

Greater Boston | January 2015

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Lumber Luxury: Unshaped Beams

By Thomas Crocker

Natural, round timber building elements can satisfy homebuyers' wishes for eco-friendly, eye-pleasing architecture that connects them to the natural world.

BEAMS, COLUMNS AND trusses of round timber — typically, trees too small for milling that would end up discarded — can create living spaces that feature sustainable materials and memorable looks. WholeTrees Architecture & Structures of Madison, Wisconsin, which supplies round timber for commercial and residential buildings, is on the forefront of this emerging trend.

“Our residential, single-family-home customers install these products because the timber has a natural beauty that they appreciate,” says Martin Whitehead, MBA, Vice President of Business Development and Marketing at WholeTrees. “The trees offset modern, contemporary spaces quite well. For residential, multifamily structures, round

timber provides points of differentiation that distinguish, say, a set of apartments from all of the other apartments consumers could rent.”

WholeTrees favors strong, long-lasting black locust trees — considered an invasive species in some parts of the United States — for exterior applications. Hardwoods, such as oak or ash, as well as straight-growing pine, work best indoors, according to Whitehead.

“The less a tree is processed, the more environmentally friendly it is,” Whitehead says. “Round timber undergoes minimal processing and is an efficient way to bear weight because lots of load-carrying fibers aren’t milled away as they are with other wood products. I think we’ll see natural, round lumber used more and more in the future.” ■

