

Custom Sawmilling, A Comfortable Lifestyle Choice

Waiheke Island is a haven of beautiful vineyards, olive groves and white sandy beaches, all just a short ferry ride from downtown Auckland, New Zealand. In 1999 Rob Macdonald was living on the island where he worked in retail. After work he would help out a friend part-time as a joiner, making coffee tables, dining tables and cabinets out of wood.



This work evolved into kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor furniture featuring wooden slabs. His tables and seats were in high demand on the island. Rob had trouble sourcing the lumber he needed so he decided to get a sawmill, which would enable him to cut any size timber he required.

While researching sawmills, Rob looked at a twin-blade mill but didn't like the hydraulic drive the particular model came equipped with. "You can't fix a hydraulic mill yourself when a tube breaks while you're at a remote location, so downtime is inevitable".

At one stage Rob considered getting a bandsaw mill, but he felt that it was too limiting because it couldn't cut the large logs that Rob had access to.

Rob discovered Peterson Sawmills early on in his research. After speaking with several people who operated different types of mills, he settled on an 8" Winch Production Frame (WPF). Deciding factors for Rob were portability, ease of use and servicing.

"You can't fix a hydraulic mill yourself when a tube breaks while you're at a remote location"

"I needed a mill I could take to the logs due to their size and location. For me, the main advantages of the Peterson are its portability and suitability for operating on steep hill sides, which means I can take on pretty much any job", says Rob.

"We were called in to a job on a farm to mill native Matai logs. They were too big to move, measuring up to two metres in diameter, so we milled them where they were felled. We would just move from one hilly paddock to the next and set the mill up around the logs! Matai is my favourite type of wood to cut as it has zero tension and a beautiful colour."

MILLER FEATURE



As a custom sawmiller, you never quite know where you're going to end up next, so having a low-maintenance sawmill is important to Rob.

"It's relatively easy to perform general maintenance and to replace wearable parts like bearings etc. myself, especially when you compare the relative simplicity of this mill to fully hydraulic ones".

"We would just move from one hilly paddock to the next and set the mill up around the logs"

Since purchasing his WPF in 2003, Rob's career has evolved into a full-time lifestyle business as a professional sawmiller. The business has been built purely by word-of-mouth, he doesn't have an online presence and doesn't advertise. Nowadays, people simply ring or email him.

Rob takes on all kinds of on-site contract milling jobs all-over the North Island of New Zealand, from cutting down Macrocarpa or Cypress shelter belts for farmers, to milling single logs for arborists. Recently, Rob turned three truckloads of Tasmanian blackwood logs into flooring timber, slabs for bench tops and kitchen tables and dimensional lumber.

One of the more interesting jobs Rob undertook was in Rotorua, Peterson Portable Sawmill's hometown. The local geothermal attractions and mountain bike tracks are hugely popular with visitors to the area.



MILLER FEATURE

It is a mecca for mountain bikers of all levels with hundreds of kilometers of tracks scattered throughout the forests.

Rob was contracted to mill dozens of previously felled Redwood trees, to keep mountain bike trails clear at Skyline Rotorua. Skyline is one of the locations of Crankworx, the multi-stop world-class mountain biking festival.

In 2018 Rob upgraded his Peterson to a 10" Giant Winch Production Frame, Peterson Portable Sawmills' most popular model. because he noticed increasing demand for the capability to mill bigger logs.

Although the diameter of the logs on offer appears to be getting bigger nowadays, the length of most remains steady at about six metres, which fit within the WPF's standard tracks. Rob is well prepared to take on the odd Longfellow though, with 4.2m (13.8ft) track extensions. Our JP, WPF and DWS models can be fitted with unlimited additional tracks.

Rob runs an effective one-person operation which has provided him with a comfortable living for over twenty years. He enjoys traveling to different milling locations and having a bit of downtime in the winter.

In Rob's spare time he goes hunting or makes little cabins/tiny homes out of rejected wood. He even lives in one himself!

Although Rob is no longer living on swanky Waiheke Island, he's certainly enjoying the lifestyle that his Peterson Sawmill is affording him.



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