



Gold Winner at the annual “Wood” awards, the Savill Garden Visitor Centre in Windsor Great Park is testament to a partnership between modern design, traditional craftsmanship and local timber to create an iconic building. Acting as a gateway to the stunning Savill Garden, the building uses sustainable, locally produced materials which reflect the rolling terrain of the surrounding Great Park and that of the South East - England’s most heavily wooded region. With its undulating, strong yet flowing, leaf-shaped roof clad in silver-grey oak, it is the largest gridshell structure in the UK. Expert carpenters, the Green Oak Carpentry and sawmillers English Woodlands Timber Ltd worked on the project.

objectives

- To produce an innovative and contemporary building, in sympathy with the surrounding landscape, using sustainable, locally produced materials.
- To provide visitors and local residents with a nationally acclaimed venue of great aesthetic appeal that would add value to the visitor experience.
- To pull together all the Garden’s visitor facilities in one space.

actions

Strong teamwork between forester, sawmiller and Savill Garden Team built co-operation and trust through:

- Early engagement of joinery specialists to apply pragmatism to specialist design and evolve a buildable, cost-effective design appropriate for locally available timber.
- Intensive testing of larch timber by structural engineers to establish its viability.
- Joint individual tree selection and shared understanding of specifications by miller, forester and carpenter.
- Visual grading of tree quality - standing, at stump and in the mill (ring width and frequency of knots)
- Attention to detail at every stage of the process.

achievements

Whole Project

- A single building to house a restaurant, shop, garden centre, seminar room for 120 people and exhibition space for the local community.
- Doubling of visitor numbers from 200,000 visitors a year to an estimated 400,000 since the new building opened in June 2006.
- A visitor centre business that has created over 50 jobs in the restaurant and shop for local residents and students, strengthening the local economy.

Use of Timber in the Building

- Three top awards for use of timber in construction.
- An exemplar for use of home-grown softwood (larch) in a structural context.
- A beautiful home-grown oak floor and oak rain screen to the roof.
- Confidence in the performance of home-grown timber.

An exemplar of sustainability, demonstrating that locally-grown timber harvested from well-managed woodlands within a few miles of its end use is achievable.

background Windsor Castle is listed as the second top “pay to enter” tourist attraction in South East England. The Savill Gardens is one of three attractions in the 400 hectare Royal Landscape at Windsor. The Visitor Centre project is part of a larger strategy by the Royal Landscape, which includes the Valley Gardens, Virginia Water and Savill Garden to raise awareness among visitors of the southern end of Windsor Great Park. The Windsor Great Park attracts over 2 million visits a year and is the only Royal Park owned and managed by the Crown Estate.

The Windsor Forestry Department manages over 3,000 hectares of woodland including remnants of the medieval royal hunting forest. Its woodlands have the sustainability badge of FSC certification and are managed in accordance with a Forestry Commission approved management plan. There is a long tradition of woodland management and estate timber production amounts to some 15,000 tonnes a year. Forest Manager Derick Stickler says the larch trees were a model of good silviculture: high pruned, slow grown and regularly thinned and grown beyond their normal economic rotation. Today, it would be difficult to select another 450 m³ of timber of the quality used in the building.

The design of the Savill Building roof also demonstrates sustainability and should encourage the sector to explore the potential for:

- Using lower grades of timber in construction as well as higher grades.
- Using “improved” or engineered timber to eliminate defects and produce structural high performance from lower grade material.
- Reducing and re-using waste products.
- Careful grading and use of naturally durable materials to avoid unnecessary preservative treatments.
- Choosing materials “fit for purpose” as opposed to over-specifying or over-processing and inviting recourse to imported products.
- Reducing “timber miles” by encouraging in-situ works where appropriate.

quotes

“It is a noble anteroom to the landscape beyond and inside, the revealed latticework of the roof is a tour de force” Hugh Pearman, The Sunday Times.

“The whole concept of the new building, its grounds, the shop and the restaurant exceeds anything one could have ever hoped for.” Michael and Angela Schwar, local residents.

“The ospreys love it here; since building these facilities we have had a 30% increase in population numbers.” Elmarie Van Heerden, Manager Savill Visitors' Centre.

partners

Architect:	Glenn Howells Architects
Carpenters:	The Green Oak Carpentry Co Ltd
Main Contractor:	William Verry LLP
Owner/Timber Supplier:	Crown Estate
Project Managers:	Ridge & Partners LLP
Sawmillers:	English Woodlands Timber Ltd
Structural Engineer:	Buro Happold & Engineers HRW

funding

Project cost: £5.3m
Crown Estate Capital Fund

lessons learnt

Local knowledge was crucial to the success of the project, along with a thorough knowledge of the quality and quantity of the timber available.