

Ted's News

November 2022

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[Grading Timber, Structurally OK May Not Mean Fit For Purpose](#)



Dr. Estela Garcez, Victorian Manager of BCRC, probing discoloured pine.

I recently visited Melbourne with BCRC to inspect timber in a heritage-listed building from 1853. The timber was still of incredibly high quality. As the gold rush started in 1851, no one was interested in working in a sawmill, so the timber was imported Douglas Fir (Oregon Pine). The logistics of bringing timber from the west coast of the USA at that time is mind-boggling as the overland telegraph was not built till 1872. Other grading, also for BCRC, was of some hardwood joists in Brisbane from 1935 and you could have made furniture and handrail with them as they were of such high quality.



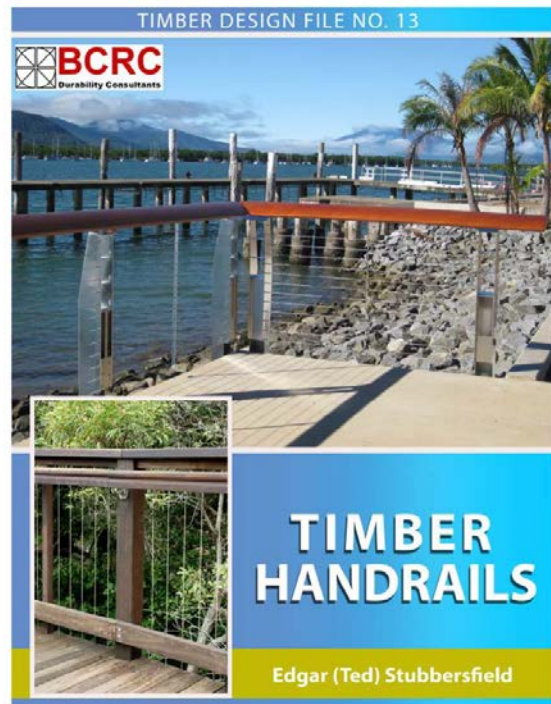
However, I also graded some spotted gum handrails for fitness for purpose. The image above was of a piece of handrail I rejected. It meets the highest grade in AS2082 but it simply is not fit for use as a handrail unless this gum vein intersecting an edge is down and at the back. It is likely to be a spearing object. Making sure the builder looks at both sides and ensuring the timber is used appropriately is a real problem (see Either Laugh or Cry below,) Proof grading did give designers certainty about the properties of the timber when it remained weather protected, e.g., in roof trusses, but it also opened the door for millers to sell timber for structural purposes that would have previously been sold as firewood. You cannot specify external timber simply to an F grade and expect it to perform satisfactorily. It can easily be a fatal mistake and I am not exaggerating, [check out the case history in this newsletter](#)

Now, if I was building one of my bridges and I did not have a spare I would have used the piece above. My practice was to chisel the piece out say 150 mm back, drive a nail or screw into the corner so the remaining vein cannot open, then smooth out with a belt sander and install with the repair to the back and down. It is fit for purpose as no one will see it and it will not deteriorate.

[Free Guide to Timber Handrails](#)

I have just about finished another guide, *Timber Handrails*. It will be the 22nd I will have published and No. 13 in my *Timber Design File* series. It is written mainly around the needs of commercial handrails but has some important content relating to domestic rails, particularly LOSP pine. This guide will give you timber specifications that work and with 127 images you will understand best practices. The chapters are:

Introduction
Timber specification and explanation
Best practice in design
Standards
Fixings
Posts
Wire ropes
Case histories
Design checklist



The guide is usable now but the plan is to have it finalised by the next newsletter so you can download it free of charge. ([contact me](#) if you need it earlier.) My good friend Ralph Bailey, one of Queensland's leading architects and someone who is very experienced with timber assisted me. Ralph has suggested adding a chapter to the book on steps as there is so much common ground. I plan to do this but I am short of good images, good or bad. Can anyone assist me with images and stories?

[Either Laugh or Cry](#)

I have known some awesome tradesmen, and now some of our best men are women, but some are truly dreadful. If it wasn't a crying matter, this Facebook page would make you laugh. [Trades.com.au | Facebook](#) Trades.com.au showcases the greatest examples of why you should only use a skilled and qualified tradesperson to work on your home.

[Need a Timber Consultant or Expert Witness?](#)

I have over 45 years of 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. I have recently completed inspections on boardwalks, bollards, support beams and external timber furniture.


Grading - Quite literally, I have written the book on the subject. Recent experience has shown that up to 30% of timber supplied may not be to grade.

Design - I can provide detailed technical drawings and advice. I can also review already prepared drawings.

Reports - I have authored many books on timber and can prepare a report providing recommendations and practical instructions on to how to rectify issues.

Trainer and Presenter – I can provide tailored training to meet your CPD needs and also have experience at lecturing to universities and presenting at conferences.

Please note as I am now employed as 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 or [download their capability brochure here.](#)

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