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ITALIANS CHOOSE WELSH STYLE FOR NEW MOUNTAIN VISITOR CENTRE

The Welsh timber industry has turned the concept of style on its head by selling its products into the stylish Italian market – with a little help from a Welsh run European re-generation project.

The latest heat treated birch floor tiles, produced in Wales using a Coed Cymru developed process, form a pattern representing mountain peaks at a new hillside visitor centre near Genoa.

The deal to supply the flooring came after a visit to Wales by Italian members of Robinwood, the European Interreg 111c RFO (Regional Framework Operation) rural regeneration project – funded by the European Union and Welsh Assembly Government.

The Italian team, working with Coed Cymru on forest management and industry development as part of the Robinwood Project, were so impressed with the heat treated floor tiles that they ordered them for their new architect designed building.

And members of the Coed Cymru team were at the official opening of the new Parco dell' Aveto Visitor Centre in Rezzoaglio (GE) in Liguria last week to see the finished floor for the first time.

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“The Italian community which has built the new centre saw the tiles while they were visiting Wales as part of the Robinwood collaboration project we are working on,” said Andy Stewart of Coed Cymru.

The floor is a mixture of birch tongue and groove strip, and square (100 x 100mm) parquet end grain tiles in Welsh birch made by Kenton Jones in their Welshpool factory using small dimension local timber.

The tiles were treated at high temperature in an oven at the Coed Cymru product development workshop, to darken the wood and provide a striking contrast with the light beech strip floor, before being shipped to Italy by local carrier.

“There is a lot of interest in these new tiles, and we have supplied them to some very famous people across the UK,” said Kenton Jones. “They are very striking and extremely hard wearing.” As well as the Italian order Welsh birch floor tiles have also been flow to the USA.

“Using small section Welsh timber, adding value to it and selling it across the world is exactly the kind of work that can really help regenerate rural Wales,” said Kim Burnham, Robinwood Wales manager.

“Robinwood’s key objective has been to work throughout Europe to identify new ways of making the forests pay, putting new life back into rural areas and boosting the economy. And we are very pleased to have played a small part by bringing together the people who have made this exciting – and very attractive – flooring project in Italy happen,” said Kim.

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More details on Robinwood are available from Kim Burnham - e-mail kim.burnham@forestry.gsi.gov.uk – tel: 08456 040845 or on the Robinwood web-site: www.robin-wood.it.

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31.12.07

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Editor's note:

Robinwood has given Wales its first opportunity to be a partner in one of the European Interreg 111c RFO (Regional Framework Operation) projects aimed at bringing partner countries together, fostering cross border work between academics, private business and the public sector. The Welsh part of the three and a half year project is worth 1 million Euros to Wales.

Robinwood is a cross-border European project aimed at identifying how forests, trees and timber across Europe can play a vital role in the revitalisation of rural communities through new business opportunities, flood prevention and wood fuel energy. It is hoped that it will also change political perception of the role woodlands can play in the social and economic future of rural communities and build new links between the partner countries involved.

Robinwood will promote the sustainable development of rural areas and overcome obstacles to progress by creating: a woodland chain process - territorial promotion, marketing - new techniques in forestry development - certification, policy changes, silviculture - hydrogeological improvements - models to prevent instability and reduce risks promotion of wood as a fuel source for energy - new management/technologies.

Analyses, sharing of experiences, the creation of new approaches, pilot projects, the preparation of operational and promotional plans and promotions will be used to achieve these. Direct results will be: workshops, meetings, studies, reports, master plans, promotion campaigns, events, maps, networks, partnerships, surveys and directives. Certain activities will be carried out by means of sub-projects assigned by means of open invitations to tender.