

Natural Veneer and Techwood

Two Wood Veneer Options

Few materials have the warmth and elegance of natural wood. However, a wide variety of aesthetic and manufacturing considerations not only affects customers' preferences, but also leave many scratching their heads.

Whereas some people like the natural beauty of wood's "cathedrals," "islands" and knots, others prefer consistent graining and coloration. Still others are as influenced by conservation-minded processes as they are by the beauty of the finished product. To meet this wide range of tastes and considerations, Knoll offers two categories of wood veneer product: natural veneer and engineered veneer (also known as Techwood, for its reliance upon technology to produce a higher yield and a more consistent aesthetic).

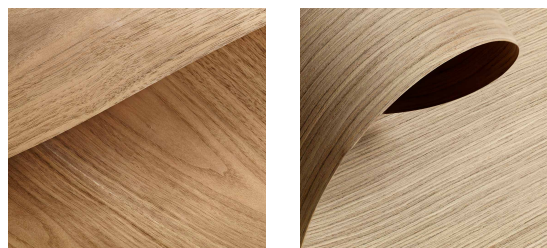
An Explanation of the Difference

Knoll's natural veneer process begins with flat cutting (i.e. slicing) a log of a given species such as cherry, maple or sycamore. Flat cutting reveals the cathedrals so characteristic of natural wood, which is why it's Knoll's preferred cut for all flat-cutting components. In flat cutting, a log is cut into slices (called leaves), which are then bundled successively into a 'fitch' in preparation for being matched.

Book matching is Knoll's preferred matching technique. In book matching, two consecutive leaves are arranged in adjacency with one being face-up, the other being "flipped over" (as if turning the page of a book). This manner of matching the leaves produces a series of aesthetically consistent pairs in which one leaf is the mirror image of the other. However, because natural grain absorbs and reflects light differently on each side, the human eye may sometimes perceive a difference in color.

A common misperception is that Techwood isn't "real wood." However, Techwood is as much a wood product as is natural veneer. The difference is in the way the veneer is produced, as well as its consequential aesthetic.

Engineered veneer (a.k.a. Techwood) also begins with a log, but a log of either the poplar or the African obeche tree. Unlike Knoll's natural veneer process, in the engineered veneer process a rotary cuts the log. In rotary cutting, a log is "unrolled" in much the same way that a roll of tissue is unrolled off the central cardboard cylinder. As a result, all of the wood's irregularities are revealed. So, in order to create a more uniform appearance, the "unrolled" wood is bleached and then dyed to the desired wood color. Subsequently, it is sliced, applied with glue, stacked in block form, and pressed in a "wavy" mold that creates undulations in the layers of wood. Finally, the block is flat cut. The result is a striking



Natural Veneer, left, and Techwood, right.

veneer with uniform coloring and linear consistency—one that is growing in popularity for its clean, modernist aesthetic.

Which Veneer is Right for You?

Costs for natural and engineered veneer vary depending upon the particular wood species and finish, but the quality is the same. Both options undergo Knoll's stringent 11-step finishing process, and both are available in a broad color palette. So, the decision as to which wood veneer—natural veneer or Techwood—is right for a given application is merely a matter of personal taste and priorities. And priorities vary. Knoll's natural veneers highlight the beauty and drama of natural figuring and distinctive grain. Thus, they are the ideal choice for customers who appreciate natural wood and all its idiosyncrasies. By contrast, Techwood, Knoll's engineered wood veneer, is created in such a way as to produce a more consistent grain pattern—one that is devoid of cathedrals and natural irregularities. Thus, Techwood is ideal for people who love the warmth and elegance of wood but prefer a more controlled aesthetic. Also, because the manufacture of Techwood results in a higher yield from the log, it may be the right choice for those who are sensitive to waste reduction.