

Exploring wood flooring



Photo: The Solid Wood Flooring Co

Healthy and sustainable building trends could give merchants scope to diversify into wood flooring in 2019, says Rob Eckersley, General Manager of The Solid Wood Flooring Company. "Opportunity is all about education. Understanding the drivers towards healthy and sustainable buildings, and their relation to marketing wood flooring, gives the option to rise above uncertainties affecting the economy."

"Being flexible is also vital. We've adapted our ranges to make use of different grades, from prime to rustic, to minimise wastage. This means we can match the trends in the marketplace, where there is demand for both the Scandinavian 'unfinished' look and more country-style rustic tones."

"High-end specifications are usually for prime grade Oak (very few knots and small colour variation). This includes a preference for Oak that isn't 'yellow' or 'golden'. To meet this need, we use a process called 'fuming' to darken the wood. We then select out the lightest and darkest boards, packing them separately, thus helping to control colour variation."

"Our website and technical library help merchants and specifiers to demystify wood flooring covering factors to consider when using this sustainable material."

Markets for 2019: What to expect

Looking ahead to trends and developments for 'Brexit year'

From products innovation to raw materials availability and pricing, where is the timber market heading in 2019?



Photo: W Howard Group

Trends in MDF products 2019

The W Howard Group is one of the biggest producers of MDF products for the merchant trade in Europe. Simon Fleet, Commercial Director details the trends they are seeing as we look towards 2019.

"Two of the biggest growth areas we are seeing are in finishes and in profile shapes," Simon Fleet reveals. "Fully-finished skirtings, not merely primed but finished and ready to fit, painted in any colour customers desire, are seeing major growth. Within this category our KOTA product, a polymer-encapsulated, fully-finished skirting is also benefitting from good growth. As to colours,

the kitchens & bathrooms market dictates the trends: blues and greys are still likely to be the on-trend colours for 2019. In kitchens, skirtings have become an accessory, not just a necessity.

"In terms of profiles, we are seeing a move away from the complicated patterns of old towards more contemporary shapes: squarer profiles particularly, with sharper angles, seem to be in increasing demand."

"Merchants are also looking to stock slightly shorter lengths, moving down from 5.4m to 4.4m lengths. These can be stacked upright and turned more easily in the racks and are less prone to warping than longer lengths," W Howard's Simon Fleet comments.

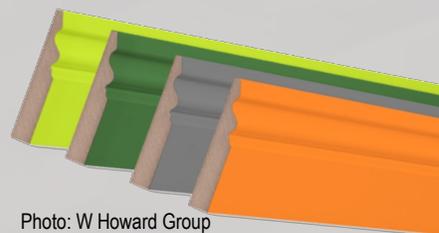


Photo: W Howard Group



Photo: Södra Wood

Structural solutions: Strong & stable outlook

We asked Jeremy English, Sales Director, Manufacturing at Södra Wood, to give us his view of the market for structural timbers: "The carcassing market is largely driven by RMI work, which has been fairly flat of late. Any increase in sales in 2019 will be covered by imported products, but they in turn are influenced by global demand, which is currently high," Jeremy English relates.

"The hot markets of 2018, the USA and China, are now cooling a little, though C24 and TR 26 demand is still stable and strong. CLS on the other hand is gradually coming back into balance between demand and supply. Overall we feel 2019 won't see the extreme price rises of this year, but there's certainly no price deflation. We reckon prices will either be up a little or flat looking ahead."

"Another area of change which may present opportunities for merchants is hybrid building solutions. Architects are becoming excited about combining different timber building systems, for example glulam with traditional timber frame. Our big development for 2019 will be the launch of our CLT (cross-laminated timber) manufacturing plant. We see this as a concrete substitute product, giving merchants an opportunity to sell into a different part of the market. We provide our customers with education on product developments, and also on how to store timber in extreme weather conditions, which we could see more of during 2019," he adds.

The going is firm in fencing supplies

How has 2018 been for fencing supplies and what's the outlook for 2019? Richard Greenaway, Commercial Director, Anglo Norden Forest Products Group, outlines the situation for Timber Forum News: "In 2018, home-grown has had a very strong year across fencing and landscaping products. The usual suspects – feather edge and rails – all had extended lead times. We've also seen unprecedented demand for new softwood sleepers."

"The possible uplift in demand for home-grown fencing may be due to the decline in influence of the big DIY sheds: people are turning to their local builders' merchant instead for fencing products. Agricultural fencing business has been affected by the long dry summer with the ground being too hard to work. This sector has picked up a little more recently. On the flip side imported fence panels and associated products have had a steady year. However 2019 may bring an opportunity for more sales of imported products, to fill the anticipated shortfall in home-grown. Given the continuing shortfall of raw material from British forests, UK mills may struggle to build enough stock to fulfil the demands of the new season in 2019. It is fair to say that log prices are not coming down so we foresee flat to firm pricing in Q1 next year," Richard Greenaway says.



Photo: Anglo Norden

No let-up in Decking demand



Photo: Arbor Forest Products

With more extreme summers affecting Britain's gardens, decking continues to provide a solution both for urban and country locations.

Jason Ostler, managing director of Arbor Forest Products, gives Timber Forum News readers his observations on the decking market and its potential next year: "Softwood decking is a mature market and shows no signs of disappearing in 2019. We are still consistently growing sales year on year. We feel the softwood decking market will be stable next year. We don't anticipate any

shortages of supply as we have worked hard to create stable relationships with sawmills," Jason Ostler says.

"Composite decking sales are also still growing. It is taking market share from across the landscaping market including from paving and aggregates."

We saw considerable growth in this during 2018 and with the new products we have planned for launch in the spring there will soon be composite products available to suit every pocket."

Marketing and quality for Softwood Mouldings

Toby Lewis, Head of Merchant Sales at SCA Wood UK says quality and marketing will influence moulding sales in 2019.

He tells Timber Forum News: "The current high global demand for softwood plus the Brexit potential have been exercising minds in relation to availability and stock movements. It may be advisable for merchants to stock up a little in Q1 next year to mitigate

any potential problems," Toby Lewis says.

He continues: "For 2019, the business opportunity in softwood mouldings lies in galvanizing your marketing around the products, which can represent up to 30% of a merchant's timber offering. Focussing on how best to market your mouldings to builders and homeowners as we move towards spring RMI work will energise your sales after winter. Focussing too on quality will give you a marketing differentiator over competitors. SCA will be launching new support for merchants on this early next year."



Photo: SCA Wood