All of these old antebellum houses and horses—it's a charming place. I travel a lot with trade shows, and everyone always likes to hear that you have horse barns from Kentucky. It gives it a little historical significance."

The company took historic barns out of places like Lexington's Hamburg area and also have barns that housed Triple Crown winner War Admiral. "We're doing a good job researching the history of each structure," George said.

Preserving history is usually the main objective, especially as the number of small family farms is in decline. "The family farm is kind of a thing of the past, and all of these old structures are kind of weathering away," he said. "A lot of people say, 'I appreciate you saving the history of

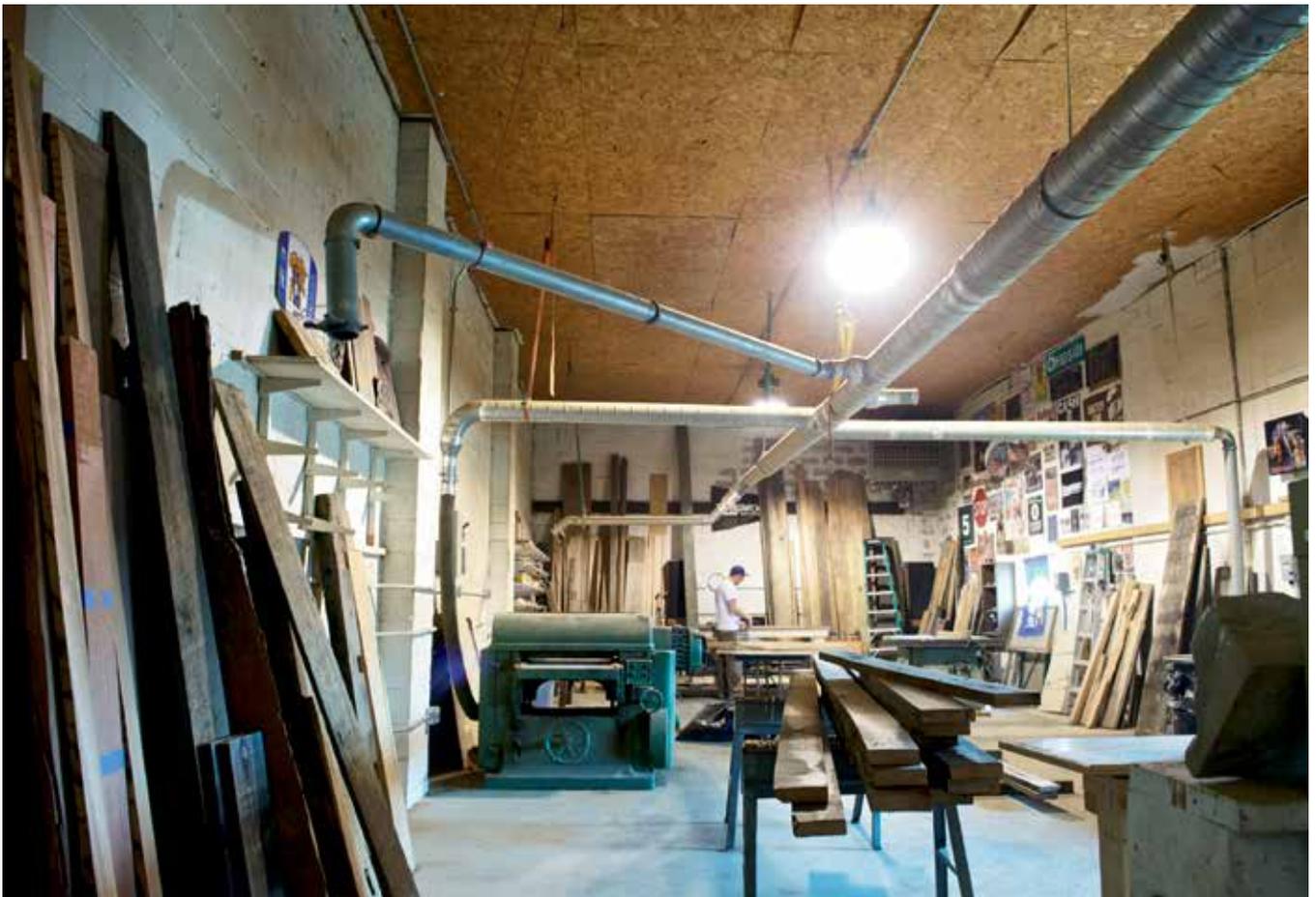
my barn. Let me tell you what happened here.' That's really fun, getting to know that barn. Then you can talk to a customer and tell them what barn it came from and what happened there."

Vance said, "We get a lot of customers that will have their grandfather's barn on their family farm, and they're building a new house, and we help them to incorporate the flooring and parts and pieces into that house from their materials, which is very neat."

If a structure is in excellent condition, they first encourage preservation. "We get enough barns that are falling down, than to say, 'I have to have this one over here,'" George said. "You can't tear down old historic structures, and you don't want to tear something down that someone is going to miss later ... But if they're going to bulldoze it down, we can go in and salvage the stuff."

"For example, a property that we're working on right now—they tore the Griffin Tavern down in Cynthiana. "We've got all of the brick, all the floors, all the wood. We sold it to a guy who's restoring the Colby Tavern in Clark County, so it's going from one tavern to the next."

For now, there still are plenty of structures to be



Longwood's processing area, where wood is cleaned and readied for new projects.

reclaimed. Vance said they sometimes get 30 calls a week from people needing their services. They investigate every lead and end up acting on about 50 percent of what they see or hear about. Sometimes, they stumble upon structures themselves while out for a drive. "Usually it finds us," Vance said. "We've been doing it for a long time, and word of mouth has gotten around."

Longwood has worked on reclaimed projects in places as far away as Lake Placid, N.Y., and has been featured in

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numerous magazines, trade shows and high-profile collaborative projects like a 200-year-old cabin restored for *Garden & Gun* magazine during the Kentucky Derby.

Working with Carloftis and the America Reclaimed

Garden Collection is affording Longwood new opportunities to show people ways to incorporate reclaimed wood into smaller-scale projects such as a garden rather than outfitting an entire home.

Other smaller projects Vance and George recommend that can be accomplished without blowing the budget are mantel beams, ceiling beams, tables, benches, dressers, bar tops, picture frames, window trim or smaller areas of a floor. Even small pieces like these, Vance said, add value to the home. "There are different little building elements, we call them, that can be used," he said, and something small can change the look of a home very quickly.

"You don't have to break the bank to give your typical

standard house some reclaimed warmth," George said. "Recycled old wood, beautiful wood, extinct wood is not going to go out of style. It's just going to become more valuable ... Sustainability is the trend, coupled with history and beauty."

Much of their business, though, comes from reclaimed wood floors. But thanks to the prevalence of smaller reclaimed pieces—like old tobacco sticks or other short pieces of wood that might be hard to incorporate into bigger designs—the Jon Carloftis Reclaimed Garden Collection is a perfect fit for people wanting to stick with unique, recycled pieces in their gardening.

The line includes "Kentucky planters" that come in various sizes using horse farm barn wood and tobacco barn tier rails, potting benches made from bourbon barrel aging racks, tobacco stick garden fences, and arbors. George pointed to the huge organic gardening trend and said it makes sense to plant these crops in something that is natural and recycled.

Carloftis said he met the Longwood guys at trade shows and other events and knew they would work well together. "If you had a flat tire, they'd stop," he said. "That's who I want to be friends with; that's who I want to be in business with, and they said, 'Let's do something together.'"

George said of Jon: "He's a good old, hard-working guy from Kentucky," he said. "He's like the **Michael Jordan** of gardening." Jon shares Longwood's love for preservation and all things old and beautiful. "I have a great respect and appreciation for things of yesteryear," he said. "It doesn't mean you have to live in a museum—I don't like museum houses where you are uncomfortable.

"But it's not disposable," he added. "There is so much disposable today, and I think people are finally realizing they want to buy quality pieces. Good stuff lasts."

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