

AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE: STAN CEGLINSKI

Stan Ceglinski is the image of the timber-getters of old, the early pioneers. A true-blue mountain of a man, he evokes memories of the romantic outback of Banjo Patterson, the battler outback of Henry Lawson. He is rough and unpolished - Stan Ceglinski is the real deal.

THE EARLY DAYS

"I've always loved working with my hands, my heart - it's always been part of me, a genetic memory I think - from a young age, my mind was filled with stories of the "old" ways in country Poland."

He was raised a Polish farmboy in a suburban Newcastle home. Among his favourite memories are his mother's stories of subsistence farming in Poland - she taught him not only how to grow his own food, but also how to weave, how to make a pair of shoes, how to make his own clothes. His father, a cobbler by trade, taught him how to work with his hands. "When the hookshed had to be built, or the fence repaired, Dad didn't ring for any wood deliveries. He'd grab the axe and bow saw and go into the bush and fell some saplings to do the job." Stan reminisces "At six years old, I was a big lad. Dad reckoned I could help and, boy, I wanted to. I loved to be with him. Mate - I loved these days."

Subsistence farming was in his blood. As a young man, his dream was to, one day, own his own farm. "I could smell it, see it, feel it. I said to my girlfriend, I love you heaps, but I'm going up the country to look for some land. If you want to come it's okay by me - if not, I'll see you one day! And she said - you find some land and we'll see. Bloody Beauty! Mate, you don't have to die to go to heaven! I was on a mission."

So he hitchhiked north, with no plan except to find land and a farm and with a belief that "If you jump into the current, things happen and you start on a journey". And he was right. As luck would have it, he got a lift with architect Ian McKay, who was to become one of Australia's most exceptional and award-winning architects, designer and builder of the Beach hotel in Byron Bay, Strop's house, Paul Hogan's house and many other master works.

Ian offered him a job - digging drains, planting trees, starting a nursery at first. "I was his apprentice for a number of years, learning what passion in your work meant. I learnt so very much from him."

BILLINUDGEL WOOD WORKING COMPANY

With his sweetheart by his side, and as his family began to grow, Stan decided it was time to start his own business. He left his work with Ian and started working for himself in 7 local forests as a private salvage logger. With his 1938 WWII Ford Army Blitz 4wd, fitted with 1200x20 flotation tires, a crane and a 200 hp winch, logs of up to 15 tons could be winched and logs up to 5 tons carried out of rugged terrain or paddocks. Work was plentiful, cutting house poles, splitting posts, hand hewing beams with broad axe and adze work. On the home front, Stan recalls "buying land, building a house and sheds and turning a property into an interesting farm with a blacksmith shop, car repair (actually repair anything shop), a woodworking shop, a shingle mill, bringing up 3 kids and trying to develop a business sure did stretch our income, but I learned to do what other business people do:

I learned to say Yes.

Can you supply me some posts? Yes

Can you sell me some bridge girders? Yes

Can you deliver me some firewood? Yes

Can you split me a shingle roof? Ah, ah yes!

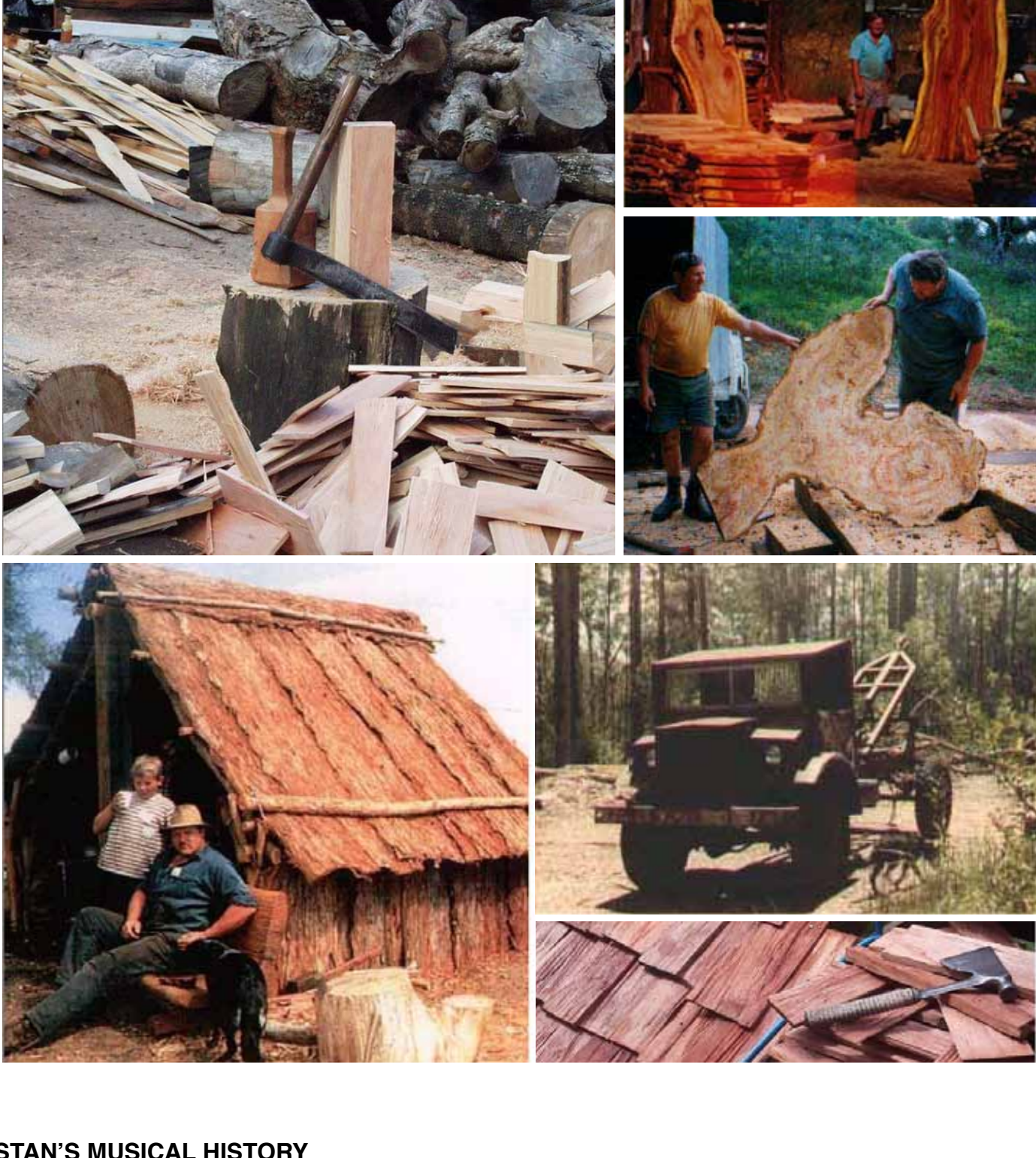
So I found out who was the oldest, best shingle splitter around. I packed my wife and kids in the car and went 4 hours to visit legendary bushman Stan Barlow."

Old Stan Barlow patiently taught Stan all he knew about the "hands on" side of the age-old craft of splitting shingles - the way to hold the tools, movements of arm & wrist, little things that made the job more productive and easier. "The rest was easy - just practice a lot!" says Stan.

He began producing shingles and shakes commercially. Word got around of the shingle quality that he was producing and work started flooding in. In the following years, with his sons in the business to help, the manufacturing of Australian shingles and shakes saw their name linked to hundreds of jobs Australia-wide and internationally - National Trust, Heritage, resorts, restorations and private commissions. "We learned a lot about old houses, new houses, resorts, timber "makeup" and structure and the beauty of our forests and trees" Stan comments. The company he founded, Billinudgel Wood Working Company, grew quickly, the family's vast knowledge of Australian timbers and their experience with all aspects of timber harvesting, falling, snigging, transporting, processing in demand. "Forty-one years later, we are regarded as Australia's premier hardwood shingle company" Stan says proudly.

The business that started off cutting firewood, posts, poles and girders swiftly moved on to designing and building bridges, barns and furniture, including works in the "African Water Hole" at Taronga Park Zoo, and restaurant refurbishment of the "Post and Rail Steak House" at Airlie Beach, North QLD.

Stan loves wood and sees it, not only as part of Australia's heritage, but as a magnificent and vital part of our daily lives. "To become a true craftsman," he says "a man must live in wood, listen to it, learn it, love it and understand it."



STAN'S MUSICAL HISTORY

Stan made his first musical instrument when he was 17. A friend showed him a homemade traditional Appalachian dulcimer - two days later, he had crafted a crude, but very playable dulcimer, made from some plywood off a wardrobe found at the dump, some machine heads off a wrecked guitar, some fretwire left over from his mate's dulcimer and some beech wood. "A traditional dulcimer is played over the knee with a feather, but I wanted to play it like a guitar - the traditional one needs the sides steam bent but I used straight sides - much quicker - and inlays are very tedious and take forever, so I got some white paint and painted on some stripes. One day I electrified it and played the blues with a slide on it!



He made 6 more, each a little different - one based on a scavenged tambourine that sounded like a banjo, another a banjo made out of a tambourine and some wood thrown out from the ten pin bowling alley. In those early days, the finale was a 4 string tenor banjo using a shop bought tambourine and the timber and machine heads from a salvaged guitar wreck, also from the dump.

Resourceful, our Stan.



In 2013, the desire to design and create musical instruments resurfaced, but now he had a successful woodworking business and factory/workshop/studio and many years of woodworking experience under his belt. While he retained his love for making musical instruments from "found" or salvaged materials, he also began making serious - and magnificent - guitars.

"Walking into Stan's Music Factory is like entering Aladdin's cave and suddenly all wishes are granted... it is packed with all things timber. As a fellow lover of rare and beautiful woods, what caught my eye like a glorious rainbow was the wide varieties of timber used to craft his vast range of wondrous musical instruments. There are 3, 4 and 6 string masterpieces, some even utilizing vintage car hubcaps. This guy has a unique imagination! His instruments look great, but most importantly, they sound as good as they look." John Carter Cash

These days.....

"Me and Noelene are living on the Far North Coast of NSW, we can see and smell the ocean, apart from the travel to woodshows, I love cutting wood, which is what I do at my mill, cutting any tree into something (waste is a crime).

Weekends, I dream of fishing but it doesn't happen as often as it should. One of my favorite pastimes is to relax on the front verandah and watch passing whales or boats (wonder they're going), or playing my favorite guitar. My most favorite pastime is sitting on the verandah with my "best friend in the world" Noelene, with a red wine nearby, listening to the sounds of life going by, the birds chirping and the smell of the bush and the ocean.

I could write hundreds of pages on my life, stories that'd make you laugh so much that you might cry - like when we got running water for the first time - but not for now, I might tell you when I see you."

