Sustainable Genuine Plantation Mahogany – Swietenia Macrophylla from Fiji

Since 1522 when Spanish conquistadors constructed mahogany doors in Santo Domingo’s first cathedrals, consumers, furniture makers, and contractors all have demanded genuine mahogany. Despite escalating prices of recent years, mahogany’s history as the premier cabinet wood of famous 18th century furniture, coupled with its intrinsic beauty and fine grain, virtually assures its future demand.

In recent years, evidence has uncovered illegal harvesting of mahogany trees in some areas of its natural range in Latin America. Due to the unscrupulous practices of some, controversy has developed over the origins of much of the genuine mahogany from South American forests. Some consumers want to steer clear of the controversy and look for an alternative origin of the genuine mahogany now on the market.

Today, an alternative source of genuine mahogany is available from the island nation of Fiji. Its unique location in the South Pacific, thousands of miles from other land masses, has allowed Fiji to avoid the insects and diseases that have plagued other attempts to grow genuine mahogany outside its native range. This coupled with Fiji’s rich volcanic soil and almost ideal pattern of rains enable Swietenia macrophylla to prosper.

The story behind this new genuine mahogany source is one of cooperation and commerce. It centers on an innovative arrangement that advances the standard of living of the island’s indigenous people, while producing a consistent, reliable supply of high-quality genuine mahogany.

Economic development opportunities are provided for those who own and work the land. A share of the profit stays with the people who live there, enabling the indigenous people—who are often exploited for the natural resources on their lands—to have control over their own economic futures. They share the rewards from the sales of this genuine mahogany through a government trust set up specifically for the landowners.

Focus is on production of a reliable supply of mahogany products year round with assurance that cuts are always less than growth rates. A Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifying company is documenting the ecological and socially responsible management and harvest of this genuine mahogany from Fiji. At this point, it is uncertain as to when the FSC process will be completed due to the Islands financial restrictions.
The plantation solution

Mahogany plantations, such as those in Fiji, provide an environmentally sound alternative to increasingly scarce supplies of forest-grown mahogany. FHCL is harvesting big-leafed mahogany that originated as seedlings from British Honduras and was planted in Fiji after World War II. The wood has the same grain, fine texture and rich color that are the hallmarks of Swietenia mahogany. The venture insures that all of the resulting lumber is carefully graded to international standards.

Most experts consider the growth time required for plantation mahogany to mature, under very careful management, within 30 to 40 years. The Fiji partnership works cooperatively to ensure this sustainability since all of the participants have vested interests in the long-term productivity of these plantation resources. The venture provides the experience required to develop the mahogany into marketable products, while the Fijian people utilize their knowledge of the land and environment to cultivate healthy tree growth.

Sustainable and ‘green’

By 2005, production was over 60,000 cubic meters of logs per year from the 100,000 acres of mahogany plantations. Additional increases in production are planned as the trees continue to mature and markets for the finished products of this unique genuine mahogany from Fiji expand. Value added manufacturing facilities will be expanded in Fiji to further benefit the Fijian economy.

All of the genuine mahogany lumber originating from Global Lumber Solutions complies with requirements of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The convention lists on its Appendix 2 Swietenia macrophylla logs, sawn lumber, veneer and related wood products from natural range countries. This CITES Appendix 2 listing does not apply to the Swietenia macrophylla Mahogany originating from the plantations of Fiji.

It is anticipated that many consumers look for peace of mind when buying genuine mahogany furniture and other products. This new venture in Fiji is a model solution in providing a sustainable, high-quality supply of genuine mahogany, free of the questionable environmental origin associated with some existing mahogany sources.