

# Sunken Treasure

Contemplating flooring options? Why not consider something that's light on the environment and heavy on historical significance? Many homeowners are buying old-growth wood flooring, the source of which might surprise you.

During the early 19th century, every square inch of our virgin country was logged. There were colonists to house, ships to build and an insatiable demand for wood in the old country. In the Ottawa Valley alone, over 14 billion oak and pine trees were cut from the forests and floated down the rivers. During every drive, about five per cent of these logs sank to the bottom, lost forever. Or so thought the lumberjacks of old.

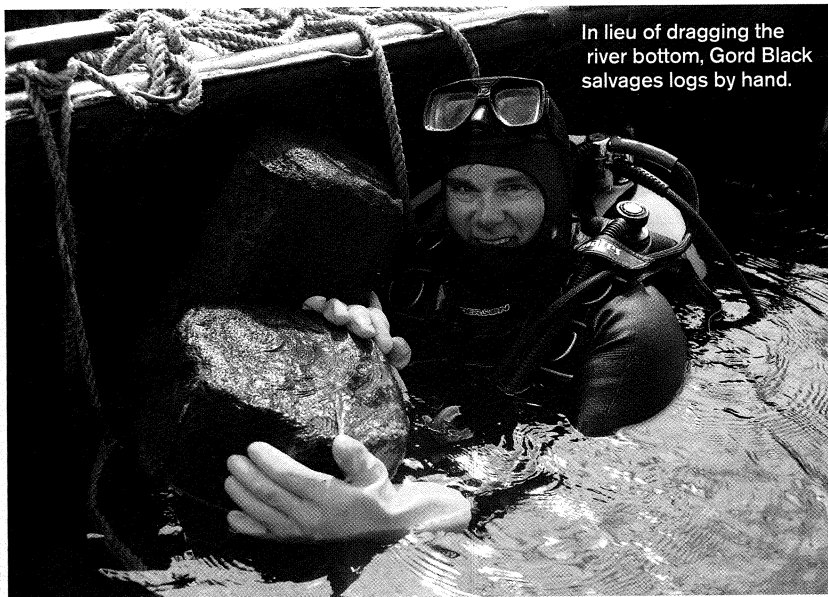
What was the lumber barons' loss has become the renovator's gain. For the past decade, Gord Black of Logs End Salvage has raised these lost logs from the depths of the Coulonge, the Ottawa and myriad miles of former logging rivers from Quyon to Temiskaming. The summer of 2010 was Black's best yet. "Low water levels gave us the opportunity to get into areas we had never been able to get to before," says Black. "In 10 years, we found 10 oak logs. This year, we found 30, each about 40 feet long."

Some of the logs could be dated to 1810. But before you think that 200 years at the bottom of a Canadian river would be bad news for the wood, consider this: The lack of sunshine and

oxygen actually helps preserve the timbers. In fact, they make superior lumber, for today's second-growth forests just don't yield boards this big.

From June to Labour Day, Black and his crew of scuba divers seek out logs like so many treasure hunters. Black himself has participated in 2,500 dives. With the help of sonar and historical logging maps, he pursues his booty of ancient logs, securing each one to the salvage boats by hand in an effort to avoid damaging the river bottom, something

**Salvaged logs are worth their weight in green.**



In lieu of dragging the river bottom, Gord Black salvages logs by hand.

dragging the river by machine would surely do. Black says his team also avoids sensitive areas as recommended by the provincial authorities on both sides of the river as well as Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The latter requires strict adherence to log-salvaging rules to prevent disruption to fish.

Of course, logs aren't the only things found in the rivers. Black says he has uncovered many unusual finds such as old tools, arrowheads, chains and anchors. Of note was the aboriginal war

## X Marks the Log

Lumber tycoons were all in competition, driving their harvest down the different waterways of the Ottawa Valley. They needed a way to distinguish their lumber from that of the other logger barons. Timber marks consisting of unique symbols, numbers and letters were carved, burned or stamped onto each log. Each mark relayed where the log was cut, the date it fell and to whom it belonged.

canoe and 2,000-year-old pottery resting at the bottom of one riverbed. Both sit in a museum today.

Once the treasure-hunting is done, though, it's time to start creating a new, modern treasure for the home. After air-drying in a mill for 60 days, the logs are sawn into lumber. The boards are air-dried for another six months. A final stage of kiln-drying brings moisture levels down to six or nine percent, which is the industry standard. The wood is then milled into

tongue-and-groove flooring at Black's mill near Shawville, north of Montreal. From salvage to ready-for-the-family-room-floor, the entire process takes 12 months.

What is perhaps most amazing of all is that some of the logs were already 350 years old when they were cut down, two centuries ago. Currently, Logs End sells about 300,000 square feet of wide-plank flooring a year, each plank packed with history.

JASON SANTERRE