

Wood Defects – what to look for

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Staining

- Distinctive colouring inside the timber running up the grain of the wood, and not apparent on external examination of the piece. This distinctive blue staining can be caused by a number of fungi species – not necessarily rot – which thrive in wet and warm conditions.



Surface Shakes

- Splits along the surface of the timber in the direction of the grain, penetrating in severe cases up to 5cm (2"). Surface shakes happen when boards are sawn and left to air-dry without proper control. Internal shakes are known as 'checking' and result when the timber is kiln-dried too quickly.



Sap Pockets

- Sap pockets are a natural defect that are found to a greater or lesser extent in all pines. A build-up of sap forms a pocket within the timber, and when this pocket is cut into the sap is released, runs dry and leaves a void in the timber. Although usually quite small, in some cases sap pockets can run to several feet long.



Bark Pockets

- Another natural defect, and similar to the sap pocket, bark pockets are usually formed as a result of physical trauma or damage to the tree during growth. A piece of bark may become trapped when a wound grows over, creating a void in the timber which only becomes apparent when the timber is cut into.



Red Streaks

- Found in the Sitka Spruce, these streaks are formed as a result of the tree being subjected to severe environmental conditions during its life – perhaps growing in an exposed part of the forest. The hard red streaks add weight to the timber, and contain tension that is only released when the board is sized for the mast.



Thunder Shakes

- These can occur when the tree crashes to the ground during felling. They are almost impossible to spot until the wood has been smoothed by planing. A very slight thunder shake break across the grain, often the full depth of the timber, will result in the spar snapping. When these are discovered during the final stages of spar shaping, the only solution is to start again from scratch.

