

BY ROE OSBORN



## Driftwood Dreams

Huge driftwood trees bleached to a silvery gray by the salt and the sun pile up randomly on the beaches on the Pacific coast of Washington state **(1)**. As tempting as wood like this twisted and knobby giant of a burl might be, removal of driftwood is highly regulated **(2)**. Smaller logs that can be handled easily often become part of shelters like this lean-to built between two beach boulders **(3)**.

**I spent my youth** on the shores of Rhode Island, and long before I put on my contractor belt, I had become a serial beachcomber. My most prized finds were chunks of silvery grey driftwood worn smooth by the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Rarely would I find a piece of wood big enough to be used for anything but a coffee-table decoration. But on a recent visit to the Pacific Northwest, I was blown away to see the beaches littered with huge driftwood trees, some with trunks that were many feet in diameter **(1)**.

Evidently, the entire Pacific Coast of the northwestern United States is cluttered with driftwood trees. Locals I spoke to said that most of the trees are swept from the banks of rivers to the north. From there, they float out to sea until they get caught in the prevailing north-to-south Pacific Ocean currents. Finally, they wash ashore in one of the fierce storms that routinely pound the Northwest Coast. Some of these trees supposedly spend years drifting in the ocean before making their way onto a beach.

As I picked my way through the piles of silvery driftwood trees, my mind began to devise ways to use them—as lumber, as art, or maybe

just in their natural driftwood character integrated into a regular structure. One twisted and gnarly burl that grabbed my attention was more than 10 feet long **(2)**. But then I considered how difficult it would be to mill these driftwood trees. The salt and sand embedded in the trees would probably destroy most any type of blade, and even if you came up with a feasible way to mill the trees, just getting them off the beach would be a monumental task. On the beach, there were lean-to shelters made from smaller pieces **(3)**, but the larger trees seemed to defy any attempt that might be made to move them.

Back home on the East Coast, I did some research and discovered that gathering driftwood on those beaches is regulated by the state and that taking large logs or taking driftwood for commercial purposes is prohibited. The beach-goers I saw seemed accustomed to the presence of these giant ocean travelers, walking in and around the maze of silvery logs to reach the open sand near the water's edge. I'm sure they'd seen the "amazed tourist" look before on faces other than mine.

*Roe Osborn is a senior editor at JLC.*

Photos: 1 & 2, Roe Osborn; 3, Laurie Sullivan