

Getting Comfortable with Shutters

Understanding them from the inside out will ensure you sell a high-quality product and enhance your reputation.

Why postpone your future in profitable shutter sales? The window coverings press frequently reports growth and prosperity among designers and retailers selling shutters. And the consumer media gives testimony of homeowners who recognize the long-term value of shutters and are willing to pay for them. Has unfamiliarity or confusion over shutter materials and manufacturing processes kept you from reaping the rewards of adding shutters to your product lineup? Read on to increase your comfort level and profits.

IT STARTS WITH THE WOOD

Though high-quality shutters are available in different combinations of natural and man-made materials, many people still believe that

the most luxurious shutters are still made of fine wood. Though various woods like cedar and exotic species are occasionally used for specialty applications, the most widely used wood for shutters today is basswood.

The reasons are compelling. Basswood is a plentiful and responsibly harvested hardwood that is grown throughout the world. Its traditional uses are for window sashes and door frames, molding, furniture, musical instruments and other applications where strength and light weight are important. Its vigorous growth capabilities make it an ideal shade tree.

When basswood is made into a shutter the wood's weight and strength permits manufacture and installation in much larger sizes than with a heavier species like oak or maple.

Basswood's grain is straight and fine with surfaces that sand smoothly and stain evenly. In addition, it is considered neutral in terms of odor and minerals content that can surface and cause discoloration. Perhaps most important, it is stable and resists warping. All of these clear advantages result in shutters that endure beautifully, adding value for generations.

Though basswood has a lot of positive natural properties there are many detailed processes that collaborate to ensure optimal performance. Compound methods reduce post-installation shrinking and warping before the wood even gets near a saw blade or a sander. Hand selection of wood means consistent grain patterns, avoidance of flaws, and superior structural integrity. Exclusive use of



Homeowners recognize the beauty and long-term value of shutters and are willing to pay for them.

quarter-sawn wood for louvers adds even more beauty and durability. Engineered stiles create robust shutter panels. Finally meticulous joinery and hand-finishing techniques uphold venerable traditions of wood artistry.

If this seems like a lot of discussion and detail about wood it's because you've got to be mindful of every detail in order to handcraft a truly exceptional shutter. The way the wood is handled prior to manufacturing the shutter plays a critical role in how that shutter will perform in the years to come.

THE PREP WORK

A common complaint about poorly made shutters is warping. To understand why shutters warp you must recognize that bonding together pieces of wood, all with different grain patterns and inherent predispositions to change creates them. Coordinated selection and conditioning techniques help harmonize the different pieces of wood so that when they are made into a shutter they will unify and resist their natural tendencies to warp, pull or twist.

Some manufacturers purchase pre-made wood components from different sources and assemble their shutters without regard for variation in the pieces or the final installation location of the shutter. Their louvers may be from one supplier and their stiles may be from another, each in a different location with varying levels of pre-production processing and quality control.

It's no wonder that assembling divergent components into a shutter often results in incompatible appearance and levels of durability. The different pieces of wood deforming against each other create strong forces that warp the shutter. In these cases the shutter is literally fighting itself to stay together! It should be no surprise when these shutters warp, the rails separate from the stiles, the homeowner calls to complain, and you have to make a profit-robbing service call!

Norman Shutters® employs a number of processes to condition wood prior to manufacturing. We exercise strict control over the sourcing, preparation and handcrafting processes.

The first step is Prescription Wood Conditioning™, which reduces post-installation shrinking and swelling. Wood arrives



Sturdy mortise-and-tenon joinery provides the strength to support the shear and racking forces endured by shutter panels.

Bonding multiple layers of wood together creates a durable, strong, warp-resistant frame for a lifetime of customer satisfaction.

with various moisture content levels depending on how long it has been since harvest. We condition hand-selected basswood at low temperatures in on-site kiln drying chambers to correspond with the climate of the final installation location.

If a shutter is manufactured with wood out of moisture equilibrium, each piece will expand or contract at a different rate. The shutter that seemed so beautiful when it was first installed will look quite different when the wood used to make it has all changed size and shape! That is why Norman Shutters takes extra steps to condition all of its wood.

The exclusive use of quarter-sawn louvers on Sussex® Shutters further protects against warping while adding beauty to the shutters. Craftsmen have long sought quarter-sawn wood to build heirloom-quality furniture. In order to create quarter-sawn wood, cuts are made parallel to the wood's medullary rays instead of across, which give the wood remarkable strength and stability. Cutting wood in this fashion is very costly. In fact, quarter-sawn boards are prized and sell for up to 75 percent more than flat-sawn boards.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Another procedure used to ensure stability is Norman Shutters' exclusive reinforced engineered wood stiles. Since stiles provide the framework to support the shutter it is very important that they remain straight. We bond multiple layers of wood together with pressure, heat and a proprietary chemical formulation. The result is an intense level of durability and a robust support system for our shutter panels. This means a lifetime of satisfaction for homeowners, which is backed by a lifetime-limited warranty on the appearance and structural integrity of the entire shutter. Manufacturers who do not use engineered stiles may produce shutters that sag and separate at the joints due to the intense forces endured by the stiles.

Even the straightest louvers, stiles and rails rely upon sturdy joints to hold them together. Wood joinery is a time-tested tradi-



tion practiced by craftsmen through the ages. Proper joinery is critical to the prolonged quality of a shutter. Some manufacturers use less sturdy techniques that are suited for drawers and other lightweight applications.

Norman Shutters recognizes that the shear and racking forces endured by shutters dictate the use of mortise-and-tenon joinery. The joint is crafted out of a mortise cut through the wood and a hearty tenon, which fits into the mortise.

The finishing touch to any shutter is, of course, the finish. Above all, consumers expect their wood shutters to look beautiful. Smooth surfaces and handsome stains or classic paints are a fundamental requirement. The finish also must seal and protect the wood but not be so thick that it will yellow or crack over time. Some manufacturers may save time with "cut-down" or "stock program" plans that can result in sacrifices to product quality. They may also forgo hand-finishing methods that are proven to yield superior results.

The Norman Shutters' hand-finishing process requires multiple sequences of sanding and coating with thin layers of stain or paint. This is the only way to achieve the translucent, deep finish of our wood shutters.

Now that you understand wood shutters from the inside out, make sure that your shutter manufacturer always follows the best practices in advanced processes and hand craftsmanship. The high-quality shutters you sell will contribute to your reputation as a professional in our industry and generate referrals for years to come.

Stormy Clements is the marketing manager of Norman Shutters®, Santa Fe Springs, CA, www.norman Shutters.com. 🌿