

Second best

Jim Ruig's Big Red Shed is a larger-than-life magnet for recyclers, restorers, artists and architects

WHY take a few planks when you can have the whole bridge? One or two old beams when the entire wharf is up for grabs? Jim Ruig doesn't do things by halves. Even the headquarters of his building supplies business is larger than life.

Holding court at The Big Red Shed in Camford Street, Milton — a stand-out galvanised-iron building holding architectural antiques, fixtures and fittings, timber, furniture and old decorating pieces — Ruig has a fund of stories about the origins of the second-hand goods he has on sale.

"Yeah, I bought the whole bridge and wharf in Casino — ended up with five semi-trailers — 700 tonnes of timber. That big copper vat is from a toffee factory and I bought the sandstone corbels (stone trusses) from Tattersall's Club in Sydney."

He also bought a pair of massive, intricately carved church entrance doors, hand-made Victorian gates, a full staircase, fireplace mantels and surrounds, the wagon wheels once used as décor in a Fortitude Valley

INTERIORS

JudithAnn Guerassimoff

nightclub and a huge picture frame complete with old, pitted glass found in the ceiling of a bakery demolished in West End.

These major finds are displayed against a backdrop of dozens of doors, windows, sinks and baths, shutters, floorboards, hooks, handles, and door knobs.

Ruig's customers range from architects and interior designers to professional restorers, sculptors and furniture makers, home handy people and the kind of people who scour demolition yards and second-hand places looking to match a piece of rare wood or complete an original kitchen restoration with an Early Kooka gas stove from the Thirties.

"Or those inner-west executives who like to do some hammering and sawing on weekends — making picture frames from old architraves," he says.

The resource base is widespread. Ruig also runs a demolition company and is often the first on the scene to unearth timber and fittings suit-

able for recycling. He checks out country auctions for bargains and farms with barnloads of old timber and other collectables.

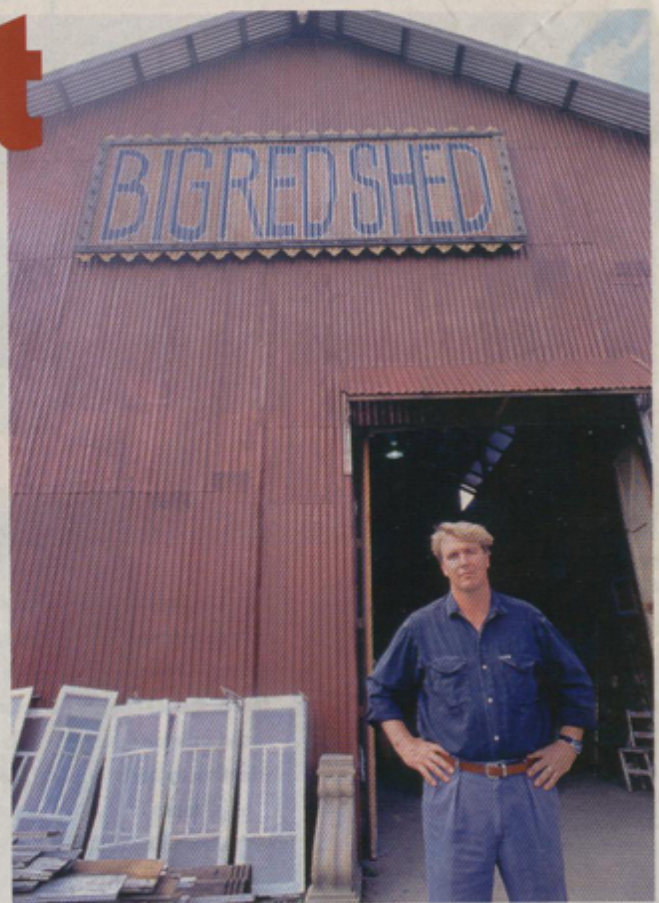
Ruig became involved with second-hand building materials when he and his wife, Leigh Bird, were buying and restoring old houses for a living, along the way collecting surplus materials and selling them as a sideline.

"I didn't start out as a greeno recycling type," says Ruig.

"I've ended up that way as a by-product of the business and it's great. Now when people are restoring a house it can really end up being an original project, instead of half and half."

He also mills old timbers, including ironbark and crow's ash, to produce 25cm-wide hardwood floorboards and massive beams used in the construction of Santa Fe-style post and rail houses — another sideline.

The Big Red Shed is open six days a week and will soon be open on Sundays. "It's a funny thing, but it's the people in the city who have a country mentality. They've got the disposable incomes — they're the ones yearning for the country style."



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