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Craftsmen Say “We Want Edge-glued, Standard-size Panels”

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Abstract

Wood craftsmen would like an alternative to hardwood lumber and plywood and softwood products. They are very interested in edge-glued, standard-size panels. These conclusions are based on interviews with craftsmen at two trade shows, and the results are included in this report along with our recommendations for optimum acceptance by craftsmen of this new product.

Have you ever had trouble finding the hardwood lumber that you wanted for a woodworking project? Would you like to purchase a different form of solid wood for your woodworking project? During 1981, we participated in two trade shows to see how craftsmen would answer these questions. We were trying to find out if craftsmen would be interested in purchasing standard-size, edge-glued panels as a supplement to or substitute for hardwood lumber. We found that craftsmen indeed want edge-glued, standard-size panels.

The trade shows were “Excellence in Woodworking-East” held in New York City, September 11-13, 1981, and “Excellence in Woodworking” held in Chicago, October 30-November 1, 1981. We felt that these shows would provide excellent arenas in which to interview craftsmen, and we were right.

Craftsmen presently purchase and use, when they can find it, hardwood lumber and 4- x 8-foot sheets of hardwood plywood. At times, they must purchase less preferred softwood products when they would rather use fine hardwoods. Although hardwood plywood is excellent, it will not meet all of the craftsmen's needs.

Using rough, unplanned hardwood lumber is often difficult for many reasons. For example, if craftsmen can find it, they may have to dry it. Then, it requires planing and rough cutting. Many craftsmen do not have the necessary or proper equipment. Standard-size, edge-

glued blanks or panels were developed for the furniture industry (Araman et al. 1982), and we believe that the product will solve these problems.

Our Booth and Interviews

Our booth (Fig. 1) in both New York City and Chicago included:

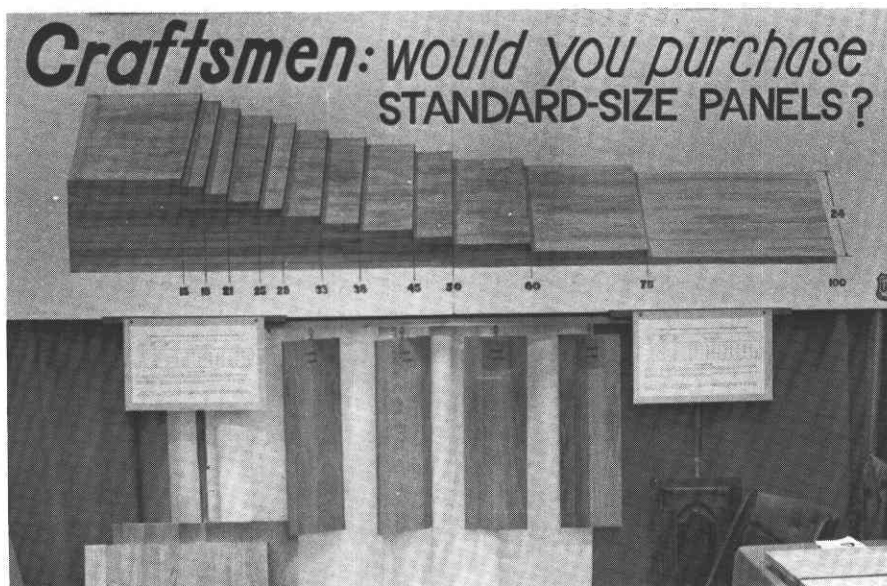


Figure 1.—Booth sign and other display materials at the New York City and Chicago “Excellence in Woodworking” shows.

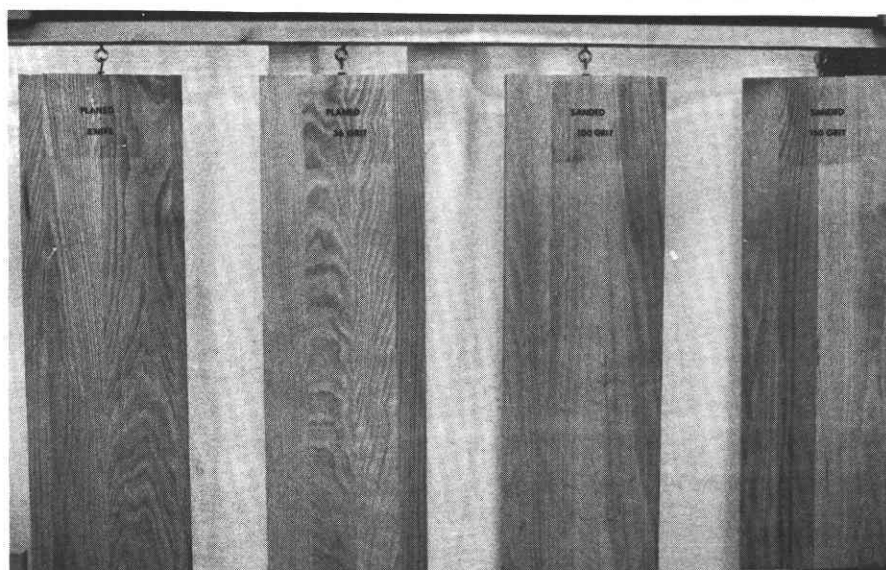


Figure 2.—A set of panels with four different surface preparations (knife planed, abrasive planed, finished sanded: 100 grit and 150 grit).

(1) a sign showing a set of standard-size blanks with a statement saying "Craftsmen: Would you purchase standard-size panels?"; (2) a set of panels with different surface treatments (Fig. 2); (3) a list of recommended standard sizes for craftsmen (Table 1); and (4) samples of red oak, white oak, cherry, hard maple, and yellow-poplar edge-glued panels. The sign attracted more than 3,000 craftsmen to our booth and of those, we interviewed 647 in New York City and 514 in Chicago.

In our interview, we stated that we were trying to determine if they, as craftsmen and woodworkers, would be interested in purchasing standard-size panels for their solid wood needs. The panels could be made by hardwood dimension manufacturers, made available through retailers, and could be used to make wide parts or ripped to narrow parts. We told them that their answers to our questionnaire would provide retailers with information to better serve their needs.

Table 1.—A list of recommended hardwood clear, edge-glued panel standard sizes for furniture and cabinet craftsmen (Araman et al. 1982)

Nominal thickness	Actual panel thickness	Panel width	Panel lengths												
			Inches												
1	3/4	24	15	18	21	25	29	33	38	45	50	60	75	100	—
1-1/4	1	24	15	18	21	25	29	33	38	45	50	60	75	100	—
1-1/2	1-1/4	24	15	18	21	25	28	32	35	40	45	50	60	70	85
2	1-5/8	24	15	18	21	25	28	32	35	40	45	50	60	70	90

What Craftsmen Told Us

●Would you purchase standard-size panels?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City	Percent	
Yes	93	90	92
No	3	6	4
No answer	4	4	4
	100	100	100

Over 90 percent of the craftsmen at both shows who visited us said that, given the opportunity and the need, they would purchase standard-size panels

●Which would you purchase if you had a choice?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City	Percent	
Standard panels	15	13	14
Lumber	8	8	8
Both	75	77	76
No answer	2	2	2
	100	100	100

The results in each city are almost identical and show that around 76 percent said they would like to be able to buy both standard panels and lumber when they shop for their solid wood needs. Clearly, the craftsmen want a choice and an alternative to lumber. Product prices, though discussed with many respondents, were not a major factor affecting the answers received.

●Which material quality would you prefer?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City	Percent	
Clear-one-face panels	40	41	41
Clear-two-face panels	41	35	38
Character-marked panels	19	24	21
	100	100	100

Chicago area craftsmen preferred clear-one-face panels over the more expensive clear-two-face panels and the less expensive character-marked panels. New York City area craftsmen had about equal preference for the clear-quality panels. Many people at both shows were willing to use character-marked panels that could contain small, natural defects found in our hardwoods. Several people at both shows chose more than one quality. A retailer would have to decide which quality or qualities to stock.

●Which surface quality would you prefer?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City	Percent	
Knife planed	41	51	46
Rough sanded (36 grit)	9	11	10
Finished sanded (100 grit)	24	18	21
Finished sanded (150 grit)	20	14	17
No answer	6	6	6
	100	100	100

The knife-planed surface on the panels was preferred over any of the finished sanded surfaces by craftsmen at both shows. About 1 in 10 craftsmen preferred the rough-sanded surface. Craftsmen have traditionally used knife-planed hardwood lumber and seemed to feel uncomfortable with the smoother finished sanded surfaces.

●Which panel thicknesses would you use?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City	Percent	
3/4-inch panels	73	77	75
1-inch panels	37	32	35
1-1/4-inch panels	16	14	15
1-5/8-inch panels	13	16	14
	139	139	139

Craftsmen polled at the two shows gave very similar responses. The totals exceed 100 percent because the craftsmen were free to choose more than one thickness. The 3/4- and 1-inch-thick panels were the most popular choices at both shows. These results are similar to commercial furniture and cabinet requirements.

●Would you cut your required sizes from the standard-size panels or would you rather have your retailer cut your required sizes from the standard-size panels?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City	Percent	
Cut own parts	89	91	90
Retailer cut	8	4	6
No answer	3	5	4
	100	100	100

Once again, results from the two shows were similar. Ninety percent of the combined respondents wanted to cut their own parts from the panels, and only 6 percent wanted the retailer to cut their parts. These results indicate that a retailer would not have to own the equipment necessary to cut the panels into rough parts.

●Do you feel that the recommended lengths in Table 1 are okay?

Answer	New York		Chicago Average
	City		
----- Percent -----			
Yes	89	92	90
No	4	2	3
No answer	7	6	7
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Ninety percent of the craftsmen felt that the recommended panel lengths would meet their needs. Endorsement of standard panel lengths will make it easier for retailers to order, inventory, and sell this product.

●Do you feel that the recommended 24-inch panel width is okay?

	New York		
Answer	City	Chicago	Average
	----- Percent -----		
Yes	82	86	84
No	10	7	8
No answer	8	7	8
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Craftsmen approved the 24-inch-wide, edge-glued panel with a combined response of 84 percent. In making the panels, random-width cuttings can be edge glued into wide panels, which will allow the dimension manufacturer to better utilize his lumber. This could affect the ultimate panel prices paid by craftsmen.

●Do you feel that the recommended panel thicknesses in Table 1 are okay?

Answer	New York	Chicago	Average
	City		
----- Percent -----			
Yes	86	86	86
No	3	3	3
No answer	11	11	11
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

The responses to this question on a percentage basis were identical. Eighty-six percent of the craftsmen said that the panel thicknesses were okay, 3 percent said that they were not okay, and 11 percent did not answer the question. Some of the people who did not like the sizes wanted 1/2-inch-thick panels for drawer sides and back material.

Discussion

Many of the craftsmen were worried that we are running out of wood because they have so many problems finding hardwood lumber. Well, we are not running out of wood (Wengert 1981), but we do not seem to have enough desirable high-grade lumber at a price the craftsman feels is reasonable. This problem makes the standard size panels, as a material source for wood craftsmen, seem very logical. A dimension manufacturer can efficiently convert abundant low- and medium-grade lumber (what craftsmen usually do not want to use) into panels and sell them in several sizes (Table 1) to retailers, who in turn could market them to craftsmen. Craftsmen at the New York City and Chicago "Excellence in Woodworking" shows told us clearly that they would like to have the opportunity to purchase the panels.

We realize that price, quality, species, and other marketing factors will affect the market for standard-size panels. For optimum acceptance by craftsmen, the following requirements are needed:

1. Panels of species accepted as furniture or cabinet woods.
2. Material free of drying stresses and drying defects and dried to 6 to 8 percent moisture content.
3. Proper color matching and alternating opposite grain pieces before edge gluing.
4. Stringent quality control of drying, gluing, moisture content, and sizing or dimensioning.
5. Completed blanks wrapped to maintain 6 to 8 percent moisture content. (We recommend individually wrapped blanks for this market.)

Note: We value the opinion of our readers and would appreciate comments on our proposals and the survey. We are currently in the process of test marketing 4/4 red oak standard-size panels at a couple of craftsmen supply outlets.

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