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Business unusual

Businesses across the board, in South Africa, as well as abroad, are undoubtedly finding that navigating the minefield which is business in these troubled times, takes a lot more than just hard work and tried and tested strategies for keeping afloat in times of economic turmoil.

Nearly every market for every conceivable product or service has taken a severe knock, and let’s face it, we’re still a long way from out of the woods in terms of averting a recession, which according to those in the know, has the potential to make the 2008/2009 recession look like a walk in the park.

Yet, there are those that go against the grain, so to speak, and manage to thrive despite the hard times. In South Africa, a country where timber and timber products are perceived to be reserved for those with money, there seems to be a growing number of companies that are not only managing to navigate the rough seas of the current ‘economic downturn’, but managing to take advantage of the tough times and make it work for them.

Some do it by embracing new technology that adds value and opens up markets for products where they are not traditionally used. This year alone, we have seen numerous new tech launches in the timber and timber products markets, each set to make a huge impact on its share of the market.

I spoke to someone recently who summed it up perfectly, saying that the timber industry today is all about adding value. Whether you make use of new technology to enhance the value of your product, or whether you come up with a completely new product, or even a new way of using old technology to add value more cost effectively.

But not everyone relies on new tech to give them the edge.

A recent trip to Swaziland proved to be an eye opener for me in terms of companies thinking out of the box to ensure that their products are always in demand.

From extending their ranges to include B, and even C-Grade timber, right down to minimising waste, and how they choose to dispose of their waste, and even creating and developing new markets for products made from timber pieces that would anywhere else be discarded or burned as waste, it opened my eyes to the possibilities out there.

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Eight minutes to fire

A forestry company in Swaziland has deployed military tactics to fight fires, and it’s working.
By David Poggiolini.

Fire continues to be the biggest risk facing the southern African forestry industry. However, achievements made by a leading forestry company in Swaziland provides a blueprint for other companies that could mitigate this risk.

Across South Africa’s borders, Montigny Investments has radically redesigned conventional forestry fire-fighting practices.

Neal Rijkenberg, chief executive officer of Montigny Investments, points out that the system is based on tried-and-tested military practices.

“In South Africa, military practices are applied to a forestry grid. Our system, on the other hand, applies fire-fighting to a military grid. It is a completely different thinking around fire-fighting that is based on scientific and accurate measurement,” says Rijkenberg.

Driven by finally putting an end to the losses the company endured in the past due to fire outbreaks, Rijkenberg decided to implement a completely different method – one that relies on “getting water onto the flame as soon as it starts and managing the process with military precision”.

To do this, a more sophisticated approach was adopted that starts off by understanding the threat, its causes and ways of mitigating and even eliminating them.

Someone with a strong military background and experience was needed to develop such a system, and the chief executive officer found these abilities in Arno Pienaar.

He was handed a clean slate by company management to implement a system that would protect the more than 50 000 hectares of pine, wattle and eucalyptus plantations under the Montigny Investments’ banner at its Usutu division. This extensive resource is the group’s biggest asset.

Pienaar immediately began redesigning the previous model employed at Usutu.

The biggest weakness of the traditional model, according to Pienaar, is that the fire-fighting crews are not directly employed, trained or managed by the company.

In order to achieve predictable and repeatable results, one has to be in control of all the relevant factors. The contractor model makes this impossible.

“Why would anybody want to build a foundation on this?”

He also questioned the existing fire detection and deployment systems in place at Usutu. Slow reporting times were the norm with camera systems, usually nine minutes later than watchtowers. As the forest security and forest risk strategy is combined, the cameras play no role in the security strategy. No reports of illegal movements or activities can come from the cameras. The manned towers play a vital role in the security strategy of the forest. They act as the eyes and ears through which security operations are relayed and controlled.

Fire-protection methods were also scant. There was very limited water supply and communication infrastructure was extremely congested.

Taking command

Pienaar’s centralised command centre more resembles the infrastructure for a typical special operations
Eight minutes to fire

Forestry taskforce than one geared at extinguishing fires in the forestry environment.

However, this is exactly what is needed when your strategy involves having fire on water within eight minutes of receiving a threat, and then, continuously bombarding it with water until it has been extinguished.

His team comprises 80 rangers who underwent stringent selection criteria, the most important of which is the willingness to learn.

“We selected these people from as many as 500 applicants. They have the character that is able to handle pressure. I do not believe in a CV. It is all about being able to handle stress,” he says.

Gone are the 40 horse-mounted rangers under the previous system. Pienaar’s team patrol the forests on ATVs. The large Kubotas can carry 400 litres (l) and the Polaris quad bikes 150 l”. They are deployed 24 hours in the forest and have paid for themselves many times over, considering the number of fires that they have already extinguished, and the significant reduction in hectares lost.

These new-age fire-fighters are also equipped with the latest technology, including tablets and state-of-the-art navigation systems providing essential online intelligence.

These devices are fed critical information from the control centre, which also has access to a complete history of fire-related activities in the plantations. This includes when and where they occurred. Hot-spots have also been ring-fenced.

“This has helped us to put in place a solid risk management system, while providing a very intelligent holistic picture of the environment that we are now able to manage,” he says.

Critically, this information has also allowed Pienaar to understand which of these outbreaks were as a result of arson, as opposed to natural causes.

Fire starter

The annual average hectares lost due to arson fires was traditionally around 1000 ha per year at the company’s Usutu asset.

Data analysed by Pienaar and his team showed that these fires were an attempt by communities to communicate their frustrations to the then management team. In many instances, their frustrations were not related to the company, but to contractor payment, community or personal issues.

“Historical data, as well as real time information from the rangers, enables us to create a predictive table that can predict where, at what time, what moonphase, what day of the week etc. we can expect an arson fire. This Predictive table then empowers us to focus on addressing reasons why people light fires in the forest, as well as increasing active patrols in the designated area to extinguish any fires quickly.

The aim is to be proactive and no longer just react to a fire with available resources. As such, having an open-door policy with communities and keeping a close eye on activities within the communities has become the biggest priority.

The rangers are tasked with managing concerns and raising them with management at Montigny Investments. In fact, community members receive priority over contractors.

“We with, action is a language and we have taken action against against anybody who poses a risk to our plantations. Our rules are simple: look after your stakeholders!” says Pienaar.

Dealing with other threats to communities relies extensively on the well-trained tracking dogs employed by Pienaar’s team. They have become the cornerstone of this “action first” mentality to protect members of communities from exploitation and criminal elements.

They were imported from South Africa and receive ongoing training from Ian Pienaar, a dog-handling expert who also boasts a strong military background. Six Rangers have received formal training as dog handlers and are registered by Sasseta. Ian Pienaar is continually improving their training.

Training as well as operations are recorded via camera and analysed at the control centre for training and legal purposes to ensure criminals are caught and taken to task when the K9 Squad is deployed.

The dogs can track spoor older than 24 hours and also track in a relay team, so long distances are also not a problem.

More importantly, they have also helped in ensuring that communities talk about their concerns, as opposed to resorting to arson.

“We have an open-door policy, and encourage communities to address their concerns with the rangers who, in turn, will bring them to us. Do not light a fire, because we will bring in the dogs and they will find you,” he says.

The best of the rangers have been employed in the quick response force. They have undergone rigorous selection criteria and are considered the “cream” of Pienaar’s team. They are tasked with providing security functions within the communities, and are well resourced.
Importantly, they also fulfill an important public relations mandate on behalf of Montigny. As Pienaar explains, it is only three percent of the community that may be involved in criminal activity, and the rest are law-abiding citizens.

“This force is fulfilling a critical role in protecting our communities, considering that no one wants a criminal in their midst. As such, there has been tremendous buy-in from the community,” he says.

They abide by one rule: “If you lie; you’re out”! This ensures that community relations remain intact, as well as the communication channels that carry accurate information from the various working forces to the control centre.

Is it working?

It is, considering that the company only lost 1,8 ha to arson burns versus the annual average of 1 000 ha before implementing this system in 2014.

What is more it is also more cost-effective than the system deployed before. This is considering that it also focuses on efficiencies and results. Wastage and unwanted expenditure on inefficient systems is a thing of the past.

For example, the mountainous terrain does not lend itself to aerial water bombers, and a decision was made to make this resource redundant.

Montigny Investments focuses on attacking fires as they start and from the ground. The quad bikes are better able to negotiate the terrain and are all located within close proximity of high risk areas.

They are key to maintaining a steady flow of water from the front.

“It’s all about speed. Any fire can be extinguished if you’re fast enough,” says Pienaar.

The 20 Kubotas and 37 Polaris quads are supported by other vehicles. They are spread out in such a way that they can immediately support the quad bikes operating in the field.

Clearly, Montigny Investments does not only cut very differently to its counterparts in South Africa. It also takes a unique approach to fighting fires! And it’s working.
Affordable, high production sawmilling capacity

Wood-Mizer’s LT70 Remote combines the proven performance of the LT70 Series with a range of class-leading added features for an industrial sawmilling solution without the price tag and attributes that are set to boost profitability.

Wood-Mizer’s LT70 Remote sawmill with a stationary remote operator console is a modified version of the LT70 Sawmill series. In addition to offering the legendary cutting capacity and accuracy, and built-tough performance of the LT70 Series, Wood-Mizer’s LT70 Remote delivers a number of productivity enhancing features that can increase output exponentially while slashing production costs to boost across-the-board profitability.

In designing the LT70 Remote, the emphasis was placed on reducing the time spent on log handling and dealing with the sawn material. This is achieved through a range of material handling conveyors and tables that assist to process logs into sawn material with maximum efficiency.

All sawmill controls are centrally located and the operator has every control within easy reach at all times. This makes it easy for the operator to load, cut and decant sawn material in a fast, accurate and productive manner on the LT70 Remote.

Ultimately this enables the sawmiller to create an efficient sawmilling production line, which is an attractive option for sawmillers that want to increase their daily production to industrial output levels without investing in costly industrial sawmilling solutions or an increased workforce.

Performance, affordability, efficiency, low operating costs to boost profits. The cornerstone of the LT70 Series’ exceptional performance is the superb combination of power, cutting accuracy and toughness that the LT70 range offers.

Matched to that is Wood-Mizer’s thin-kerf narrow bandsaw technology that ensures that sawmillers waste less timber and have more sawn timber to sell for larger profits.

The LT70 Remote comes standard with an 18.5 kW electric motor that is mounted on the cantilever head to provide for maximum cutting capacity on logs sizes of up to 950 mm in diameter and 6.6 m in length. The sawmill bed can also be extended to 9 meters to provide for an effective log processing length of 8.2 meters.

This is an ideal solution for sawmillers that are aiming to cut solid structural timber lengths above six meters.

Productivity in any sawmill depends to a large extent on the time required to manipulate the log and handle the sawn material as opposed to the actual sawing time.

In designing the LT70 Remote, emphasis was placed on reducing the time spent handling the log and dealing with the sawn material.

The complete setup comprises of a log loading ramp, a belt conveyor and a roller conveyor. The set can also be fitted with a less expensive roller table option on the outfeed end. The material handling options include the following:

- **Log Deck** - for staging and loading logs
- **Incline Conveyor** - for transporting slabs and boards out of the mill once cut

Wood-Mizer LT70 Remote enables the sawmiller to create an efficient sawmilling production line.
• **Transfer Table** - quickly directs waste, finished boards, and slabs for edging in three different directions.

• **Edger Multrip** - for edging boards

• **Roller Tables** - where needed or as a cheaper alternative to feed the sawn timber out of the mill

Further productivity increases are also achieved with the cutting direction and the positioning of the Remote Operator Station.

Because the cutting head moves towards the operator while cutting monitoring the cutting process is much easier in a stationary production environment.

This together with the easily positioned Remote Operator Station gives the operator a full and unobstructed view of the entire milling process. Accurate loading, cutting, material outfeed and material segregation can be achieved with improved productivity the ultimate winner.

Fully automated hydraulic log positioning and clamping functions also contribute to productivity and reduces the need for manual log handling actions.

The standard hydraulic package consist of the log loader, log clamp, claw log turner, toe boards and rigid side supports. An optional Super Hydraulic Package is also available. This replaces the claw log turner, toe boards and rigid side supports with a chain log turner, power toe boards and hydraulically activated side supports.

The chain log turner ensures higher log turning speeds in two directions while the power toe boards and automated side supports reduce the time spent positioning the log.

The LT70 Remote is also equipped with an automatic board removal system.

The board removal system pushes the board off the sawmill and onto the outfeed conveyor as the head returns for the next cut. The conveyor takes the sawn material away from the sawmill and onto the transfer table where waste, finished boards or slabs for edging can be separated.

All of these processes saves additional handling and allows the operator to immediately continue with the next sawmilling operation.

The remote operator station also includes Setworks for automatic dimensioning that makes it easy to pre-program frequently used dimensions for instant recall later.

Final take
Looking for maximum productivity, efficiency and performance from a smaller scale operation that has the ability to rival and even outperform industrial scale operations at half the cost?

Wood-Mizer’s LT70 Remote is an ideal stepping stone for sawmillers that want to grow their sawmill enterprise to an industrial scale operation without the large capital expenditure typically required to reach that point.

Affordability matched to a full range of productivity enhancing features that are set to slash operating costs to improve already flush margins resulting from higher output even further, provide compelling reason to consider Wood-Mizer’s LT70 Remote.
Collaboration between fire services and industry could mean a safer South Africa

By Tony Balanco, Managing Director: Fire Solutions at Jasco

The key concern of any fire department is to first and foremost save lives, followed closely by saving property and the environment from fire damage. The main responsibility of the fire and safety industry is to develop systems and devices that aid in preventing and treating any disaster which may cost lives and damage property or the environment.

For both, it is agreed that preventing a fire or disaster before it even occurs is the most effective way to accomplish this. Yet far too many fires occur that in hindsight could have been prevented if proper measures were in place, and far too few measures are being designed with the benefit of real experience of fire.

It stands to reason then that these two fields should combine their collective knowledge and experience to determine better, more effective solutions for the prevention and treatment of fire incidents and the preservation of lives. Collaboration between fire services and the fire industry is exactly what is needed to drive the development and implementation of effective fire solutions.

There has never been a proper association between fire services and industry, a fact which hampers effective development of safety systems, measures and equipment. The Fire services with actual firefighting experience, are best positioned to advise on how actual fires develop and behave.
**HUQVARNA 570BTS BLOWER**

656 cc • 2.9 kW • 378 km/h • 11.2 kg

Husqvarna 570BTS is a powerful commercial back pack blower designed for demanding tasks. Large air flow and high air speed are provided by an efficient fan design together with the powerful X-Torq® engine. Commercial grade air filter gives long operating time and trouble free use. The harness has wide shoulder straps.

**HUQVARNA 580BTS BLOWER**

756 cc • 31 kW • 330 km/h • 11.8 kg

One of the most powerful back pack blowers in the world, the Husqvarna 580BTS has earned its reputation as a highly effective fire control tool for foresters, farmers and land owners. Boasting the highest air flow of all blowers on the market today, the 580BTS also has one of the highest air velocities, making it ideally suited to extinguishing small or short grass fires as well as fuelling a wet or slow burning fire.

**DESIGNED FOR TOUGH WORK**

- Commercial grade air filter
- Robust air filter ensures longer operating times

**HIGH PERFORMANCE**

- Air velocity of 330 km/h to 378 km/h
- Air flows of 27.5 m³/min to 29 m³/min
- Powerful X-Torq® engine
Collaboration between fire services and industry could mean a safer South Africa

Their knowledge also gives them insight as to what could have been used or done to prevent various incidents. They do not, however, usually have the necessary skills to develop and deliver the measures, equipment and systems that could help them accomplish this. That is where industry comes in.

Industry that develop the systems and tools that people and fire services use to improve safety and reduce fire risk, is usually doing so without having any real practical knowledge of fire behaviour.

So, while they are best positioned to deliver fire and safety solutions, they lack the first-hand knowledge to make their solutions completely effective both in preventing fire and fighting it.

Added to this disconnect are a number of concerning factors. The current South African standards for fire prevention are outdated, leading to solutions which are falling behind International standards. Local by-laws for fire prevention and safety vary from district to district, making it increasingly difficult for industry to develop solutions to address all of them.

Safety and security service providers are determining fire prevention solutions with their customers without consulting local fire authorities, leading to solutions which may fall far short of the mark in terms of effectiveness.

With fire prevention being more or less a grudge purchase, people invest as minimally as possible, cutting potentially lifesaving corners.

Many of these concerns are entrenched and will be difficult to change. There are rules which require amendments, and outdated practices which need to be addressed. There are many solutions available which are simply not meeting the requirements of fire services, and which could be adjusted and re-developed in order to be efficient when deployed. Similarly, there are practices used by fire services which could possibly benefit from a more technical insight.

There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise available across all sectors involved in any fire and safety related practice. Further knowledge can be gleaned from revisiting reports of past incidents and investigating what could have prevented them.

If fire services and industry coupled with government and other associated role players, were to partner in assessing, amending and addressing these and the many, many other concerns they could move forward with a common goal in mind.

Collaboration between fire services and industry and all related role players would provide a holistic approach to solving fire and safety concerns, benefiting not only each other and themselves, but the country.

This collaboration should be inclusive of all industry specialists, allowing them to contribute towards achieving this objective. This will ensure that South Africa pioneers the way with fire and safety planning and solutions, setting a benchmark for the rest of the world to follow.
Getting to the root of enhanced growth

Recently completed tests show that trees planted in pits made by an auger fan better than those hand-planted in manually dug holes. The new STIHL BT 130 auger is ideal for this task: robust and offering high torque power, combining the benefits of two-stroke and four-stroke technology with its 1.4kW STIHL 4-MIX® engine. The smooth-running, reduced noise, low emission engine is also very economical. The BT 130’s advanced vibration damping system and oversized hip cushion pad add to user comfort, and the STIHL Quickstop™ drill brake, triggered by the operator’s thigh, stops the machine should the drill jam in the ground. Give newly-planted trees a starting chance with the STIHL BT 130 auger.

Like any superior item, STIHL products are only available at specialised dealers nationwide. For expert advice and no-charge after-sales service.

www.stihl.co.za
The South African Renewable Energy Independent Power Procurement Programme (REIPPP) has played a leading role in diversifying South Africa’s energy mix. Wind and solar power now feature more strongly in the national grid, complemented by small hydropower projects.

The REIPPP aims to eventually bring 10 000 gigawatt hours of clean electricity to the national grid.

However, it is the fourth round that is the most relevant to readers of Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times. This is considering that it is participants in the sawmilling industry who are set to diversify their businesses by also positioning themselves as independent power producers (IPPs). Two of these projects are already under way.

One of the advantages of biomass is that it is a very reliable base-load power. This is considering that it is not dependent upon sunshine or wind, but it has not been easy for South African sawmillers to exploit its potential to the benefit of the strained South African electricity grid for many reasons.

Experts believe that Yorke Timbers’ 25 megawatt (MW) project, complemented by another 25 MW biomass plant that is being driven by pulp and paper producer, Sappi, may be a game-changer, paving the way forward for more of these projects in the future.

Experts close to the project believe that up to 20% of processors of forestry products will generate electrical energy and thermal energy in future.

It could serve as a blueprint for other enterprising sawmillers, attempting to offer some answers to the technical and political challenges the industry faces in becoming IPPs, at present.

There are only two sawmills in the country that generate electricity from their steam turbines for supply to local
communities and two that use steam to power generators for electricity production.

We now see the forestry and sawmilling industry add value to its by-products, breaking the old tradition of burning this unwanted material in furnaces to generate steam to dry timber, giving their residues a negative value, compared to its European counterparts who have turned it into a valuable "green" fuel source.

Another conundrum facing the industry is determining the value of the biomass on hand to generate electricity, while striking a balance between the thermal production and electricity production requirements of the mill.

Bear in mind that in South Africa, 90% of the steam produced by sawmills is used to dry timber, and very few sawmills have placed a value on the biomass and operations they need to produce thermal energy to dry their timber. In Europe, on the other hand, 90% of hot water is used to heat kilns.

Then there is the high efficiency installation that is needed to strike this balance. What does the sawmill do with the electricity when it is not operating? This, alone, brings with it a host of concerns involving feeding electricity back into the grid that has not yet been privatised.

When some of these hurdles are overcome, through initiatives such as those being undertaken by York Timbers, more industry players should follow suit.

**Offsetting high costs**

Some agree that more players in the biomass sector should also help drive down the higher electricity tariffs of this "green" energy compared to the prices the state-owned electricity supplier, Eskom, receives from generating energy from coal. This has certainly been the case with both wind and solar under the REIPPP programme, and may eventually hold true for sawmilling biomass projects, which will offset the high capital costs associated with the installation of a combined heat and power (CHP) plant.

The REIPPP programme has played an important role in driving these projects. Earlier initiatives did not offer a viable enough tariff structure for these projects.

This is despite most sawmills in the western regions of the European Union using steam turbines as the main source of generating electricity. They have overcome many of the challenges the South African sawmilling industry is currently grappling with. This has given rise to an industry that specialises only in sawmilling biomass energy applications.

Urbas, which is represented by Nukorfor example, has undertaken a number of projects in the field. This includes BMHKW HIT Torgau in Germany, which generates 32 MW of thermal energy and 10.6 MW of electrical energy; Stora Enso Zdirec in the Czech Republic, which generates 23 MW of thermal energy and 5 MW of electrical energy; KWK Cocklamarkt in Austria, which generates 27 MW of thermal energy and 7.9 MW of thermal energy; and BMKkw Doug Energie in France, which generates 16.4 MW of thermal energy and 3.5 MW of electrical energy, to name only a few.

In all instances, it has been involved in the design, manufacture, supply, installation and commissioning of the entire plant. In terms of the latter project, Urbas was also involved in receiving final approval for the project from TUV, the notified body. It was also responsible for testing the operation of the power plant, training the operating staff and handing it over to the customer.

Urbas also supplied the plant components from the fuel input stages through to the ash removal, as well as the turbine. It undertook flue gas cleaning, steel construction, including stages and platforms, while taking full control of the electric system, heating ventilation and control installation works, fire detection and extinguishing systems for fuel input, as well as measurement and control.

**A big step forward**

The Ngodwana energy project was awarded preferred bidder status in the REIPPP programme in April last year as one of 13 successful projects in the fourth round of the procurement, and the only successful biomass project in that round.

According to Norton Rose, which is advising on the project, the plant will be constructed at the Sappi Ngodwana mill in Mpumalanga.

The land required for the power plant will be leased from Sappi, which will also supply the fuel to the power plant, principally from biomass residue (toppings, branches and bark) recovered from surrounding plantations, and screened waste material from the mill production process.

All forest biomass will be processed through a chipper/hogger located at the mill’s existing woodyard, to ensure the fuel is shredded to a size that meet the requirements of the boiler fuel specification. All foreign material will be removed from the biomass during this process.

The processed biomass will then be conveyed to the furnace/boiler via a new conveying system. The biomass will be stockpiled in an undercover storage facility located near the feed of the boiler. There will also be an open storage area for additional stockpiling at the boiler.
The fuel is fed into the boiler surge bins through a redundant feed system, at a controlled feed rate. The boiler plant will offtake potable water from the Ngodwana Mill, and stored in situ for use as required.

The boiler draws this water through a demineralisation plant and preheats it before sending it to the boiler make-up water tank. The boiler will make steam by burning the biomass to heat the water.

Steam is used to drive a steam turbine which in turn drives a generator. The generator creates electricity which feeds the plant auxiliaries and the balance is fed to the grid. Output steam from the turbine is condensed in an air cooled condenser.

The exhaust gases from the boiler are fed through a dust collector to ensure compliance with emission requirements and then to a stack. The dust collected from the dust collector and the ash collected from the bottom of the boiler will be disposed of at Ngodwana Mill Land fill site.

Power produced by the generator is to be delivered into to the grid through a separate connection to Eskom’s existing 132kV substation at the Ngodwana mill. Ngodwana will sell this energy to Eskom under a 20 year power purchase agreement.

Grand plans

Certainly, a step in the right direction is the South African National Energy Development Institute’s (SANEDI) biomass atlas, which is expected to better guide policy making in the field.

To date, the South African Department of Energy has prioritised the role that biomass is able to play in biofuels, noting that the potential of biomass in energy production has been neglected. This could be because the power stations are significantly smaller than the large renewable energy plants being developed under the solar and wind banners.

SANEDI estimates that there is about 47-million tons (t) of woody biomass available in the country. Only 14,2-million t of this is currently being used for power generation. It acknowledges the important role that it can play in ramping up quickly and providing much needed stability to the national grid.

Time will tell if South Africa is able to better harness this resource. Meanwhile, Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times learns that a prominent forester and sawmiller in Swaziland intends co-generating. At present, it is drying its biomass and supplying it to sugar mills for biofuel production.
Davidson and Msomi take top honours

David Davidson and Mdumiseni Msomi were recently rewarded for excellence in tree farming.

NCT recently held its tree farmer of the year awards at its AGM in Pietmaritzburg.

David Davidson and Mdumiseni Msomi received this year’s coveted awards in tree farming. The winners were recognised for their excellence in sustainable plantation management which has earned them a place on the exclusive list of achievers in tree farming. Both are from Kwambonambi outside Richards Bay.

In the category farm managed on private land, David Davidson took top honours. Davidson manages Zenith Estate on behalf of the family close corporation and has been involved in the business since 1995. Zenith Estate is 385 ha in extent with 320ha planted to timber. The remainder of farm consists of orchards (macadamias, lichis, citrus), open areas and infrastructure.

Exceptional silviculture practices, effective weed control, harvesting operations and firefighting capacities are compliant with all aspects of sustainable plantation management and minimising impacts on the environment. Open areas on the farm consist mainly of riparian zones with grasses and patches of indigenous bush that includes a hectare of yellowwood trees (Podocarpus falcatus).

Davidson had been able to manage the impacts of a prolonged drought and insect pests in the area by changing his clone selections to more pest and drought resistant varieties. Through good species selection, excellent silviculture and efficient harvesting the operation has remained sustainable under challenging conditions.

Mdumiseni Msomi received the award in the category farm managed on communal land. He developed an interest in timber farming at an early age (19) and today is the proud owner of 10ha of land which he inherited from his father. It is planted out to timber (8ha), maize (1ha) and vegetables (1ha). A long standing member of NCT, Msomi compliments the co-operative for its services rendered to members, its effort to nurture and share vital forestry information to enable his business (and trees) to grow. Project regeneration, member workshops, a good payment and bonus system have all contributed to the success of his enterprise. “NCT is a reliable market partner and has made me realise the full value of my timber,” he says.

Timber farming has enabled him to purchase equipment for the business, provide an education for his sons and improve his standard of living. He has been able to diversify his business interests, managing a spaza shop on his premises.

Msomi follows meticulous methods in land preparation and carefully manages coppice reduction. He singlehandedly runs his operation and employs five workers on a seasonal basis at weeding and harvesting times.

Each winner received a Stihl chainsaw sponsored by Stihl Pietermaritzburg & PMB Power Products.

The NCT tree farmer of the year was initiated in 2002 and is awarded annually to tree farming operations that display excellence in sustainable plantation management.
Success in any business venture requires experimenting with new technologies and methods. This is especially the case in the highly competitive timber transport industry where at least three specialised haulers compete for market share.

Buhle-Betfu Carriers is one of these companies and, like its counterparts, has played a role in defining haulage in this sector, known for being one of the most arduous.

Getting into this challenging terrain is the easier part. The complex part is leaving the forest fully loaded with logs, and there are not many trucks that are able to do this.

This is just one of the reasons why MAN has been associated so closely to Buhle-Betfu over the years. The German truck original equipment manufacturer also has a permanent presence at Buhle-Betfu Carrier’s operations neighbouring SAPPi’s Ngodwana mill just outside Nelspruit, Mpumalanga. This ensures that all trucks are subjected to a thorough proactive maintenance regime.

The 1 000 square metre facility is believed to be the first workshop to be established on any customers’ site by a truck supplier. Two MAN mechanics are employed on a full-time basis at the facility and are standby 24 hours a day.

Rocki Smit, managing director of Buhle-Betfu Carriers, says the success of the business can be attributed to the company’s loyalty to its supply chain partners that continue to provide it with a good service.

“I am very conservative, and am adverse to risk. For this reason, I prefer partnering companies that have a strong track record in our industry,” he told Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times during a visit to the company’s premises.

An important mantra that Smit abides by when dealing with any truck manufacturer or dealer is: “Don’t spend time in the head-office when you are making an important decision about buying trucks. Rather, spend a lot of time in the workshops where they are repaired. It will give you a thorough idea of what you are actually buying”.

Vying for share

Certainly, plush head-offices are taboo for a close-knit team that earns its keep from working in the forests, and a hard lesson for any OEM competing for a share of Buhle-Betfu Carriers’ imminent spending on new gear.

When we visited the operation in July, Volvo Trucks, a very well known marque in the international forestry sector, had already demonstrated its offering to the timber haulier. Mercedes-Benz and Scania, also leaders in the field, were set to follow suit.

These are the top truck brands in the forestry industry, and highly regarded in other transport segments, including long-haulage, the “bread-and-butter” of any truck OEM.

He says that it is critical for the haulier to keep abreast of the latest developments in truck technology. For this reason, the company has invited other participants in the industry to showcase their offering. All of these truck brands have a quality product, and their differentiator is their ability to provide a comprehensive after-sales support to the timber transporter.
WE ECONOMICAL GO THE WAY
Buhle-Betfu Carriers’ approach is to make the truck manufacturer and its dealer accountable. This is in the form of solid maintenance contracts.

“This ensures that our trucks are properly maintained and serviced by the specialists, while we are left to focus on our speciality which is timber haulage,” says Smit.

In addition, the timber haulier also ensures that it has formal buy-back guarantees in place. It also expects the dealer to train drivers to optimally operate the vehicles.

**Drop the bells and whistles**

These brands are also well-known for catering for the sophisticated requirements of the developed world.

While he acknowledges that advanced technology can be a huge enabler, especially when it comes to engine diagnostics, Buhle-Betfu shuns “cosmetics” that complicate operating and owning trucks in the unique South African forestry environment. “We’ve got rugged vehicles in our fleet that do not rely on fancy gadgetry. They need to be able to be repaired quickly so that downtime is minimised at all costs,” he says.

Being as risk adverse as he is, Smit has shied away from many of the so-called “value offerings” from Asian suppliers. While they can be significantly cheaper than their European counterparts, Buhle-Betfu Carriers takes a longer-term view of trucks, focusing on the lowest total operating costs provided by the technology.

While many of these companies have made steady inroads into other transport market segments, including the tipper truck market, they have struggled to penetrate the South African forestry environment.

We are, however, aware of at least one forestry company using Powerstar trucks in fire-fighting applications.

Is MAN still in the running for a sizeable share of Buhle-Betfu Carrier’s business, considering the offering from some of its closest competitors?

It certainly seems so. The Buhle-Betfu Carriers team still regards this truck brand as a leader in the field. Smit jokingly refers to a “very big mistake” made by the company when it sold its MAN trucks with 750 000 kilometres on their clocks to a small private transporter operating in the region.
“These trucks are still running to this day. Now that’s a real testament of the quality that we have received from MAN over the years,” he says.

Just as importantly, the transport contractor has kept its uptime at more than 91% using these trucks and the support infrastructure the dealer has put in place to keep them running. This is in line with SAPPi’s own stringent requirements.

As a golden rule, Buhle-Betfu Carriers overhauls its fleet at about 320 000 kilometre mark with the average truck having an age of 30 months.

“This is essential to avoiding critical problems closer to the end of the haulage contract.

“This strategy is certainly working considering that we have not had any negative days within the last four years,” says Smit.

This mileage is generated from running the trucks 365 days a year round the clock, and the timber haulage specialist shows no signs of applying brakes any time soon!

It’s inside that matters
While state of the art haulage technology is essential to keeping timber contracts going, it is the driver that ensures a sustainable haulage company.

“The magic and cornerstone of our business is our people, especially the drivers. Without our drivers, we are nothing. I honestly believe that managers of transport companies sometimes forget this,” says Rocki Smit, managing director of Buhle-Betfu Carriers.

Retaining competent driving skills is imperative for management of the company. This is reflected by the fact that 95% of the company’s drivers are still with Buhle-Betfu Carriers since its establishment in 2006.

So how does the company keep these critical skills?

Smit believes it is all about the appropriate treatment of his employees.

The flat management structure of the company is also conducive to sharing ideas on how to improve the working environment and conditions.
Against the grain

Montigny Investments can best be described as a “disruptor”, challenging the norm and continuously pushing the boundaries in the southern African timber industry, writes David Poggiolini.

A giant is emerging in the southern African sawmilling industry. From humble beginnings, Montigny Investments is now valued at in excess of R2-billion, and is four times the size of the next largest wet-off-saw plank supplier in southern Africa.

What exactly is brothers Neal and Ward Rijkenberg’s recipe for success? A walk through their recent investment at the Usutu operation, which is now undergoing extensive upgrades, reveals a lot. It is all about a culture that challenges the norm, or at least what many sawmillers across the border in South Africa accept as standard best practice.

Firstly, Montigny Investments has a diverse range of products. Its day-to-day operations are geared at extracting every last bit of value from the resources it has at its disposal. This includes its own wattle, eucalyptus and pine, as well as the material it receives from other suppliers.

It was about 10 years ago that the company faced a crossroad – “do we specialise or do we continue to diversify?”

The answer to the question is obvious, and Neal and the rest of his management team have never looked back. Its diverse range of products include mouldings, wet-off-saw board for the pallet making market, structural timber, chipboard through to charcoal, mining timber and treated poles. Add to this biomass that is dried for the sugar industry’s co-generation activities and a eucalyptus oil extraction operation, serving a market Neal, the chief executive officer of the company, intends expanding in a very “aggressive way”.

“This has been a major advantage for us. It is a risk averse approach that ensures that we are sufficiently diversified to take advantage of various timber markets as they grow, while avoiding over-exposure to markets that have experienced a downturn,” says Neal.

However, this approach can only be sustained by a radically different approach to operating a timber products operation at both management and operational levels.

“This can only work with very stringent accounting systems, as well as the tight supervision levels at our different sites, firmly in place. We believe in the saying that it is impossible to manage what you cannot measure. This is how we have ensured that we run a good business,” Neal told Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times during a visit to the operation.

At an operational level, the unique approach to ensuring that maximum benefit is derived from every log is reflected at the new sawmilling line at the company’s flagship Usutu...
MONTIGNY PRODUCT LINES

Pine wet-off-saw

Gum wet-off-saw
  • Grade A, B and C

Dry Pine
  • Kiln Dry Pine
  • Air Dry Pine
  • Available in Industrial, Crafting, and Mill Run Grade

Structural Timber
  • CCA Treated
  • Wet-off-saw
  • Kiln Dried

Mining Timber
  • Charging sticks
  • Gum Planks
  • Mine Packs
  • Scaffolding
  • Sleepers
  • Shavings

Poles
  • CCA Treated
  • Onyx Treated

Chipboard
  • Thickness: 12mm and 15mm
  • Grade A and B

Biomass
  • Vaths
  • Eucalyptus
  • Pine

Charcoal

Essential Oils
  • We harvest Eucalyptus Smithii, Radiata and Davis leaves

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operation. The Usutu site was bought from Sappi in 2014, and is undergoing an extensive upgrade.

Managing director, Ward, tells about the complexities the company’s management team faced in breaking traditional mind-sets of the many South African machinery suppliers who tendered for the project. They are used to serving the South African mind-set, specialising in manufacturing one high-grade product, as opposed to recovering every last piece of the log.

“We were repeatedly told that it just could not be done. However, we stuck to our views and eventually got exactly what we wanted,” says Ward.

Nukor installed and commissioned the new 6.6 metre (m) structural mill line, working closely with the Montigny Investments team from conceptualisation to the final stages of the product.

The mill includes some of the best practice Ward identified during his extensive travels to international sawmills. The new operation in Montigny Investments is built around clearing the site of waste, with the ground floor dedicated to recovering residues, while production continues at a rapid pace one level above.

The sawmill is designed to accommodate an additional line. Initially, it was anticipated that each line would easily be able to produce 5 000 cubic metres (m³) a month in two shifts. However, it is exceeding expectations achieving about 8 500 m³ in two shifts.

He says this mind-set of challenging the norm prevails in all operations at management level to ensure that every last piece is recovered in operations. What is more, the focus is on “sweating the assets”, operating 24 hours round-the-clock.

“Our people have a larger range in which to operate and can make important decisions that are to the benefit of the company. This does not mean that there are no approval processes, but we are certainly much more flexible than traditional corporates. It is definitely working considering that we continue getting the best out of our people, and our business, focusing on the individual brilliance of each team player,” says Ward.

The existing sawmill across the road will be relocated to the Usutu site and will focus on cutting shorter material.

Meanwhile, the first of four Mahild kilns is being erected to improve drying capabilities at the operation. The remaining three units will be commissioned every four months. This will boost drying capacity for structural timber to 10 000 m³ per month.

Connected to this investment is a significant upgrading of drying skills at the operation, as well as an obvious bolstering of the capabilities needed for the dry mill side of the operation over time to keep up with this investment.

Montigny will also be moving into component manufacture. Before the end of the year, it is anticipated that the company will supply 20 truckloads a day to South Africa from its current two loads a day of components.

Challenging the norm

While Ward has been inspired by the many sophisticated mills he has visited on his extensive fact-finding missions abroad, another key differentiator is the labour-intensive nature of the operation.

Most of these resources are allocated to the sorting of timber – in line with Montigny’s philosophy of maximising the use of its resources.

The Montigny Group currently provides employment for more than 7000 people in its sawmills and plantations.

Neal explains this philosophy, which flies in the face of most modern undertakings where mechanisation and even advanced automation are the order of the day. This is especially the case in South Africa.

“If you equate high recovery losses with advanced mechanisation, it simply does not pay. If you are able to employ people, why not do so. There are a huge number of people without jobs out there, and we want to be part
Neal says the company’s strategy is complemented by supportive unions and the high skill levels of Swazis. The minimum wage in Swaziland is lower than in South Africa, but Montigny Investments pays its workers significantly above that rate.

At the same time, the company invests significantly in in-house training to bolster skills of employees on site.

This focus on finding every piece of timber can be attributed to the company’s very humble beginnings, when both brothers collected timber left behind after felling from farmers plantations for onward sale and processing. This diligence formed the basis of a business model that is now thriving at a much larger level.

Nukor deigned and installed the new line...
Swaziland: Montigny’s Northern Operation

Swaziland’s forestry and sawmilling giant, Montigny Investments, has grown from a small family run business to the biggest timber owner and operator in Southern Africa in just a few short years.

Since its formation in 1997, it has become the success story that most business owners can only dream about, now valued at approximately R2 billion, owning between 30 and 40% of the Southern African wet-off-saw market and growing.

According to founder and CEO, Neal Rijkenberg, some of the key reasons for the massive success that the company has enjoyed, are the core Christian values according which the company is run, their policy of eliminating waste wherever possible by extracting every last bit of value from every log brought into the mill, and the extraordinary diversity of their product offering.

In South Africa, for example, although South African companies are in many instances the market leaders in their fields, their operations are very focused.

“Our diverse product offering places us in a position to push production on products that are currently in demand and hold off on others where the market may be down. We always have a product that is selling.”

Montigny’s current product range includes wet-off-saw planks for pallets, wooden umbrella poles, decking, furniture grade planks, desktops for schools, mouldings, structural timber, pure Eucalyptus oils and everything in between, enabling them to utilize up to 95% of the tree in one form or another.

This ear-on-the-ground policy has not been without its challenges, as managing such a diverse product range can become complicated. “We came to a fork in the road about 10 years ago where we had to make a choice,” says Neal. “Running such diverse production lines can become very difficult to manage, and so we had to make a call. “After much deliberation, we decided to stick to our policy
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of diversity, running each line as a separate business silo. This requires quite intensive management and accounting practices. One has to be very attentive to which products are most in demand at any given time, and have the ability to not be scared to make decisions to cut any product that is profitable, but it has paid off in the long run.”

Usutu Mill
Since the conclusion of Montigny’s purchase of the Usutu Forest Project Company from SAPPI Limited in 2014, for which the company managed to raise nearly R1 billion, massive upgrades have taken place at the Usutu plant at Bhunya, including the installation of a whole new production plant which includes a new 6,6 meter structural mill and the capacity to take another line.

“We are currently in the process of installing four new Mahild kilns from Germany, which will be completed in four month intervals, the first of which should be up and running by the end of August,” says Marketing Director, Ward Rijkenberg. “This will enable us to up our production on kiln dried timber with around 2 500 cubes per month per kiln.

According to Ward, they settled on Mahiln kilns after a long process of elimination. “It was, at the end of the day, the only kiln that could deliver on everything we set out to achieve. It just ticked all the boxes.”

The purchase of Usutu was one of the largest private commercial transactions in the history of Swaziland and represents one of the largest continuous man-made forest complexes in the world, and the shortest average stump to mill distances in the region, with 55 000 hectares of timber within a lead distance of 18km from the mill. Montigny now controls roughly half of the forest plantations in Swaziland. The company currently sources 65% of the timber run through their mills from their own forests.

This equates to approximately 700 000 tonnes of timber annually, and plans are in place to increase this to approximately 1,2 million tonnes within the next four years.

Labour intensive
One thing that is evident when visiting the Usutu mill, is the labour intensity of the operation. In today’s world, where mechanisation, automation and optimisation are buzzwords, Montigny is certainly breaking the mould in this regard.

“Yes we have a large labour force,” says Ward. “I have travelled all over the world and I have seen some of the top sawmilling operations globally. We are certainly not ignorant of mechanization, but when you take into account our strict policy of recovering every last piece of wood possible, and you equate recovery losses associated with mechanisation, it just makes sense to rather have more labour.

“A large part of our success has been developing markets for timber that would normally be discarded or burned. The labour intensity of our operation allows us to make that recovery.

“We currently employ approximately 7 000 workers. Plus another 4 000 if you add our informal suppliers. Firstly, we are able to maintain our high recovery rate, and secondly, we are able to create jobs.

“We would much rather employ 10 people at R2 000 per month and be able to maintain our high recovery rates, than one person at R20 000 per month and lose our high recovery rate. We are very intentional about getting that last
little plank out and minimising waste.

“Even with our high labour intensity, we still manage to pay nearly double the local minimum wage,” says Ward. “It all goes back to our core Christian values and we pride ourselves on being able to make a real difference in the local communities from which we source our people.”

According to Ward, the company enjoys good relations with both the local labour union and the government. “Labour relations, as well as relations with the government are very good. We’ve had almost no labour issues in terms of strikes etc.

“We also have in place, at any given time, numerous incentive programs for our staff. We set fairly stringent production targets, with bonuses and incentives for staff if they are able to meet those targets.”

**Pulp processing plant**

In addition to the production plant, the Montigny Northern Operation also sports a top of the line saw shop, where they are able to sharpen and repair their own saw blades, a chipping plant, a fully equipped engineering workshop where machines are maintained and repaired in-house, and, obviously the existing decommissioned SAPPI pulp plant.

“We are still deciding exactly what to do with the existing pulp processing plant,” says Ward, adding that they have received various offers from prominent players in the industry to either purchase, or rent the plant from them.

“We are looking at various options at the moment, including the possibility of producing our own electricity.

According to our calculations we have the capacity to generate approximately 35 MW of electricity.”
Transport

Unlike the Montigny Southern Operation, which makes use of a local transporter’s association to deal with all their transport needs, Montigny’s Northern Operation makes use of a number of different transport companies, many of which are local owner-operated small businesses, to deal with the transport of logs to the mill, and finished products to their respective destinations.

“We have one truck offloading approximately every 45 minutes, and one departing approximately every hour, 24 hours per day, seven days per week,” says Ward, adding jokingly that they even work 31 days in February. This requires quite a well planned and tightly managed schedule, but we are able to maintain it.

Staff development, skills transfer and training

According to Ward, finding people with the skills needed to run an operation of this size and level of speciality is not the easiest task in the world.

“We take great care in appointing of department heads that are not only competent and passionate in what they do, but also are able to effectively pass on skills and train the people working with them.”

“Even if you try to source workers from South Africa, it often proves difficult to find people with the skills that we need, so we place great import on our in-house training and skills transfer activities in order to develop talent from within. Workers showing specific promise are identified by department heads and singled out for further development and training.”

— Marketing Director, Ward Rijkenberg

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Back to roots

Montigny Investment’s Usutu operation has undergone major upgrades, but plans are under way to rejuvenate its southern operations – the start of it all, writes David Poggiolini.

While work forge ahead on the upgrades at its operation in the northern regions of the country, Montigny Investments also has plans to significantly upgrade its business in the southern region.

Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times learns that this investment includes a new log sorting line to improve efficiencies at the operation, upgrades to its chipboard facility and a new creosote line for its treated pole division.

This operation is the beginnings of Montigny Investments, which continues to grow at a phenomenal rate, mainly due to its very unique strategy of using every last bit of resource available to supply a diverse market for timber.

If anything, this operation is a microcosm of a similar strategy underway in the northern areas at a mill that was acquired from pulp and paper giant, Sappi, in 2014, and points to the future of this operation.

Montigny Investments’ managing director, Ward Rijkenberg, says the operation remains extremely profitable and essential to the financing of the ongoing upgrades underway at the Usutu operation. This is in line with the company’s ethos which is to plough all profits back into the business.

One of the operation’s biggest markets is wet-off-saw timber for pallet manufacture, which replaced the mining timber business about 10 years ago. The latter was one of the foundations upon which Montigny Investments has built its business. The decision to exit this market was mainly driven by declining volumes due to the general state of underground gold mining in South Africa.

As Coen Badenhorst, regional manager of Montigny Investment’s southern operation, notes, this move mirrors the larger company’s strategy to enter new markets as quickly as possible. This has been one of its strengths to moving the 25 000 t of timber this operation receives in its
yard every month. Less than 10% are from its own resources in Swaziland, with the operation also sourcing material from independent growers in the country, as well as larger players in Piet Retief, such as NCT and Tekwani.

Noticeable, is the important role the company has played in introducing the market to pallets manufactured from gum, as opposed to pine. Badenhorst says that the company was one of the pioneers in the field.

The narrow band-saws deployed at the mill that mainly cut between 230 cubic meters (m³) and 250 m³ material a day also feed a saligna moulding operation on site. The operation is currently producing up to 4 000 square metres (m²) of desk tops a month, with plans of eventually producing 5 000 m².

“This operation has really out-performed our initial expectations. Over the past year, it has proved to be a very profitable undertaking and a turning point for our moulding operations,” Badenhorst told us during a visit to the operation late last month.

He says the moulding arm of the operation is set to also receive a capital injection, especially in finger-jointing technology. Some of the older machinery is also set to be replaced bringing it line with modern practices. It is producing about 200 m² of decking and six square metres of wood styles a month.

One of the noticeable aspects of the entire operation, but on this site is the focus on ingenuity. Much of what is operating has either been built or refurbished by Badenhorst, a stalwart of the company who has been with the operation since the outset.

Bent logs are sent to the two ovens on the site to make 100 tons of charcoal a month that is used by large South African industrial smelters.

Meanwhile, some of the timber is sent to Swazi Poles to produce up to 1 500 cubic meters (m³) of treated rounded...
poles mainly for use by Swaziland Electricity Company (SEC). Up to 60% of the output is received by SEC with the balance destined to the South African, Namibian and Lesotho telecommunications and energy distribution markets.

Badenhorst says that the operation has a capacity to produce up to 6 000 m³ a month, a capacity that will be exploited should the demand arise for its SATAS-accredited poles. Montigny Investments is now the sole shareholder of the operation, having previously operated the plant with a partner.

**Chipping away**

Certainly, it is the chipboard manufacturing operation that is one of the highlights of Montigny Investment’s southern division. This is considering that it is the only one operating in the country, following the exit of a major board producer some years ago.

As much as 65% of the 7 200 tons (t) of chips received by the southern operation are destined for this plant, with the balance sent to three sugar mills in the country for their co-generation projects, which produce a total of 15 megawatts for SEC. The operation, which is now producing a total of 125 m³ of board a day, runs on three shifts and supplies the lion’s share of its output to South African upholstery manufacturers, with the balance sold to other board upgrading concerns in South Africa.

While Montigny Investments continues to grow, a noticeable aspect that comes through at this operation is that it has retained a flat management structure that allows for flexibility and the rapid response times by its managers.

Badenhorst says this is key to the successful performance of the southern plant: “When we see a niche that has to be exploited, we are able to move quickly without the formalities that one finds in a large corporate environment,” he says.

It is a strict, but fair working environment. Managers are given free reign, but they are held accountable at the end. And, clearly, this is the pressure and responsibility Badenhorst enjoys in a company that is known for challenging conventional practices in forestry and sawmilling!
Over the top truss installation

LCP Roofing recently supplied and installed a number timber trusses for the Reddford House School.

Located on the northern slopes of the Magaliesburg foothills and surrounded by established residential areas, the highly acclaimed Reddford House School enjoys easy access from the nearby N1 Western Bypass Highway. The site, which boasts all the amenities associated with the premium Reddford brand, is expansive and is home to two main buildings, including an Early Learning Centre and Junior/Senior Primary School, which are both accessed via a centralised gatehouse.

The architectural design and layout of both the main buildings allow for optimal functioning and maximum usage of the space, and upon arrival, the sheer size and aesthetics of the structures make an immediate and profound impact on the viewer.

LCP Roofing was tasked with fabricating and erecting exposed timber feature trusses at the gatehouse, main building entrances, piazzas and the main hall. The client brief called for a number of exposed timber roof trusses in as many viable spaces in the buildings as possible, and even the walkways were to be exposed and supported by laminated Pine beams at the eaves. While structural soundness was paramount, the aesthetic value of the project was a prominent consideration for the client.

“At LCP Roofing, we’re no strangers to supplying exposed timber roof trusses and are finding that this trend is on the rise,” says Paul Guassardo, LCP Roofing sales representative. “Exposed timber roof trusses are beautiful to look at and add a sense of elegance, grandeur and volume to a space, so it made sense that the brief called for extensive use of exposed timber roof trusses, which reflect and pay homage to the values and ethos of the school below.”

The architect, Michael Bishop of Century Property Developments, provided detailed sketches of the client’s requirements, to which the LCP Roofing team answered with precision, ingenuity and attention to detail. According to Lyndsay Cotton, LCP Roofing general manager, “There was certainly nothing small about this project and it represented an exciting challenge for our team to put our resources and expertise to the test. Our highly competent design office turned the concept sketches into workable blueprints that allowed the aesthetic components of the project to push boundaries, all while maintaining the highest level of structural integrity, collectively making for an outstanding end result.”

Stunning entrances leading on to double-volume piazzas and wide covered walkways framing a central playground,
evoke a sense of quality, comfort and security, and the main hall, which is situated in the Junior/Senior Primary School building is the proverbial jewel in the crown with its vast, 19.5 metre wide span exposed modified scissor-with-top-hat trusses that draw – and hold – the eye upwards.

**Challenging work**

“The trusses in the main hall proved to be quite challenging, not only from a design perspective, but from a logistical point of view. With a pitch of 27 degrees over such a span, a one-piece truss with a continuous top and bottom chord would simply be too big to deliver,” remarks Guassardo, who goes on to say, “The solution was to fabricate the trusses in three sections instead of one, using two two-ply half modified scissor trusses and a separate one-ply top hat truss.”

Once completed, the modified design, as per industry requirements, was sent to LCP Roofing’s supporting engineers for final specification on the specific fixing, which was ultimately the use of a sliding shoe on the wall plate on one side of the building as well as the necessary bracing details.

Once fabricated and delivered, the scissor trusses had to be assembled on site and the top hat trusses were erected only once the exposed scissor trusses were in place.

A mobile crane was required to hoist the 19.5 metre span trusses above the double volume of the hall and then to lower them, one by one, into position. The crane was only available for a limited period of time, so the LCP Roofing team worked as efficiently as possible, using the apron of scaffolding along the side of the walls of the hall provided by the principal contractor.

Life lines were not an option with the trusses having to be lowered from above, but once the trusses were in place and temporarily braced, these were put in place and permanent bracing and anchoring could be done. The top hat trusses were then erected and fixed on top of the modified scissor trusses.

**Grade 5 and 7**

Timber used in the fabrication of the trusses was a combination of Grade 5 and 7 structural SA Pine as well as structural SA Pine laminated timber beams. “The various grades of timber are determined by the software we use under license from International Truss Systems for the design and fabrication of timber roof trusses,” notes Cotton, who adds, “Many factors, like the span of the building, the pitch of the roof, the type of covering required, and the type and location of ceilings to be installed, help determine the grade of timber required for a roof structure. According to a strict (and necessary) requirement imposed by the National Building Regulations, all timber used in this project was structural timber.”

Specifically sourced from sustainable and responsibly managed plantations, all timber used by LCP Roofing is...
considered a renewable resource. “Through effective, responsibly managed and sustainable forestry, farming of structural timber enjoys great success in South Africa, ensuring us the availability of structural timber as a raw material well into the future,” says Guassardo. “The entire production process, from transforming a tree into usable timber, transportation thereof, fabrication and final erection to form a structure, requires less energy in comparison to readying other structural materials for the same application, and has a much lighter impact on the environment.”

In an effort to reduce the energy embodied in erecting the timber roof trusses, apart from the erection of the roof trusses in the main hall, the entire school’s roof structure was responsibly erected and handled manually, negating the continuous use of expensive and energy-hungry lifting equipment and machinery.

In addition, solar geysers and panels were installed, which will go a long way to reduce electricity usage and associated costs for the school into the future, enhancing the structure’s continued sustainability.

“Reddford House School is a well-respected institution with the highest standards in all regards. Having been appointed as a sub-contractor for this project represented a unique opportunity for our team and while the project requirements were challenging, they were refreshingly stimulating and pushed the LCP Roofing team to dig deep for elegant solutions to complex requirements,” says Cotton, concluding, “The end result is an impressive, expansive roof structure that will house the school for many years to come and, on the underside, exquisite timber roof trusses that are worthy of being exposed and that pay tribute to an institution committed to educational excellence.”

Project snapshot:
Name: Reddford House School, Northcliff
Date of completion: December 2015
Architects: Michael Bishop, Century Property Developments
Main contractor: Murray & Dickson
Roofing supplier & erector: LCP Roofing
CMC Group introduces new partner in sawmilling machine industry

The CMC Group South Africa has announced that Pilous Sawmill Machinery will be their official supplier of all log resaws and sharpening equipment for the Southern African market.

"Their extensive range of manual to full automatic and hydraulic resaws in the Forestor range will provide our clients with the latest technology and European specifications in safety and quality," says CMC Group South Africa CEO, Pieter Olivier.

Pilous Forestor originated in the Chech Republic in 1994, specializing in metal cutting machinery and the fabrication of bandsaw blades. In 1998, they received the European award for quality at the BRNO Exibition.

In 1997 the company added woodworking machinery to their offering, quickly developing their range of log saws to the point where they are today regards as one of the top producers, both in terms of the quality of their machines, and the vast range on log cutting machines they produce.

"Pilous is known worldwide for their quality sawblades and machinery," says Olivier. "The expansion into the wood cutting and processing lines in the sawmilling industry was a natural progression for the company and it has now established 60 distribution agencies worldwide.

"They also pride themselves on the static and field cutting log saws in their range, where the client can now have the option of petrol or electric motors in the saws.

"The sturdy, easy to assemble, portable saws, makes forest cutting a breeze," says Olivier. "This technology was developed over a period of 20 years, and ranks among the best in the world."

Pilous has ensured that their forest equipment is light weight and easy to assemble. "All functions on these machines were designed to allow easy setup and quick removal capabilities," says Olivier.

"They understand the concept of cutting in a forest as opposed to their bigger fully automated models that are working in production lines in factories. They also tick all the boxes on safe working and all machines apply to the European safety regulation standards. "The lubrication systems on all the machines are designed to protect the sawblades and allow maximum cutting before sharpening or replacement becomes necessary.

Pilous machines are tested in extreme conditions from the minus 40 degree temperature in Siberia all the way to humid hot conditions in Asia and Africa.

"The CMC Group would like to invite our clients to visit our branches to see the range of machinery from Pilous," says Olivier "Our branches can also be contacted for detailed specifications and very competitive pricing structures.

"We pride ourselves on our service and all our technical teams across the country will be able to assist you with technical enquiries related to electrical and mechanical applications."
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Swingmill Blades – Plate (Body), Gullets & Blade Tensioning

Part 3 of a 5 part series covering all you need to know about swingmill blades – by Kerris Browne

This is an area that is not very well known, even amongst owners of swingblade mills. In the early learning period, you don’t need to know much about blade tensioning. A good blade can easily last through 2 sets of teeth, or around 34,000 board feet or 80 cubic meters of sawn timber before tensioning is required. And often, a good sawdoctor will automatically check the tension each time he puts new teeth on for you. But once the blade gets on in life, or if you work your blade too hard and ‘smoke it up’, you may experience loss-of-tension problems. So it’s a good idea to know what to look out for. Good care of your blade will see it last you for 3-8 years or more.

About Tension

1. Tension is put into a blade so it holds it’s shape in both vertical and horizontal position; so it doesn’t ‘cup’ or wobble with speed. Think of a rolling pin rolling out a piece of dough from the center to the edge. Tensioning presses the blade around the middle area, forcing tension into the main body of the blade, so that it holds it’s shape. But excessive heat during sawing will release that tension, and make your blade floppy and vibrate in the cuts.

2. Loss of tension is caused by plain old fatigue and hard work. Some owners will know more about tension than others, if they have blades that need more frequent servicing. If you are losing tension too frequently, you either have poor quality or incorrectly spec’d blades, or your adjustments are out causing stress on the blade, or you’re just a very rough operator!

3. Premature loss of tension is caused by forcing your blade through the cut; when it’s out of adjustment, when it’s blunt/dull, or if it’s incorrectly spec’d. The blade then heats up, causing the metal to soften and lose it’s tension. The blade will then vibrate about, be noisy, and cut rough, and you will see a ‘washboard effect’ on the log as the blade dips and rises. This is visible by 3-4 saw marks, then none for several inches, then another 3-4 marks. Your blade will more frequently jam in the cut, smoke up, and be left with purple or blue burn spots on the surface.

4. There are many saw blade manufacturers eager to make blades for you, and often at very competitive prices. But you really should stick with the manufacturer’s blades. They have spent many years establishing the specifications. There is a fine line between plate thickness, number of tips, kerf width, rpm, and collar size, to come up with a solid blade in terms of performance. And by performance, I mean the whole package; production speed, timber recovery, finish, and how long it will hold tension.

5. Bottom line, if you are struggling to cut, there’s something not right with the blade specs or adjustments. You will need to stop and correct them before you heat the blade and lose tension.

6. A good sawdoctor will retension your blade during a retip service, for very little extra, if any. You will need to tell your sawdoctor what rpm your blade is running at, and the tooth specifications (spec sheet usually supplied by the manufacturer). Modern sawdoctors
will roll-tension your blade, where the blade is rotated while it’s being pressed by two bearings. You will see rings on your blade if it has been roll tensioned. This method distributes tension more effectively, but the old fashioned hammer-tension is still sufficient if carried out by a skilled sawdoctor. A tension service on its own can cost anywhere from $10 to $40.

Blade Care

1. Keep your blade sharp! This is priority number 1. It takes only 5 minutes to sharpen, and it saves your blade as well as your legs. A dull blade works twice as hard, tears at the timber rather than slices it, and bogs down easily. Plus you can lose 20-40% production and end up sweating a river from all the extra pushing!

2. Make sure your blade adjustments are spot-on. If your blade is diving or taxiing for takeoff, it is fighting against the timber, stressing the blade and heating it up. You try doing the 100m dash running sideways…or better yet, with your nose to the ground! So learn those adjustments early on. The next topic in this series is dedicated to the art of Blade Adjustments.

3. Ensure you use water for very hard or sappy timbers. Sap buildup can cause drag and side friction, and heat the blade prematurely. Scrape off any sap buildup. You can even put a little dishwashing liquid in your water supply; this will give more lubrication but also prevent algae buildup in your water line.

4. The rounded-out area in front of the tooth, is called the gullet. Once the tooth slices off a piece of sawdust, it moves down into the gullet, which acts as a sort of holding scoop, and throws the sawdust out once it exits the wood. The steel edges of the gullet will get rounded after time (around 500-1000 hours), and make it inefficient at removing sawdust. Your sawdoctor should know how to service the gullets when they need it, by grinding back the steel to 90 degree cornered edges again.

5. Even longer term, is the very important need to inspect your blade for the beginnings of stress fractures. In the second year, and every year thereafter, inspect the mounting holes and the center bore for any tiny fractures lines. These can be caused by blades that are too thin, sloppy mounting screw holes, or overworking your blade while it’s out of tension or out of adjustment. Any of these issues will cause the blade to flex more than normal around the mounting holes. I’d show a picture of one if I had one, but the last time I saw a blade with stress fractures was over 5 years ago. If you spot any at all, it’s time to thank your blade for a good life and retire it permanently! DO NOT CONTINUE TO USE A BLADE WITH BODY FRACTURES.
Masonite receives capital injection

An embattled engineered board producer has received a capital boost.

“We have wasted no time since the deal was approved by the Competition Commission in June”
A recapitalisation programme and an investment of over R300 million are on the cards for KwaZulu-Natal based Masonite, a major South African manufacturer of high quality engineered wood.

The business rescue process – which started last year and officially ended this week – included the acquisition of the company by corporate investment and transactional advisory firm Jacobs Capital and its partners, Black Bird Capital, headed by Nkosinathi Nhlangulela and Siyabonga Mncube.

Creditors received 100 cents in the rand and shareholders will be paid a 35% premium on the list price. Most importantly, all employment contracts were saved.

The board of directors is in the process of being reconstituted.

“We have wasted no time since the deal was approved by the Competition Commission in June. All the conditions of sale have been met. This is a very exciting time. We have teams in place looking at all aspects of the business and strategic planning sessions have produced short and longer term plans,” said Wessel Jacobs, chief executive of Jacobs Capital.

The addition of the Masonite business at Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal, to the Jacobs Capital portfolio marks the third large investment by the group in 12 months, and it is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the annual revenue of the company, whose investments already exceed R1.5 billion.

Since its establishment in 2002, Jacobs Capital has completed over 50 restructuring projects including the successful turnaround of Da Gama, one of the largest textile mills in South Africa.

Jacobs said Masonite is a strong company and the deal was structured to ensure that all creditors were paid out leaving the company with a debt free balance sheet and working capital of R85 million as well as R100 million in stock holding.

“Extensive recapitalisation of the production lines is necessary to ensure that the mill runs at full capacity which will ensure that the company is able to return to sustainable profit as quickly as possible. A new product line is also among plans to ensure that Masonite keeps up with market trends,” said Jacobs.

“We believe that the modernisation of the mill will prepare it for expansion into new markets and products. This will contribute towards Masonite business maintaining its position as a leading producer of hardboard and timber products,” he added.

Nkosinathi Nhlangulela, director and shareholder added: “The company is now 100 percent locally owned with a new board that understands local conditions and imperatives. We see this as a long term commitment to both the business and the KwaZulu-Natal region. The new Milco leadership team is well placed to ensure a sustainable, ‘built-to-last’ business approach. It combines local management experience and expertise and offers access to strategies, systems and methodologies that have proven successful in turning around a number of South African manufacturing businesses.”

An upbeat Hilton Loring, Masonite Chief Executive, said the company was back on track. “The lead management team is in place with renewed energy and entrepreneurial spirit. This combined with investment and a new product line will ensure the company meets growing demand and provides Masonite products of the same high quality and standards that customers expect.

Jacobs said he was confident that the oldest company listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange was poised to regain its place in the economy. “We have an excellent team that can restore this business and take it to new heights.”

In terms of the ratified transaction, the Milco Consortium has purchased the Masonite Mill. The Masonite forestry assets have been sold to Forestco which is owned by R&B Timbers and an agreement is in place that secures the supply of timber for Masonite.

The Estcourt Mill, in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, which produces hardboard, soft board and door panels, was damaged in an explosion in June 2014. This, together with a difficult trading environment, saw the company apply for business rescue in December last year.

Because Masonite has been in business rescue, its trading on the JSE has been suspended. Details of the listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are still to be finalised.

Jacobs Capital was established in 2002 as a private investment company. Since then, it has developed from exclusively acquiring and establishing businesses, to incorporating independent divisions that provide an extensive range of business advisory services as well as manage turnovers, mergers and acquisitions.

Its portfolio includes leading workwear manufacturer MB Workwear, textile companies Da Gama and Gelvenor, automotive component supplier Connecto Fasteners.

Unlike other potential private equity investors, Jacobs Capital is able to draw on extensive in-house expertise to implement a strategy that will see Masonite taken out of business rescue within a short period of time.
German edgeband for southern Africa

Seal Cool Industries will distribute German edgeband systems to the southern African market.

Seal Cool Industries (SCI) will distribute German edgeband manufacturer MKT’s offering in southern Africa, SCI chief operating officer, Rudi Hasert, tells Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times.

The announcement follows SCI’s appointment of Eládio Gaspar as national sales manager for its new woodworking division.

Supplying its extensive customer base with profile extrusions and mouldings for the last 24 years, SCI formally entered the woodworking industry two years ago, providing components to manufacturers. “By purchasing existing tools to manufacture knock-in edging, furniture handles and other specialised profiles, SCI realised a shorter route into the market than the traditional approach,” says Hasert.

MKT is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

What makes MKT unique, says SCI director, Karlo Blazevic, is that its business is exclusively focused on the manufacturing of edgeband, and it is this focus that results in the continual drive to develop innovative products and manufacturing processes.

Strategic fit

The partnership with SCI, already an established extruder and distributor, together with the combined industry experience of Hasert and Gaspar, meant that there was little doubt as to who should distribute MKT products.

“The similarities between MKT’s general business approach and our own makes us extremely excited to collaborate with MKT,” adds Blazevic. “Their passion for innovation and the value they place on investing in themselves makes MKT a perfect strategic fit for the latest expansion of our product offering.”

For 25 years, MKT’s daily challenge has been to strive for innovation, improvement and perfection. This drive has seen MKT continually investing in its own facilities, from doubling their size in 2003 with a new production hall, to investing €20 million in the construction and machinery of a second production plant in Ohrdruf in 2007. This 13 000 m² facility hosts several new inline and offline printing units as well as new extrusion and slitting machines working on a 24-hour basis. Plans for further expansion of the 64,000 m² premises are already underway.
MKT also invests heavily in research and development. It was for this purpose that MKT decided to take the development and production of printing inks, lacquers and pigments into its own hands and it now owns the company PRINTEC in Ernstroda, Thuringia. Consequently, it has a significant market advantage over competitors not only in terms of shortened production and development cycles, but also by achieving exceptionally high colour consistency as well as minimising problems with metamerism, which are so commonly seen with many edgings sold in South Africa.

Just as SCI has ISO 9001:2008 certification, so too does MKT with its EN DIN ISO 9001:2008 certification endorsed by the official seal from TÜV Thüringen in January 2011. Gaspar elaborates that this mutual understanding of quality illustrates synergies in how both companies meet the challenges of a demanding market. SCI has therefore taken the decision to import ABS edging from the MKT stable.

New local range
Marketed under the brand name ALPHA-TAPE™ ABS, the edging conforms to European requirements for a greener option to PVC edging. This enables South African customers to satisfy the needs of the most demanding corporate clients. “Not only can ALPHA-TAPE™ ABS be processed on all standard edgeband machines, but the range selected for South Africa is also of a very high quality,” explains Hasert.

Gaspar continues that the process of developing the local range took over 12 months, with continuous feedback between continents to ensure the best-possible solution for the market. “We took our time perfecting colour matches, liaising with customers, getting samples tested and so on, all to ensure we have a range tailored to local needs.”

The fact that MKT manufactures in broad sheets of up to 1.3m wide, using a unique production technology on calandering lines, offers several advantages to SCI and its customers. Ultimately, SCI will ship large Jumbo rolls, which will be slit according to customer requirements, thereby offering customers maximum flexibility and ensuring quick reaction times to short-term demand, he says.

The possibilities of expanding this range and offering customer-specific solutions are virtually limitless, adds Gaspar. “Initially our range will comprise of 1mm and 2mm edging, however MKT has the capability to manufacture edgeband in any thickness between 0.4mm and 4mm.”

In fact, the full MKT range holds a host of surprises, such as the well-established products ALPHA-TAPE™ EXCELLENT GLOSS and MATT, which set new standards for surface refinement where a perfect mirror gloss or a perfect matt finish is desired to enhance the optical qualities of any wood grain or plain colour, states Gaspar. Even more impressive, ALPHA-TAPE™ EXCELLENT EFFECT combines both matt and gloss finishes within a single edgeband décor, to produce a truly unique and striking finish. “We expect to see major increases in demand for these products, with significant investments from local board manufacturers and suppliers in this space.”

Gaspar is particularly excited that MKT’s flagship, namely ALPHA-TAPE™ ZERO, is now also available upon request from SCI. “Invisible-join technology has come a long way since its inception and with the advantages it holds over traditional hot-melt adhesive edgebanders, it is obvious that this will ultimately become the industry standard.”

ALPHA-TAPE™ ZERO is leading the way forward with its innovative edging that can be applied with all currently available zero-join techniques (Laser, Hot-Air or Near-Infrared), adds Hasert. Thanks to the calandering production method of ALPHA-TAPE ZERO®, which guarantees constantly equal layer thickness across the top and functional layer, the results achieved are incomparable, he says. It is already in use by a leading local office furniture manufacturer.

The SCI team, states Blazevic, is confident about its future role in supplying the woodworking industry in Southern Africa. “The opportunities are limitless. Our approach to offer value to customers and quality product solutions at the right price, coupled with the high service levels expected of a business partner, is our formula for growing our industry footprint.”

As the old adage goes, slow and steady wins the race. This could be said of SCI’s approach to the market thus far and calculated advances in its product offering have seen the company winning favour with many of the large manufacturers.
The looming recession may be lapping at the doors of the massive cut-and-edge industries, but the demand for custom-designed furniture remains very buoyant.

This is evident by the daily hustle and bustle at a small woodworking facility in the Bosveld where husband and wife work hand-in-hand to meet this demand.

Bela Bela-based Mellowood Furniture Design has been designing and manufacturing bespoke hardwood and sleeper furniture for the past three years.

It was back in 2014 when the two entrepreneurs decided to sell their successful businesses and move to Limpopo. Both had very limited experience in furniture making, apart from Gareth Snyman’s minor dabbling in woodworking with his hobbyist father in the garage as a child.

However, the Snymans have always been known for their impulsive business decisions. He and Ellie had identified a demand, and were therefore going to exploit it – the
foundation of their previous companies’ successes in Johannesburg, Gauteng.

“We have always been the type of people to identify a business area and go lunge for it, and learn how to do it later. We took exactly the same approach with Mellowood Furniture Design, and never looked back,” Gareth Snyman told Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times during a visit to his factory last month.

This leap was definitely well worth it. The latest factory, which is currently located in the industrial zone of Bela Bela, continues to manufacture a range of furniture. This includes the solid table made from Klaat slabs for a Pretoria-based orthopaedic specialist when we visited the operation late in July. The top, alone, weighs in at a whopping 400 kilograms (kg).

This workmanship adequately reflects the company’s ethos. Everything manufactured by the small team is of the highest quality.

“For example, we never make a table top with a 38 millimetre (mm)-thick material. Ours is always thicker. We may even decide to go right up to 50 mm if the customer wants this,” he says.

A stunning Mahogany table with a 42 mm top was recently personally delivered to the customer by Gareth Snyman. This is a ritual he enjoys and continues to do after the completion of every project.

“While Mellowood Furniture Design exists to make a profit, we’re very passionate about what we do. It is more than just the money. I live for the look on our customers’ faces when they see their furniture,” he says.

Solid business

Although the company has a fairly short history, there is not much it has not done yet, barring bending and carving. These are both skills the company prefers to leave to specialist sub-contractors.

When it comes to furniture design, Mellowood Furniture Design’s key differentiator is the materials it uses, and it is certainly not Pine, apart from using this material to manufacture a quality frame for upholstered furniture that is also made at the company’s factory.

Snyman uses Klaat, Rosewood, Teak, Rubber Wood, Meranti and American Ash, to name a few. It sources these materials from reputable suppliers with a long track-record importing timber. Some of these agents include IFA, Silverton Hout and Numill Marketing, to name a few.

He cautions against a number of unscrupulous participants in the industry which have not kiln dried their timber correctly.

“I make sure that I only deal with reputable players. I have learnt some valuable lessons dealing with some so-called importers. There are many who do not even have VAT numbers, and the quality of the material that they supply is questionable,” says Snyman.

Most of the company’s business is generated from the furniture items it manufactures from hardwoods.

However, there is also a very real demand for items made from sleeper wood, especially pool tables and tables.

The challenge is sourcing the material at a reasonable price. Sleeper wood is becoming more scarce and, as such, extremely expensive, impacting negatively on the end product. Bear in mind that Mellowood Furniture Design is known for

The company only uses hardwoods and sleeper woods
being more cost-effective than many of its counterparts in the industry – a major competitive edge especially in challenging economic conditions.

**Solid machinery**

One of the complexities on the factory floor is machining these hardwood species and large sleeper wood slabs.

Snyman shies away from new woodworking technology, noting that it is not geared at the materials he uses, especially Tambotie and sleeper wood.

“When you plane these materials, for example, the blades become blunt very quickly. We have had to be very specific with our woodworking machinery requirements,” he says.

All of his equipment was bought from a hardwood furniture manufacturer just before opening shop in 2014.

They are solid cast-iron units that are built to provide a robust performance when challenging these materials.

The band saw, for example, is 2.5 metres (m) high and weighs just under a ton, featuring a gargantuan 800 mm-diameter wheel with a 5 140 mm-long belt.

These machines were all refurbished on behalf of Mellowood Furniture Design by an undisclosed private player. A noticeable aspect of the operation is that it defies modern production lines geared at producing for a mass market.

This operation takes time to make its furniture. Custom work is more often than not intricate in nature requiring a close eye for detail.

A sound example of this is the Rosewood table with turned legs that was designed and manufactured for one of the company’s customers.

**Its business**

Snyman has surrounded himself with experts and openly acknowledges that he is the businessman who focuses on steering the ship, while relying on the knowledge of his team. Some of his employees boast almost 20 years of experience working with hardwoods.

“Great artisans do not necessarily make good business people. Ellie and I have always been good at business, but we need good skills and knowledge of the industry to make Mellowood Furniture Design a success. I am confident that we have them.”

And, Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times has to agree!
Dokter and Misses, a leading multi-disciplinary product design company based in Johannesburg, has won the highly revered ‘Icon’ award at the 2015/2016 Southern Guild Design Foundation Awards, which took place on 23 July, at the Southern Guild Gallery in Woodstock, Cape Town.

The award, which was sponsored by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), was presented to Adriaan Hugo and Katy Taplin, the husband and wife duo who run Dokter and Misses.

In total, seven companies were awarded under the categories ‘Icon’, ‘Object that Moves’, ‘Maker to Market’, ‘Manufacture’, ‘Future Found’, ‘Apprentice’ and the newly introduced ‘Design with Purpose’, with the awards acknowledging both highly successful companies, and designers entering into the industry.

According to the organisers, the ‘Icon’ award is awarded in recognition of work produced by a highly regarded South African design company, acknowledging outstanding achievement, innovation and career advancement.

Dokter and Misses was recognized for its major trajectory over the past 18 months, which includes having participated in a focused exhibition of African design at R & Company in New York last year, and continually showing at the top design fairs around the world with Southern Guild, with bespoke work being commissioned for some of the best homes and hospitality venues around the world.

The company currently has work on show at Beauty - Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, and its involvement in developing a solar-powered Wi-Fi bench for public areas shows the company’s far-reaching effect within its own country.

“Our partnership with the Southern Guild Design Foundation Awards marks our strong commitment towards the promotion and marketing of American hardwoods as a truly beautiful and sustainable material,” says Roderick Wiles, AHEC Director for Africa, Middle East, South Asia and Oceania.

“Through this partnership and others in South Africa, we are looking towards further strengthening our ties with the top designers and architects in line with our mission to raise awareness about American hardwoods in South Africa, while also supporting the design community.

“These awards continue to provide a unique and exciting opportunity to recognise some of the very best talent in South Africa and we are confident that American hardwoods will maintain their position as a preferred material for design in the region.”

Adriaan Hugo and Katy Taplin, the husband and wife duo who run Dokter and Misses

Other winners on the night included Wonki Ware (Object that Moves Award); Pichulik (Maker to Market Award); Woodheads (Manufacture Award); Pinda Furniture Design (Future Found Award); Jason van der Linde (Apprentice Award); and Repurpose Schoolbags (Design with Purpose Award).

Aimed at recognizing the industry’s top achievers as trailblazers in local design, manufacture, commerciality and innovation, each of the seven winners received a bronze gorilla sculpture, now a Design Foundation Award tradition, sculpted by Otto du Plessis from Bronze Age Foundry.

“As a local design brand, Dokter and Misses has developed a unique voice that, unencumbered by trend-driven aesthetics, strives to create a new African design vernacular,” explains Southern Guild Design Foundation board member Trevyn McGowan. “For a remotely positioned country, with an extremely young industry, it takes a design company with a very strong identity to create an impact in the saturated global design world.

“Katy and Adriaan have been making that impact almost from the outset of their careers. Their retail spaces, high-scale commercial contract business and contemporary production ranges all signify a true grasp of what it means to be a successful design brand, all the while being professional, generous and two of the nicest people you could ever meet.”
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Woodcreations launches new tech

Johannesburg based wooden furniture stalwart Woodcreations, established in 1979, like most other furniture manufacturers at the time, was facing a crisis in the early to mid 2000s. With the market being flooded by cheap Chinese furniture and local companies struggling to compete, the company was forced to make some difficult decisions regarding its product range, which at the time consisted mostly of bentwood furniture.

When husband and wife team, Russell Dickson and Michele Uys got involved in 2005, they did not hesitate to cut the non-profitable bent furniture range, and introduce new furniture ranges, mainly for the corporate market, as well as the hospitality industry. This blew new life into the company and ensured its success.

Now, 11 years later, the dynamic team is once again at the cutting edge of the woodworking industry, having recently installed a brand new Biesse Stream A, a fully automatic edgebanding machine, with cutting edge technology that is reliable and guarantees first-class results, from woodworking machine supplier, Austro, which is set to revolutionise cut and edge technology in South Africa, at their factory in Wynberg.

The Stream A is the new range of single-sided edgebanding machines aimed at manufacturers who wish to increase their production capacity, it allows users to take on huge amounts of work and seamlessly adapts to any machining needs due to its versatile configuration possibilities.

According to Russell, this has already aided the company in successfully tendering for at least one major project, namely Tshwane House.

“We wanted to tender for the Tshwane House project, but the tender specified that PU glued edges had to be used,” says Russell. “So we did some homework and came up with the Biesse Stream A, with Air Force technology, which...
Air Force System, available on the Stream A, is based on the physical principle of convection. By using a compressed hot air system, the edge bonds perfectly with the panel, guaranteeing resistance to water and heat and an excellent long-lasting quality finish.
allowed us to tick all the boxes and then some, and secure the contract. The Air Force technology surpasses PU by not only providing the water resistance required.

“With the new Air Force technology made possible by the Biesse Stream A, we are able to eliminate glue lines completely, thereby sealing the board and making it virtually waterproof, and all of this without using any glue,” says Russell, adding that the machine is still capable of conventional ABS and PVC edging, using non-toxic polymers.

Airforce technology is based on the principle of convection. By using a compressed hot air system between 400 and 500 degrees Celsius, the edge bonds perfectly with the panel, guaranteeing resistance to water and heat and an excellent long-lasting quality finish. No joints and no glue lines, in perfect harmony with the panel.

Because the technology does not require any adhesives, toxic fumes normally associated with glue are eliminated.

“Not only is this product extremely environmentally friendly due to the fact that it cuts out the need for toxic polymers, it also lends itself to a large number of applications,” adds Michele.

“With conventional edging, the glue lines are usually where one would find a build-up of dirt over time. This technology lends itself perfectly to application in hospitals, restaurants, and many more, due to the fact that, where there is no glue line, there can be no dirt build-up.”

While, being a premium product, it commands a premium price. The Airforce technology manages not to price itself out of the market. “Whilst conventional edging is cheaper than Airforce edging, the difference is marginal given the running meters per furniture item and the added benefits of Airforce edging.

“If one takes into account the fact that, by eliminating the glue line and thereby effectively sealing the board, its life cycle is extended by many years, this small price difference is definitely worthwhile.”

Michele adds that, for the Tshwane House project, they were able to guarantee their work for an incredible 15 years.
You wouldn’t expect something so beautiful to be so tough.

MelaWood SupaGloss™ is the latest design and colour trend brought to you by PG Bison, the trusted name in decorative panels for kitchens, furniture and shop fittings.
A solid foundation has been laid for the showcasing of the variety of indigenous woody species in southern Africa in a format that all wood lovers will enjoy.

This follows the launch of the *Guide to the properties and uses of Southern African Wood* last month.

Authors, Stephanie Dyer, as well as Barry and Danielle James, have documented as many as 160 tree species in the region, and plans are already under way to continue with the exercise.

“We are confident that we have made a very good start, but there is still much work to do,” said Danielle James at the Briza publication launch, which was attended by *Wood Southern Africa & Timber Times*.

A stand-out feature of the book is the invitation by the authors to invite professional woodworkers to share their views on working with the various species of timber.

This first-hand account should appeal to professional woodworkers looking to broaden their material choices, while acting as an accurate source of verification and identification of woody species in the region.

Work on the 336 page hard cover book with its more than 700 full-colour photographs and distribution maps started in 2013.

The information is presented in such a way that it is accessible to the public, and according to James, this is a highlight of the publication, considering that other publications tend to be extremely technical.

This publication therefore appeals to a wider readership, ranging from professional woodworkers, designers and architects through to wood dealers and collectors to hobbyists and anyone else who is interested in trees and wood.

Species treatments include information on conservation status, uses, mechanical properties, durability, identification features and woodworking properties.

Photographs include images of tree bark, untreated and treated wood, end-grain macrographs, as well as worked items.

The book provides information on historical uses, where the trees grow, availability and sustainability of the woods and the practicalities of harvesting and processing. It is encouraging to learn that efforts are being made to continue with the project, although it will take time before we see the next results. This is considering the long process involved in launching the first offering from the authors.

However, Barry James’ passion for the material, which dates back to his professional career as a game ranger, is sure to add impetus to the project.

This is definitely a must for readers of this journal who earn their keep from working with woods of all varieties!

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According to UNI-CAM SA Sales and Operations Director, Venetta Dudley, the show went very well for them with lots of interest shown in their wide range of CNC machines and routers.

“I think what sets us apart is that we do not simply sell a machine to a client, but we look at the client’s needs and recommend a machine based on those needs,” says Venetta. “We develop training manuals in order to ensure that our client’s employees are sufficiently trained in the correct use of the machine.

“We handle the entire process from machine selection, to training, to setting up the machine and software applications, in order to ensure that clients are able to start using their machines immediately.

“We also have in place a number of optional value adding services that even includes additional artwork and design services.”

Another selling point for UNI-CAM SA is that they are able to design and build custom machines, based on the needs of their clients. “The fact that we design and build custom machines gives us an edge as we are able to work closely with the client, taking into account every aspect of what our client needs and design a machine that ticks all the boxes for the client.”

As a local manufacturer, repair and maintenance call-outs are attended to quickly and efficiently. “We pride ourselves on our after sales service and ongoing technical support services and we generally are able to sort out any problem, be it due to standard wear and tear, or any other technical mishap quickly, and with as little as possible disruption to the business our clients.

The company recently extended their already impressive product range to include both flatbed and rotary plasma units. “We are also planning to launch a low-cost router within the next few months,” says Venetta.

“We have found that the hobbyist market, as well as the small business sector has grown significantly and we’ve seen a need in the market for a machine that won’t break the bank, while at the same time bringing a lot of value to the production line for small businesses as well as hobbyists.”
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Carpentry skills brought to Diepsloot community

A leading power tool company is providing essential support to a carpentry training initiative in a poor area in Johannesburg.

The Diepsloot Foundation was established by St Mungo’s church in 2008 and its carpentry school has been supported by Stanley since inception. The carpentry course now has an intake of 15 students, recruited from the Diepsloot community.

Stanley Black & Decker donates monthly to cover the operating costs and facilitators salaries, in addition, it donates a comprehensive tool box to each student and provides branded overalls and work shoes.

As their Mandela Day initiative Stanley Black & Decker staff repainted the abulation blocks at the Diepsloot Foundation. Magdeline Makofane, HR Manager of Stanley Black & Decker said, “We have staff from our GM, sales managers, to warehouse packers here today. Every level of the organisation is represented and doing something that goes beyond the scope of just benefitting the company.”

Manoj Panikkal, General Manager at Stanley Black & Decker said, “We don’t wait only for Mandela Day to contribute, but support the Diepsloot community everyday through our support of the carpentry skills development programme at the Diepsloot Foundation.”

The Diepsloot Foundation is in the process of getting the carpentry course accredited by the FP&M Seta as Building and Construction (NQF 3) and this should be in place by the end of 2016. The premises has both internal and external workshops. The course consists of theoretical and practical components including carpentry, numeracy, literacy, computer and business skills.

“Students learn carpentry skills for the construction industry such as how to make roof trusses and door and window frames which enables them to apply for jobs. They also learn furniture making which is really enjoyed particularly by the more creative students. Recycling and upcycling are key to the carpentry programme in which students learn to make affordable wardrobes, coffee tables, bed sets, chairs, tables, chests of drawers and planter boxes made from old pallets, just to name a few of the projects,” says Aldon Karshagen, MD of the Diepsloot Foundation.

Diepsloot is home to over 350,000 people. 5000 families live in formal RDP-type homes, but the vast majority of the inhabitants live in 3m-by-2m shacks assembled from scrap metal, wood, plastic and cardboard.

Estimates indicate that half the population in the settlement is unemployed – 72%+ of the 18 to 30 year olds. The consequence of this alarming state of affairs is extreme poverty, rampant crime and other social ills, including the physical abuse of women and children.

The high level of unemployment stems, in a large measure, from the low levels of education and skills.

It is into this milieu that, in 2008, St Mungo’s United Church launched the socio-economic upliftment initiative that is the Diepsloot Foundation.

The objective is the channelling funds, skills and resources into sustainable projects that will benefit and build the competencies of individuals and groupings within the Diepsloot community.

About Stanley Black & Decker

Stanley Black & Decker, an S&P 500 company, is a diversified global provider of hand tools, power tools and related accessories, mechanical access solutions and electronic security solutions, healthcare solutions, engineered fastening systems and more.

Issued on behalf of Stanley Black & Decker by Stone Soup Public Relations

For further information or high resolution images, please contact Daya Coetzee daya@stonesoup.co.za, (011) 447 7241. Company. The objective is the channelling funds, skills and resources into sustainable projects that will benefit and build the competencies of individuals and groupings within the Diepsloot community.

It also runs other vocational programmes such as sewing, AET (Adult Educations and Training), computer and business/entrepreneurial skills and is involved in a number of social outreach initiatives. Other sponsors include AVI, AECI and Auto&General.
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One-off investment for immediate results

Owning a company can be a risky business. Making the right decision at the right time always remains the biggest challenge, believes John Liu. “But I love challenges, and you have to trust your instinct.”

John Liu owns JL Cabinets, a company based in Sydney’s western suburb of Smithfield. He is a cabinet maker by trade and having built the business from scratch, he is now looking back on 20 years company history.

“People say I’m crazy and I failed a lot of times, but now I have the experience and abilities to further grow my business.”

Additional features for improved productivity machines are the lifeblood of a business, and John has recently invested in a new Weeke Vantech and a second Brandt Ambition 1440 FC edgebander from Homag Australia. Having moved into new premises late last year, and with new projects starting to kick off, the company needed to get up to speed in production to meet its timeframes. John appreciates the changes the additional machines brought to his business.

With the Weeke Vantech, he purchased a more automated nesting machine compared to his older CNCs. “We always had to touch the sheets before cutting and more manual handling was needed. We needed to watch the machine all the time, but we can leave the Weeke alone without concerns.”

JL’s older two CNC machines are rarely in use anymore and are usually a backup only. John gives an example, “The Weeke Vantech is so much faster than my older machines. We can put 90-100 sheets through per shift; previously we could only run 30-35.

“The machine runs in two shifts from 7am until midnight. It’s amazing how much work you can put through the machine.”

Paying the extra dollar for quality

It goes without saying that John is willing to pay the extra dollar for a quality machine from the German machine supplier. “It’s a one-off investment that improves efficiency and productivity straight away and in the long-run.”

The Weeke Vantech is available in different sizes and it can be ordered as a stand-alone centre in standard or...
with additional auto loading/unloading and automatic label printing for precise handling and identification of the work pieces.

JL Cabinets is now able to keep a lot of other jobs in-house, especially processing different profiles that they previously had to outsource. “Our project work is much more demanding than other jobs, so we do require good machinery,” says John.

The Sydney company has already secured three big projects, which will keep them busy until next year. “Homag salesman, Alex Muscat, saw how busy we were,” remembers John. “So he suggested new solutions to increase our productivity.

Growing in size and staff, JL Cabinets specialises in custom designed homemade and commercial kitchens for Australian households, businesses and commercial builders. Additionally, they offer cut-to-size jobs for builders or manufacturers.

As it is so often the case in the cabinet making industry, John started small in a garage back in 1998. He just put up a table for assembling and had other business partners doing the cutting. He could call it lucky if he finished two kitchens a week.

After two years of hard work, John had established a decent customer base. As a result, he rented a small factory.

“If it’s not enough, I run another shift – or get another Weeke, says John. “There’s no excuse. When you sign, you have to deliver.”

The company quickly grew in size and staff, bought its first machinery and then, end of last year, it moved into its current premises with 2 500 m² of space. Today, JL Cabinets delivers close to 2 000 kitchens per year and has 35 staff working.

Remarkable increases in volume, in particular, lead John to invest in a second Brandt Ambition 1440 FC edgebander. “Previously, we did 15 kitchens, now we can at least triple our volume.”

With the glossy board becoming more and more popular, and with his old machines not able to process this kind of material, the move to an upgrade to machines with additional features was inevitable.

Clean edges and less wastage

John treasures the accuracy. “Previously, staff was needed to clean the edges. Thanks to pre-milling, the edges come off spotless, says John. “We eliminate mistakes and have less wastage at the end of the day.”

John looks back on a loyal customer base that he built up over more than 17 years. “They want the best quality. You should do every job as it would be for your own house,” says John, who has another big contract laying in front of him.
From furniture to finishes

Wood products, ranging from furniture to finishes and everything in between, has always been very popular in South Africa. And with trends worldwide leaning toward natural, renewable, and organic products and finishes, wood products are seeing a renewed interest in markets around the world.

There are many products available on the market today that claim to be the best when it comes to wood treatment and maintenance, but few as cost effective, easy to use, and user friendly as the Rubio Monocoat range of oils.

Made with pure linseed oil and containing 20% polymer waxes, Rubio Monocoat oils are, within a couple of minutes, able to bond on a molecular level with any type of wood, providing durable protection for both indoor and outdoor applications, with a single coat of oil.

With a track record of over 10 years in South Africa, the product has proven its mettle with many users, including famed local luthier Grant Fouche, raving about its ease of use and its effectiveness as a wood treatment solution.

Rubio Monocoat is ISO 900 certified and does not contain any water, solvents, or volatile organic compounds, making it safe to use and environmentally friendly to boot. It is also non-toxic and therefore safe to use on wooden toys and furniture.

According to Rubio Monocoat CEO, William Combrinck, Rubio Monocoat has been tested in some of the world’s most extreme climates and has proved that it can stand the test of time.

“We have had projects in areas ranging from the Okavango swamps, to the Namib desert, and even the Seychelles and Mauritius where we have successfully used Rubio Monocoat oils not only to enhance the aesthetic appearance of the wood treated, which included both indoor and outdoor furniture and facades, but also managed to effectively halt and reverse cell degradation caused by the elements,” says Combrinck.

“The fact that it only requires a single coat application, that can either be sprayed on, or wiped on, eliminating all that tedious time and cost intensive sanding, and requiring only one litre to cover 50 square meters for the indoor oils, and one litre for 30 square meters for the outdoor, or hybrid oils, makes it one of the most sought after wood treatments out there today.”

According to Combrinck, another feature of the Rubio Monocoat range of oils that has helped to boost the product’s popularity, is ease of use.

“Another fact is that you don’t need to employ particularly skilled workers to apply the product as it is as simple as wiping it on, waiting the prescribed time, and then wiping it off. We’ve found that on some of our projects, it helped tremendously as we were in foreign countries where the language barrier was difficult to overcome.”
The fact that it is so easy to use makes it perfect for maintenance purposes as well,” says Combrinck. “Wood does need to be maintained, no matter what treatment you use. With the Rubio Monocoat range, you do not have to hire a professional to come and do maintenance. Anyone, even your domestic worker, is able to do it.

With a range of 42 basic colours that can be mixed and matched, the possibilities are endless. “This includes our range of pop colours for those who like things a bit more colourful,” says Combrinck.

Rubio Monocoat is also available through a large, and growing, network of resellers throughout South Africa and they are currently making a lot of headway with their expansion into sub-Saharan Africa.

“We are constantly evolving and our product line,” says Combrinck. “We are adding new products, and researching new technology, including a newly launched non-solvent glue for parquet, as well as a new fire retardant product. We will also shortly be introducing a new oiling line with wider rollers for veneer boards.”
AHEC gears up for inaugural Woodtech Forum

Total exports of U.S. hardwood lumber and veneer to Egypt reached a value of USD 8.74 million in the first five months of 2016, according to the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), the leading international trade association for the American hardwood industry.

The statistics, which have been compiled from the latest data released from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), reveal that US hardwood lumber shipments to Egypt rose by 16 percent in volume (5,128 cubic meters) and by 4 percent in value (USD 3,944 million), marking a significant comeback in this major furniture producing market.

In addition, direct exports of US hardwood veneers to Egypt reached a total value of USD 4,708 million during the January to May period of this year, marginally falling by 2 percent in comparison to the same period in 2015.

A closer look at the statistics reveals that around 75 percent of the volume of lumber shipped to Egypt was red oak with ash, white oak, walnut and maple accounting for the remainder.

With an aim to raise the profile of American hardwoods in Egypt, AHEC has announced its participation in the inaugural Woodtech Forum, which will take place at the Damietta Sports Hall in Ras El Bar, Damietta on November 26 and 27, 2016.
Given that Damietta is the main hub for furniture production in Egypt, AHEC’s participation is aimed at educating visitors about the wide availability and variety of American hardwood species as well as their proven environmental credentials.

In addition, Dana Spessert, Chief Inspector, National Hardwood Lumber Association (NHLA) will provide an introduction to grading American hardwood lumber and a practical demonstration of the NHLA Rules for grading American hardwood lumber.

The presentation will aim to help attendees obtain a better understanding of the physical properties, grades and the potential for applications offered by the different species of American hardwoods, while reflecting AHEC’s renewed commitment to cater to and expand further in Egypt, which has demonstrated a growing appetite for U.S. hardwoods, driven by the growth in both domestic and overseas demand for Egyptian wood products.

“The Egyptian wood industry is poised to grow domestically, as the Government of Egypt engages in large-scale infrastructure projects, including the construction of one million affordable housing units in 13 locations with an estimated value of USD 40 billion, and the Mena Holding Group’s Ayaat City project at a cost of USD 24 billion,” says Roderick Wiles, AHEC Regional Director.

“These projects present ample opportunities for American hardwood species; however, market development activities need to take place to capitalize on these opportunities, “AHEC’s participation will help strategically reinforce the position of US hardwoods as a favored material, mainly for interior joinery, flooring and furniture, and more importantly as key projects near their completion dates.”
MS 382

“This is a hassle-free machine that offers better fuel economy – we find we are saving a tank of petrol a day per machine, which is a significant saving.”

- Jonathan Rencken, Forestry Manager for Tree Fall Harvesters.

“The MS 382 has a lot of power yet is lighter than the MS 381, which makes my team happy. In addition, we are saving almost a litre and a half of fuel per daily set task.”

- Andre Banardo, Procurement and Harvesting Manager for Treated Timber Products.

Despite being a high performance machine, the MS 382 delivers impressive fuel consumption, up to 20% less than previous models.