



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is yakisugi, or “shou sugi ban”?

A. Yakisugi is a traditional heat-treated wood siding material that has been used in Japan for hundreds of years. It is heat-treated by burning the outside board faces in order to make them more resistant to UV, rot, fire, and insects, at the same time being low to no maintenance. It is specifically a cladding product, not a process applied to wood such as furniture or beams. “Yakisugi-ita” is Japanese for “burnt sugi planks” (sugi is a cypress but is often called “cedar”), and “shou sugi ban” is actually a misreading of the word in Japanese that is often used in the West.

Q. Where are you located?

A. Our timberland and headquarters are in Hiroshima, and our mills are located in both Hiroshima and Tokushima, Japan. Our North American distribution is out of Portland, Oregon, and our European distribution is out of Duesseldorf, Germany.

Q. How long have you been in business?

A. Mr. Nakamoto’s grandfather established Nakamoto Zourin in 1959 when the family expanded from timber management into millwork. Nakamoto Forestry North America was launched in late 2015, and Nakamoto Forestry Europe was launched in 2019.

Q. Is Nakamoto Forestry’s yakisugi more expensive and does it have a larger carbon footprint due to being imported?

A. We are actually able to offer a low price point (\$5~\$13/SF incl. oil finish) since many of our logs are sourced internally and our kilns and entire manufacturing process are to economies of scale above and beyond any other manufacturer in the world. In terms of shipping cost and carbon footprint, our mills are located in the forests where we harvest our logs, all production is in-house, and 99% of the trip to our overseas warehouses is by efficient ocean freight. Compare that to a retail mill buying profiles or blanks from a larger mill, which in turn is buying logs that have been trucked in a hundred or more miles. We find that we can control quality, cost and carbon footprint better by managing the entire process.

Q. Can yakisugi be used for interior paneling? Does it need to be installed a certain direction?

A. Yakisugi can absolutely be used on interior surfaces, and we offer specific stains, topcoats and fire retardant options for them. It can be installed vertically, horizontally or diagonally as well.

Q. Does the charred finish shed soot?

A. If not re-oiled periodically the soot layer on Suyaki will erode over about 50 years on an exterior application – but the erosion is simply so gradual that you will never notice any residue. Most yakisugi is installed with a factory oil prefinish, which bonds in loose soot. Wipe the wall down after install with a wet rag to clean any soot residue from handling, or simply let a good rain or two wash it off. For interior applications, we use oil finishes to prevent damage or soiling.

Q. Is yakisugi suitable for all climates?

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Q. What advice can you give me to help DIY yakisugi for my project?

A. There is a holistic series of millwork steps to get good heat treatment and dimensional stability that are different from American millwork – it is not just burning lumber until it looks right or copying techniques from videos online. The information available in English is incomplete, and few people actually know the correct process. We have been milling yakisugi for several decades and use logs from our own forests – so in any case there is little chance you will be able to DIY it for less cost than we sell retail for the same grade of wood. However, if you want to do it yourself, here are the basic parameters:

1. Use plain-sawn cypress only (we use sugi), as other species can be highly problematic.
2. Face the outside of the log to the outside of the resawn moulder blank.
3. Use a shiplap or square edge profile (not T&G).
4. Use planks about ½” thick.
5. Air dry the wood completely, no KD.
6. Use the traditional triangular flue method to achieve consistent high heat. Torches are inconsistent and do not apply enough heat to penetrate into the wood for a functional charred surface (but they do suffice if your goal is the burned aesthetic on an interior or furniture application).
7. Burn the wood way beyond your comfort level to where you think you’ve ruined the plank.
8. If desired, use a soft wire brush to remove the soot layer.
9. Finish the wood with an oil stain as desired (most oils work just fine).
10. Follow our installation instructions for best results.