

American hardwood lumber grading Q&A series; article no. 8

July 2008

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The Grading Rules for North American hardwood lumber were established 100 years ago by the National Hardwood Lumber Association (NHLA), which is now headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee. I have been writing a series of articles for the eighteen months, answering a variety of questions pertaining to the application of those grading rules. This month's article answers some of the questions I have received over the past few months. These questions come from all over the world, as the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been distributing this article from Europe to Asia.

We are a large flooring manufacturer in China. We recently received orders for American walnut solid flooring. Our customer in Europe was concerned that some of the pieces were a softer density than others. What can we do to ensure our floors, which are guaranteed for 10 years, hold up?

Well, you have opened a big subject that skirts the grading rules and gets into industry practice and flooring guidelines. Firstly, the NHLA grading rules do not address hardness. As

discussed in previous articles, they are a measuring tool to determine the percentage of clear, defect-free wood on the face of the board. You have told me that you are using No. 1 and No. 2A Common grades, which are the sensible choice for your flooring. I have spoken with several walnut suppliers and no one is interested in sorting for density. This would be an almost impossible task from a mill's standpoint and, honestly speaking, a waste of time. So, let's talk about hardwood flooring and our practice in North America.

The National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) and the National Oak Flooring Manufacturers Association (NOFMA) are the two primary groups that have set guidelines for solid wood flooring. Both use the JANKA Hardness scale as a means of comparing densities or hardness for a wide variety of woods from all over the world. A tropical species such as jatoba (Brazilian cherry) is in the 3000 hardness range, compared to hard maple and oak, that are in the 1300 range. American walnut is around 1000, which is on the lower end of the scale. This does not imply that you cannot use walnut for flooring, as it is entirely suitable for residential use. In fact, I even have it in my family room.

All hardwood flooring needs to be cared for properly. The biggest problem is caused by ladies' high heels and the pressure exerted will dent even the hardest of woods. Removing your shoes when entering the home is a great idea and is the custom in many parts of the world.

To answer your customer's concern, it is my experience that when hardwood flooring manufacturers guarantee their floors, this covers machining defects. Once the floor is successfully installed, the guarantee/warranty covers the finish, not the wood. There are many very high end manufacturers selling American walnut flooring without density being an issue. As I always told my flooring customers, you are walking on the finish, not the wood. I encourage you to look up the NWFA and NOFMA websites and also look up the JANKA scale. I am sure you will benefit from the information available.

I recently purchased some No. 2A Common white oak. There are a lot of splits, knots, and bad ends on the majority of the boards. Are these allowed?

This question needs to be included in every article I write pertaining to the NHLA grading rules. The No. 2A Common grade is required to have a minimum of 50% clear, defect-free wood on the poor face of the board. Splits, knots, and bad ends are unlimited on the other 50% of the board. Obviously this is a worst-case scenario. When a grader is sorting through the full output of the logs being processed, there is always a range of quality within each grade. For example, No. 2A Common needs a minimum of 50% clear and will include all boards up to but not including the next best grade, in this case No. 1 Common, which must be 66% clear.

I always stress when teaching the rules that they are based on the percentage of good wood, not the bad. If you take a 10 foot board that has a big split 4 foot long, which makes that end unusable, and it is shipped as is, the grade will be No. 2A Common because 60% of the board is defect-free. If you think about it, if the shipper cuts this 4 foot off, the board then becomes 100% clear and priced as Selects and Better. The pricing for each grade depends on the grade, which depends on the percentage of clear wood on the board. Another point worth mentioning, a clear cutting from No. 2A Common is just as high a quality as the same area as on an FAS graded board. There just isn't as much and the price reflects this.

Where can I get training in the NHLA grading rules?

My first answer to this is to contact NHLA and come to America, where they conduct both the intensive long course and short courses, which last only a few days. Since this article is spread out all over the world, my next response is to contact your nearest AHEC office (www.ahec.org) and see when and where we will be conducting grading seminars. You can even request for us to come to your area if there is an association or big enough group interested. AHEC's goal is to get as much information about American hardwoods into your hands and heads, making it easier for you to make decisions about the

source for all your hardwood needs.

We recently purchased some Selects & Better hard maple and were disappointed with the wide variety of colours after we surfaced it. Do the grading rules address this?

I wrote a complete rundown of the sorting process for hard maple last year. Anyone interested in a copy can contact me. Having said that, the grading rules for hard maple address sapwood (white) sorts and heartwood sorts. After speaking with you, you wanted the white colour. The boards you surfaced ranged from very white to a slight pinkish colour. The grading rules do not address the degree of whiteness, only that they be sapwood and stain-free. There are certain times of the year when it is best to harvest hard maple, namely in the winter, which tends to produce a more consistent colour within a region. The slight variation can be attributed to the fact that hardwood is a naturally occurring product with natural characteristics.

Post Script: If you have any questions related to the NHLA grades or AHEC and our upcoming programmes, please email me at: info@nbla.com. Dit e-mailadres is beschermd tegen spambots. U

heeft Javascript nodig om het te kunnen zien.

American Hardwood Export Council

The American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) is the leading international trade association for the US hardwood industry, representing the committed exporters among US hardwood companies and all the major US hardwood product trade associations. AHEC concentrates its efforts on providing architects, specifiers, designers and end-users with technical information on the range of species, products and sources of supply.

AHEC produces a full range of technical publications which are available free of charge by visiting www.ahec-middleeast.org, www.sustainablehardwoods.info & www.americanredoak.info or by faxing (44) 20 7626 4222.

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