

MATERIALS: TIMBER

The Re-emergence of Solid Timbers

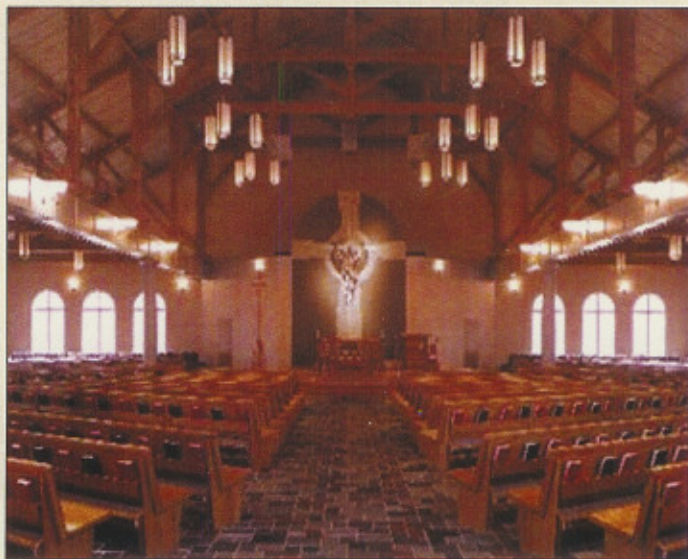
In the triad of the dominant structural building materials—timber, concrete and steel—each has its advantages. Timber, by far, has the longest history. It is both renewable and biodegradable. Its fire performance, in heavy timber sizes, is superior to unprotected steel. And, very importantly, it is appealing to the eye and hand, and yes, the nose. The presence of wood in a commercial building adds warmth that is almost measurable.

In the early centuries of this country, timber was the dominant structural material in commercial, as well as residential, structures. As steel production became a major force, girts, purlins, beams, joists and columns that had been fashioned out of heavy timbers began to be manufactured from steel, particularly in commercial structures. For the most part, the component names remained the same, as did their individual function within the structure. Interestingly, something else remained the same—the practice of placing a pine bough at the highest peak of a building upon the completion of its structural skeleton. This tradition was followed by timber framers for nearly two thousand years; high steel workers have continued the tradition.

After taking a hiatus, timber framing is again appearing in com-



For its work on the 15,000-square-foot Wedge Restaurant at Liberty Forge Golf Course in Mechanicsburg, PA, Lancaster County Timber Frames, Inc. won the coveted Members Project Expo Award at the 19th Annual Timber Framers Guild Conference held in Montebello, Canada. The firm is the first to receive the award for two consecutive years.



The interior of St. Mary's Church in Johnson City, TN—completed in 1999 by Lancaster County Timber Frames—demonstrates the beauty and warmth of timber framing.

mercial construction. Three decades ago, just a handful of companies were working with heavy timbers. Today, there are more than 200 companies in the United States involved in timber framing. In 1985, the Timber Framers Guild of North America, dedicated to the education of its members and the public, held its first conference in Hancock, MA. Its name has since changed to the Timber Framers Guild and has members in all 50 states, nine of Canada's provinces and 16 other countries around the world.

In the early years of the Guild, the majority of timber framed structures were residential. As the public became aware of the possibilities, timber framing became much more common for commercial structures, often in the form of roof trusses, but also as whole structures. You will find new timber framing in churches, museums, wineries, restaurants, shopping complexes, libraries and golf course clubhouses. Since timber framing is a method, not a style of construction, it remains efficiently flexible in achieving a particular feel or look or mood. Timber framing is, at its essence, structural sculpture. People will always feel attracted to and comforted by it on a visual, tactile and emotional level. ■

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