

# THE FOREST HERITAGE CENTRE

a  
**New Leaf  
for Dwellingup**



People who have lived in a forest environment, and those who still do, have a close affinity with the domain of the tree. They know the living canopy as a home, a provider and an entertainer. They know its feel, its touch, its smell. And they have an understanding of the ecosystem to which it belongs. Nowadays, with most people living in urban sprawl, there is a need to have places where we can go to learn about our forests. The new Forest Heritage Centre at Dwellingup is just such a place.

**By Mandy Clews and  
Tammie Reid**

**I**t tends to be taken for granted, but if you look around, you will see it close to you, in every room. Wood forms a component of most of our buildings, furniture and hand tools, and the aesthetic detail of our lives. The human relationship with wood is primal and enduring, even through the technological revolution of minerals, plastics and synthetic fibres.

This summer, a new forest development at Dwellingup, only about an hour's drive from Perth, is expected to touch the lives of thousands of visitors. Industry and State and Commonwealth governments have joined forces to develop a first-class facility for the interpretation of the jarrah forest and its management, and the advancement of Western Australia's fine wood industry.

The Forest Heritage Centre is unique. While there are many interpretive facilities set in forests around Australia, none contains the intricate machinery of industry, a museum of social, industrial and natural history, and a working school of fine wood crafting, in one establishment. At the Forest Heritage Centre, it is all on display—for history buffs, craftspeople, conservationists and the curious. The Forest Heritage Centre celebrates the splendour and complexity of the natural environment, embracing at the same time the fascination of how we have worked, and continue to work, within it.

Here, visitors can ponder the complexity of the forest ecosystem one moment, and the next, marvel at the ingenuity and skill of craftspeople in the



*Previous page*

**Main:** The Forest Heritage Centre is nestled in regrowth jarrah forest. This bird's eye view highlights the jarrah leaf-inspired architecture.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

**Inset:** The tree tops are visible from inside the building, emphasising its bond with the forest.

Photo – Marie Lochman

**Left:** Visitors arrive by way of a wooden walkway and elevated deck, constructed of timber cut from Dwellingup forests.

**Below left:** The rammed-earth, curvilinear walls of the gallery 'leaf' are inset with picture frame windows.

Photos – Marie Lochman

**Below right:** Timber platforms and stairways through the forest canopy provide an aerial dimension to the walktrails.

Photo – Barb Giles

design and creation of exquisite fine wood products. The centre provides a rich experience suffused with a sense of both history and perpetuity.

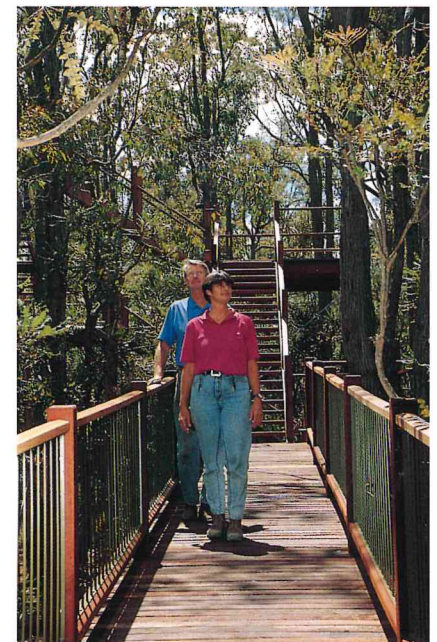
## FOREST HERITAGE

Deep in Western Australia's jarrah forests, there is a practical relationship with wood stemming back thousands of years. The Nyoongar Aboriginal people exploited the forest to provide all the basic needs of life. Plants and animals provided food and medicine; wood was the raw material for shelter, fuel, weapons and tools; and the forest environment provided spiritual nourishment.

A different scale of exploitation came with European settlement. Thriving on infertile soil, the jarrah forest remained

largely uncleared for agriculture. But commerce was developing. In the early part of the century, the need for wood to feed a hungry export market and to provide railway sleepers for a growing State, saw the development of a booming timber and sawmilling industry in the more accessible forests. In the 1920s, timber was being produced and exported at incredibly high rates.

Today, the timber industry has slowed, to be managed at a sustainable level. While the resource continues to be extracted, our relationship with wood has taken another turn. WA hardwoods, such as jarrah, karri and marri, have become highly prized for their rich grains and handsome colours, prompting a steady growth in WA's fine wood industry.



This industry has gone from strength to strength in the manufacture of elegantly crafted furniture and decorative artefacts, and has the potential to become a major export earner and job creator for the State. Recent developments in kiln drying techniques for karri and marri have meant that furniture manufacturers are now able to capitalise on the unique ornamental properties of these timbers, creating individual, high value, pieces.

## HEART OF THE FOREST

Dwellingup is nestled in a valley, surrounded by regrowth forest. This prime location near the Murray River was a traditional Aboriginal camping place long before European settlement.

With the establishment of the rail link from Pinjarra, Dwellingup soon became a regional centre of forest activity, and has remained so ever since. It was at the edge of the first State Flora and Fauna Reserve—which, at 160 000 acres, was the largest at that time anywhere in Australia. But intense lobbying by sawmilling concerns saw its conversion to a Timber Reserve in 1911, and it soon became the natural convergence for the network of railways and roads carved out by the expanding timber industry.

Later, in 1928, the establishment of the first Forests Department office in the town ushered in a new era of forest management, where timber cutting was based on regeneration and sustaining yield in the forest. Dwellingup also became the site of the first established Forestry Cadet School.

Through decades of intense activity—fuelled by economic development, industrial growth, an increased understanding of nature conservation, and policy and management reforms—Dwellingup has kept in touch with the natural environment, so it is fitting that it should have been chosen as the site of the Forest Heritage Centre.

## A JARRAH ADVENTURE

Built in the shape of a giant jarrah bough, the complex nestles peacefully in its forested surroundings. Three leaf-shaped, rammed-earth buildings extend from a welcoming, stem-like foyer. The largest, central 'leaf' houses the School of Wood—a facility for demonstration and training in the art of fine wood processing and quality furniture production. The smaller 'leaf' extending

## THE SCHOOL OF WOOD

One of the most significant functions of the Forest Heritage Centre is to provide a training base for Western Australia's growing fine wood industry. The School of Wood has been operating at the Forest Heritage Centre since September 1995. It offers weekend workshops and longer-term courses in specialist subjects to professional craftspeople, hobbyists, manual arts teachers, high school and TAFE students. The tradition of learning about the forest will live on for those seeking inspiration among the trees, birds and wildflowers of the jarrah forest, just as it did for the young foresters of the past.

Accommodation is available at the former Forest Cadet School, now leased to the centre by CALM. Some 400 forestry cadets went through the school between 1952 and 1991, when it closed following the development of tertiary courses and on-the-job training. The newly renovated building has a lecture theatre, kitchen and dining room, recreation room with television and pot belly stove, and 16 rooms catering for up to 32 people. It is available for national and international conferences and for use by other industrial organisations, educational institutions, government departments, community groups and tourists.

Recently, the board of management of the Forest Heritage Centre appointed the first Director of the School of Wood, Malcolm Harris. A respected fine wood craftsman, Malcolm has designed and made commissions for private and corporate clients, as well as having worked collaboratively with other designers on projects such as furnishings for Parliament House in Canberra, Australia Post and HBF. He is also an experienced teacher in the fields of wood-craft design and manufacture.

The School of Wood will foster the expertise and marketing acumen that will place luxury items, skilfully crafted from exquisite Western Australian timbers, among the most sought-after aesthetic products in the world.



Malcolm Harris, the Director of the School of Wood, working with Bunnings New Talent Scholarship holders.

Photo – Marie Lochman

to the west provides a gallery for exhibition and sales of fine wood products, while the 'leaf' to the east introduces the visitor to the ecology of the jarrah forest, offering interactive displays as a prelude to an interpretive walk.

Although it stretches only 400 metres, the fully wheel-chair accessible Heritage Centre Walk takes the visitor through a cross-section of the jarrah forest. Starting from the east leaf, the first phase of the walk simulates what is happening beneath the forest floor. A rammed-earth wall depicts the soil structure of the forest and the complex root system of the trees.

A stroll through the forest at ground level shows the effects of the ecologically sustaining elements of water and fire. An alternative biodiversity loop offers seasonal information on the plants and animals of the forest system. Finally, a short canopy walk takes visitors up to the tree-tops, for an aerial perspective on the forest system. Along the canopy walk, visitors also get a bird's-eye view of the craftspeople at work in the School of Wood.

A five-year business plan anticipates that the Forest Heritage Centre will cater for an estimated 75 000 visitors a year and, together with revenue generated by



### THE FOREST HERITAGE CENTRE BENEFACTORS

- ❖ Adelaide Timber Co.
- ❖ Alcoa of Australia
- ❖ B & B Timber Trusses
- ❖ Bunnings Forest Products
- ❖ Bushmill Timbers
- ❖ Coli Timber Products
- ❖ Colli & Sons
- ❖ Commonwealth Department of Tourism
- ❖ Corinthian Industries
- ❖ Cullity Timbers
- ❖ Department of Environment, Sports and Territories
- ❖ Don Stone
- ❖ Eldon Metal Industries
- ❖ Fine Wood Industry Project
- ❖ For Wood Tools and Machinery Sales
- ❖ Forest Industries Federation of Western Australia
- ❖ Gandy Timbers Pty Ltd
- ❖ Gunnar Hornum
- ❖ GW & NL Saunders
- ❖ Hamilton Sawmills
- ❖ Independant Timber Supplies
- ❖ Inglewood Joinery
- ❖ KD Power Sawmilling Co.
- ❖ Kevin Bourke Machinery
- ❖ Murray Joblink
- ❖ NG & LB Thomson
- ❖ Peel Development Commission
- ❖ Pickering Brook Sawmills
- ❖ Shire of Murray
- ❖ South West Development Commission
- ❖ Stefanelli Sawmillers Pty Ltd
- ❖ Timber Traders Cockburn
- ❖ TJ & MB Waugh
- ❖ V & D Ridolfo Pty Ltd
- ❖ Vanessa Horner
- ❖ WA Department of Commerce and Trade
- ❖ WA Department of Conservation and Land Management
- ❖ WA Department of Resources Development
- ❖ WA Lotteries Commission
- ❖ Wesfarmers Limited
- ❖ Wesfi
- ❖ Wespine Industries Pty Ltd
- ❖ Whittakers Ltd
- ❖ Worsley Timber Pty Ltd
- ❖ Youth Options, Mandurah

the School of Wood, it will soon be paying for itself. But as non-profit venture, it is ultimately an asset of the people of Western Australia. Its real legacy is intangible, creating a lasting bond with our natural, industrial and aesthetic heritage.

As the centre's literature explains, forests are complex, dynamic ecosystems, nowadays managed to maintain what has been described as the most important heritage of all: the ecological processes that sustain the forest itself. Heritage is what we have inherited and what we intend to pass on to future generations. But these elements are not meant to be static. The forest has been in continuous use for thousands of years and subject to heavy-duty demand since the turn of the century. The Forest Heritage Centre is edifying to tourists and industry workers alike, for in these surroundings it is impossible for those who use forest products—and this is all of us, whether we are creators or consumers—to lose touch with the precious origins of the resource.

The Forest Heritage Centre is the

outcome of a unique partnership between the Fine Wood Industry and CALM, with sponsorship from numerous State, Commonwealth and private agencies. Managed by an independent board as a non-profit making venture, the centre's mission is to increase awareness and understanding of how Western Australia's forest heritage can be conserved, managed and used most effectively. It carries the message that the natural environment is not a museum, set apart from human presence, to be visited occasionally and observed under glass. The Forest Heritage Centre presents a living, breathing example of how we fit into the whole. It is an instructive model of forests and forest use as it is happening now and, with long-term sustainable management of our forests, long into the future. Whether by a sense of nature, a fascination with forest products, or the lure of old-fashioned lore of the early timber-cutting days, visitors will be drawn irresistibly into the experience of the centre, and will leave with an enriched sense of heritage.

**Top left:** The old Forest Cadet School tradition of living in and learning about the forest lives on in its new function as a conference and accommodation centre.

**Top right:** The Forest Heritage Gallery will display and sell craft pieces made from fine wood, as well as other art and craft pieces inspired by the forest. Photos – Marie Lochman

Tammie Reid is a Community Education Officer with CALM's Corporate Relations Division and is based in Dwellingup. She can be contacted on (09) 538 1078. For the past two years Tammie has been developing the visitor displays and walktrails for the Forest Heritage Centre.

Mandy Clews is a contributing editor and can be contacted on (09) 430 7032.

The Forest Heritage Centre is off Acacia Road, Dwellingup, past CALM's District Office in Banksiadale Road. It is open to the public from 10 am to 5 pm daily. The telephone number for enquiries is (09) 538 1395.



A series of platforms and stairways give access to the treetop canopy and to a viewing deck inside the School of Wood.  
Photo – Barb Giles



**DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT**

Reprint from *LANDSCOPE* magazine (Summer 1995/96), published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.  
Managing editor: Ron Kawalilak. Editor: David Gough. Designer: Maria Duthie.

