

Neuro -Wood

BY TEGAN LYON

Renowned for its versatility and unique varieties, timber has been utilised in Australian architecture for years. Aside from its aesthetic appeal, timber is recognised to improve wellbeing – connecting inhabitants with nature inside the confines of their homes. Here, Diego Jaime, co-director of Archebiosis Architects, speaks with Tegan Lyon and shares his insights on the beneficial properties of timber and its positive influence on our mental health.

In the past twenty years, numerous studies have emerged on the correlation between our built environment and our emotional and physical wellbeing. This concept is known as neuroarchitecture, a scientific discipline that evaluates the way architectural spaces can foster better mental health. The use of timber is at the forefront of these discussions in order to cultivate an enriched environment.

PRODUCTS OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

Being in nature has proven to be a restorative process, and since the average Australian will spend 90 percent of their life indoors, your home should have the same effect on your psyche. As humans, we have a biological need to connect to nature; incorporating timber into the design of your home establishes this connection on a daily basis. Biophilic design is not a new idea, but its beneficial influence on our wellbeing has only begun to gain traction with architects and neuroscientists in recent years. Jaime astutely points out, "Timber is a natural material that enriches and enhances with its variety of texture, colours and scents, in a way our body feels connected to nature."

Timber introduces warmth into our homes and adds softness to architectural designs. Even as the modern home design evolves, timber continues to be synonymous with Australian architecture. "Timber inside the home helps to blur the boundary of [outdoors and indoors], which suits our way of

life in Australia," Jaime adds. Built environments that feature timber have been known to facilitate creativity and productivity, lower blood pressure and reduce stress levels. As our homes are the most prominent environments within which we live, it's where we should be feel most at ease.

FREEDOM IN YOUR DESIGN

The versatile nature of timber lends itself to both classic and contemporary-style homes. As timber can be transformed to represent almost any shape, there are countless ways it can be utilised to create character within the interiors and exterior of your abode. "One advantage of timber is that it suits any style [and] can be modified to match any particular aesthetic," Jaime says. "It can be both serious and playful, or heavy and light."

Timber can be used to inject personality into your home and create unique points of interest both indoors and externally. Utilising timber for your outdoor decking, window shutters, stairways, wall panels, and flooring is well-documented and timeless, but Jaime encourages readers to think outside of these confines. "Consider [timber] both a practical...and beautiful building material. The





combination of these two key aspects of timber make its possibilities endless," he says. Timber ceilings, feature walls and alcoves can be used to create soft and light spaces within the living area. Jaime suggests introducing timber joinery and cabinetry into your kitchen and timber vanity units into your bathroom. The various species of timber allow for alternative textures and colours that will complement different aspects of your kitchen and bathroom. Jaime also favours exposed structural elements, such as columns or trusses "to enhance the overall look and feel of the home".

A RENEWABLE LIFESTYLE

As a non-toxic and 100 percent renewable material, timber is one of the few natural building options available to us. Providing natural storage for carbon, timber contributes to the long-term reduction of carbon emissions and uses less fossil fuel energy during its manufacturing process compared to other common building materials like steel, concrete and aluminium. Moreover, timber is a natural insulator, and a home populated with timber requires less energy to heat and cool – greatly reducing your carbon footprint. Jaime recommends using timber that has been harvested responsibly. "Your timber supplier should be able to let you know if the timber you are buying comes from a certified, sustainable forest. This way you will know that a new tree has been planted to replace the one used to build your house."

PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF YOUR HOME

Timber is a firm favourite among builders and homeowners for its availability, as well as its lower cost and construction time. "These days, timber has been developed to a point where it can be affordable for most homeowners," Jaime advises. However, even with its numerous benefits, building with timber does present its own set of unique challenges that should be addressed before, and after you build. "Timber is a beautiful material, but it needs to be chosen wisely as there are many external agents influencing its durability and integrity, such as exposure to sun, rain, saltwater, moisture, pests and fire."

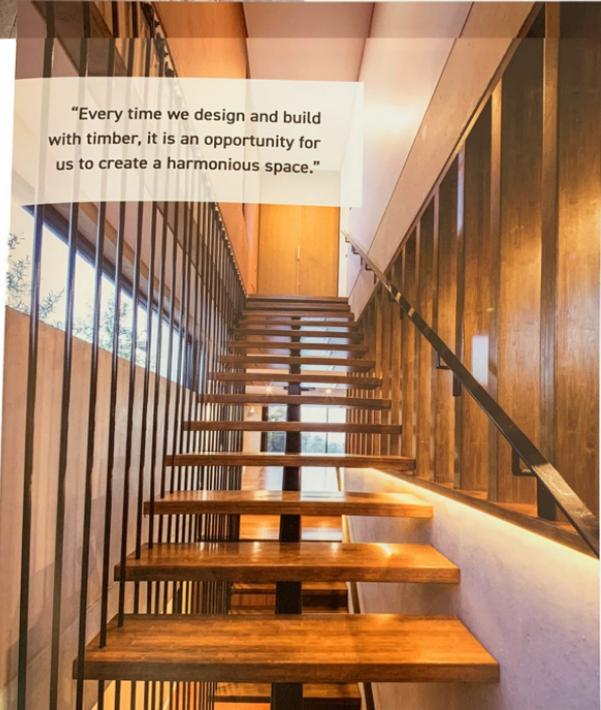
As a natural product that changes with the climate, timber is prone to mould, pests and fungi. Before construction, it is vital to choose the correct type of timber according to the climate of the area in which you are building. "Some timber species retain moisture for longer and this can be detrimental in the long-term." Whether your timber is exposed, covered or concealed, providing adequate ventilation is essential in preserving the structural integrity of your property. Being able to dry timber quickly or prevent extended periods of condensation will help avoid mould, pests and fungi. "This can be achieved by good construction detailing," Jaime says. This can also be combated by selecting timber that comes with a pre-applied pest control product.

As timber ages naturally, it's known to shrink, swell, crack and fade over time. Jaime recommends addressing these concerns with your builder before construction to ensure your home will remain in prime condition. "Everyone involved in the selection and handling of timber must be educated and informed about the unique properties of each species." If external factors are considered during the design phase and timber products receive periodic maintenance, this can extend the life of a home by decades.

With its warm aesthetic appeal and various design capabilities, timber is a worthy fixture in any Australian home. "Every time we design and build with timber, it is an opportunity for us to create a harmonious space," Jaime echoes. Incorporating timber within a home design establishes a tangible connection to nature, enhancing our emotional and physical health.

Images courtesy of Archebiosis Architects

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