

# VENEER TECH REDESIGN AT NEWPORT FACE VENEER OPERATION GOES MODULAR

Change in production layout and technology upgrades provide quality enhancement with greater flexibility and efficiency.

BY JENNIFER MCCARY

**L** NEWPORT, NC  
ast year, Veneer Technologies Inc. increased its footprint about 25% with the addition of a 50,000 sq. ft. plant ex-

pansion to house a completely redesigned and expanded face veneer production department. Previously, the layout was configured in a star pattern with four production spurs or zones feeding to a central location to facilitate time and motion efficiencies. The new layout incorporates a modular design and automates material handling to provide greater versatility, operating efficiency and quality controls.

"It's a whole new splicing concept," states Vice President John Varner. "There are two main lines and the machines are interchangeable so we can easily pull machines in and out. That ensures better quality and since we're automated from the double jointers through the glue applicators, it protects the integrity of our cut and ensures the glue is applied properly."

The two automated lines were custom built by Kraft Machinery Inc. based in Atlanta, Ga. Each production line includes two Kuper Josting double jointers, one Kuper glue applicator and fanner, plus five cross feed splicers—either Fisher+Ruckle Crossmaster or Kuper ACR SuperQuick. Surge protection is built into the plant layout, so that any of the four double jointers can feed any machine downstream simply by re-routing material flow. For example, if one line's two double jointers

aren't keeping up with the splicers, material from one of the second line's jointers can be switched over to make up that difference.

The project eliminated two of four existing glue applicators, which are notably high maintenance labor intensive machines, while also increasing overall production. All four jointers and six of eight existing splicers were replaced with the latest technology available. Two more splicers were also added bringing the total to 10 units—four Fisher+Ruckles and six Kupers. One of the latter is designed specifically for counter front faces.

Each brand has inherent advantages and disadvantages, Varner explains, noting that the disadvantage of one is directly related to the advantage of the other. The new interchangeable production flow allows them to capitalize on the advantages of both.

Change is nothing new for the 138 employees of one of the largest face veneer plants in North America. Established in 1993, Veneer Tech's management team, headed by President Christian Weygoldt, has followed a continuous improvement philosophy throughout its history, always with the goal of staying on the leading edge of the face veneer industry. The latest \$4 million investment has increased production by



Kuper Josting double jointer operator clips veneer and inputs downstream splicer destination for each bundle.



Conveyors deliver veneer to one of four Fisher+Ruckle Crossmaster splicers.

20%, bringing face veneer capacity to 72MMSF annually.

Veneer Tech produces both domestic and exotic hardwood species imported from every continent, offering approximately 100 different species. According to Varner, they are one of the largest importers of Okume veneer, resulting in 10 to 12 truckload shipments—roughly 250,000 sheets—per month. Face veneer is marketed to hardwood and plywood industries and numerous specialty product manufacturers.

In addition to face veneers, the company produces about 8.5MMSF of paper backed sheet veneer as well as edge band rolls. Veneer sheets and edge banding are sold through a distribution network. In the last two years, managers have also added imported lumber matched to veneer faces to the product mix. All production is sold to domestic markets in North America.

Production managers are Uwe Funke and Jim Leach. Alan Hubbard is sales manager for face products.

## MILL FLOW

The company purchases domestic and imported veneer flitches as well as some veneer logs, which are contract sliced at several supplier plants in the area.

Veneer Tech runs several customer

## DESIGN COMPETITION

**V**eneer Technologies, Inc. has an unusual take on advertising. For the last three years, the company's advertising budget has been geared primarily to one major promotion—a designer's competition called Veneer Tech Craftsman's Challenge.

Since 2005 the company has sponsored a woodworker's designer competition featuring woodwork designs and architectural projects that utilize natural veneer and wood products. Veneer Tech's distributors are encouraged to solicit entries from their customers and the company advertises the competition heavily through major woodworking publications.

Substantial monetary rewards are awarded to the winning designer, distributor and supplier sales representative. In addition, Veneer Tech provides invaluable exposure for competition winners and their suppliers by soliciting free publicity through feature articles and featuring them in advertising next year's event.

"We are trying to reward, not just the end user, but our distributors and all distributors in the industry for

their part in the whole process," states Vice President John Varner. "And we are rewarding them with things that mean a lot to them. Most are small companies that don't have large advertising budgets."

Contestants are not required to use Veneer Tech products in their designs, and submissions are judged by an independent panel with representatives from architects, trade publications and education. Categories include Architectural Woodworking, Cabinetry, Furniture, Store Fixtures and Specialty Items. There is also a Student Design category and a Grand Prize winner.

Winners are announced at the Assn. of Woodworking & Furnishings Supplier (AWF) Trade Show and International Woodworking Machinery & Furniture Supply Fair (IWF). Veneer Tech hosts a reception at these events and invites all industry publications.

"It's a great program for everybody and it's getting a lot of attention," Varner states. "It has really worked well for us."

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Standard face sizes range from 3x8 ft. to 10x4 ft. The plant is primarily a book and running match operation, but also offers slip, plank, center and balance match face products.

## SHEET VENEER

Like the face department, most of the system design in the sheet veneer department was custom made to Veneer Tech specifications by Kuper and Kraft Machinery. All processing is done by job tickets.

Forklifts transfer sheets to be backed from the grading line to a matching station where they are matched with cut-to-size backing, produced by a Carolina Machinery textile cutter. Impregnated paper backers include 5, 10, 20 and 30 mil thicknesses. Veneer Tech also makes 3M pressure sensitive backed sheets; phenol backed sheets for high pressure laminates; and wood-on-wood sheets.

Matched sheets are stacked 10 high and fed into a five-opening Wemhöner press, effectively pressing 50 sheets per cycle. Material then flows to a custom built double tenderizer, then to an auto-

matic trimmer line which sizes it to length and width. After putting-in, a Costa veneer sander applies the finishing touch before sheets are packaged and shipped per order.

Veneer Tech outsources production of fleece backed edge molding master rolls. These are processed through a Dusphol splitter into standard ½ to 2 in. widths in 250-500 ft. rolls. Custom lengths and widths are also available.

Sheet veneer and edge banding are marketed through a 300 strong distributor network in the U.S. and Canada.

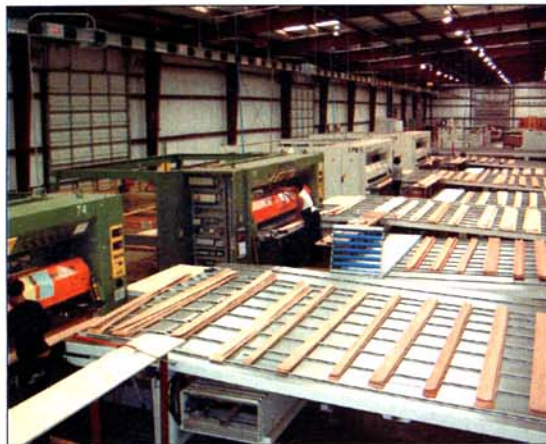
## SALES

A progressive philosophy is also evident in the way Veneer Tech's sales team approaches the market. According to Varnier, their goal is change the traditional price-based supplier customer relationship to one of partnership, in which Veneer Tech seeks to supply more than



**One of the largest face veneer plants**

specified types of glue so it is necessary to know what product is being produced prior to splicing. Veneer flitches are pre-graded, clipped at two Josting end clippers, and then sorted by length as



**It's a new concept, says Varner.**

the veneer flows over a measuring sensor. Short and long lengths are stacked on separate pallets.

Each jointer operator feeds the veneer bundle into a Kuper double jointer, punches a button to clip both sides simultaneously, then another button se-

lecting the splicer that will process that bundle, based on species and product. From there material advances through the glue applicator and fanner and is automatically distributed to the specified cross feed splicer. With this system, operators can run more than one species at a time.

Waste from end clippers and jointers fall to a below floor belt conveyor feeding two veneer choppers. Material is blown to outside silos and utilized as boiler fuel.

Toyota forklifts transfer stacked veneer behind the splicers to one of three Kuper automatic voice activated grading lines equipped with 13 sorting bins, or to a Kuper trimmer and taping line where it is manually graded. About 70% of total production goes to the automated grading lines.



**Expansion added 50,000 sq. ft.**



### **Graders use voice-activated system to enter grade.**

mere products. Their success is reflected in a 15% sales growth rate each of the last three years.

The company continuously develops aggressive, often unique, sales and promotion programs such as the highly successful Veneer Tech Craftsman's Challenge initiated in 2005. (See sidebar on page 17.)

As a partner supplier, managers try to develop added services that strengthen their customers' ability to compete. For example, the company has developed a password protected program available on line. It provides real time inventory, pricing, product options and other pertinent information on exotic woods that a hardwood plywood plant normally dealing in commodity species, for example, can use to quote a job for their customer.

"We developed this just with the intention of helping them sell more products. In turn, that will hopefully get us more veneer sales, though it is not tied to us," states Varner.

"What this does is empower our customers' sales people to expand their product offering to be more diverse, increase their margins and have more options than competing against Chinese imports," he adds. Customers aren't necessarily asking for these added services, Varner points out, but it is the kind of "outside the box" thinking he believes will give customers more staying power in a highly competitive marketplace.

Two years ago, the company started importing some hardwood lumber to promote with matching veneer faces, which has worked out well. The main species is flat sliced Sapele, used as a replacement for Honduras Mahogany since it was listed on the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES). Varner says they purchase lumber and faces from the same region, which ensures uniform color matches and is ideally suited for large architectural projects.

This fall, Veneer Tech is launching a new trucking service for plywood customers called Veneer Tech Right Now. Veneer Tech has committed to make regular "milk runs" from the East Coast to the West Coast, with stops at face veneer customer locations across the country. It allows customers to receive small orders in a timely manner without having to accumulate a full truckload shipment. Knowing the truck will arrive on a specific day every week or month will give them more flexibility in their operation. Coupled with that, the company is offering consignment inventories that can be regularly refilled through the delivery program.