

# LARSON · JUHL®

## From Forest Floor to Shop Floor - The Life of a Moulding

*In association with the Fine Art Trade Guild*

Mouldings are the staple diet of all framers. But what many framers perhaps do not realise is that even the simplest type of moulding has undergone eight to ten different processes before it reaches them. Some of the more ornate mouldings will have been subject to up to 20 different treatments. Here we take a look at the life of a moulding, from the forest floor to the shop floor.

### The timber

Traditionally, the main species of tree used in the production of mouldings are Ramin and Obeche, although Pine from Canada and Scandinavia is now more commonly being used as an alternative for the increasingly rare Ramin tree. Ramin grows primarily in Malaysia and Indonesia and is typically yellowish-white in colour, while Obeche is found in Africa, it is softer than Ramin and is characterised by a yellowish-white colour and coarse texture.

Most of the timber brought into this country now comes from managed forests, where selective thinning and replanting projects are in operation. Larson-Juhl recognises worldwide environmental concerns and the desire for greater controls along the timber chains, and as such proudly holds accreditations from the PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification scheme) and the FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council) Chain of Custody.

These schemes provide assurance mechanisms to purchasers of wood and paper products that they are purchasing wood produced in a sustainable way. Products carrying the FSC or PEFC labels are independently certified to assure consumers that they come from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and ecological needs of present and future generations. The Chain of Custody certification is particularly important as it looks at all areas of manufacture too - including transportation and distribution.

Felled timber is cut into planks, usually five metre lengths which are then treated with anti-fungal and anti-parasitic agents. Timber used in the manufacture of mouldings is a by-product of the furniture making industry. However, wood for mouldings must be completely knot free, so only the good parts of the wood are taken and laminated together to form a board. This also helps to ensure that the boards are completely straight.

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## Cutting the lathes

The boards are cut into lathes using a multi blade saw. The width and thickness of the lathes are determined by the ultimate dimensions of the profile. Mouldings up to 2" wide can be cut in pairs, i.e. a left and a right, whilst very wide mouldings are cut from several lengths laminated together. Lamination reduces wastage and prevents warping.

## Cutting the profile

Mouldings are profiled or milled using a multi-headed cutting machine which literally carves out each face of the frame length. At our factory in Czech Republic, the cutting machine has six revolving blades which each cut a different aspect of the moulding. The blade which cuts the profile is made from a steel template, which is produced externally from a design. The template is then used to check the wood has been milled accurately. It is extremely important that these measurements are exact. We will see why later in the process.

Mouldings which are designed to have a natural wood finish then require sanding and smoothing before being packaged and shipped out. For all other mouldings, there are still many stages to go through.

## Applying gesso

After the wood is milled, a primer called gesso which is made from chalk and skin glue is applied to the frame in a number of layers. The gesso is often coloured to match the colour of the moulding. The steel profile template is mounted onto a four-sided drawing box which contains the coloured gesso. Up to ten layers of gesso are then extruded onto the frame to create a smooth surface. This is why it is so important that the lathes are milled to the exact measurements of the template.

## Embossing the ornamentation

At this point, any added decorative ornamentation is added to the profile. The embossing process uses either heat or pressure to create a continuous pattern. Ornamentation on the mouldings produced at Senelar is created from embossed compo, which is made from skin glue, Blanc de Champagne, linen seed oil and pine resin. The compo is passed under an embossing wheel which impresses the pattern into the mixture. Strips of the embossed compo are then applied to the profile. Ornamentation can also be added using hot embossing, where a heated wheel is used to burn the pattern directly onto the wood.

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## **Adding the colour**

Paint is applied to mouldings with a vacuum pump spray nozzle, which disperses a fine jet of paint onto the wood. Several coats may be applied, depending on the final finish. Getting the right colours to meet customers' needs is very important; manufacturers such as Senelar can produce over 10,000 different colour options.

## **A touch of gold**

Gilding can be applied by hand or machine and is a highly skilled process. There are two types of gilding – oil gilding and water gilding.

With oil gilding, the moulding is lacquered to make it waterproof and then a glue varnish is applied. When the glue is almost dry, metal leaf is applied either by hand or using a roller. Oil gilding causes the gold to have a more matte appearance and is often used for architectural gilding.

In water gilding, a mixture of alcohol, water and skin glue is applied to the moulding. The metal leaf is then added, with each leaf laid slightly overlapping the previous one. During the drying process the leaf is absorbed into the wood. It is much stronger than oil gilding, which means that once dry, the leaf can be distressed by minimising the thickness of the leaf until it becomes transparent. Water gilding produces a more brilliant finish than oil gilding does.

## **The finishing touches**

Traditional finishing processes include distressing, rubbing, washlining and patination to create the final effect. Many of these processes are very labour intensive and can add significantly to the price of the moulding.

## **Distributing the mouldings**

The final product is then quality checked, packaged and shipped to companies such as UK market leader, Larson-Juhl. The company's Bedford facility has been designed for maximum distribution efficiency and this, combined with state of the art IT systems and an advanced product development programme enables Larson-Juhl to offer more than 2,500 different mouldings in a wide range of styles and finishes.

Larson-Juhl purchases its mouldings in mass quantities to ensure continuity and speed of delivery to its customers. Extensive quality control checks, ensures stock remains at a consistently high level.

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Incoming mouldings are put into bulk storage from where they are sorted into picking bays ready to be selected and packed for dispatch. Computer links between the sales office and the warehouse means that an order can be processed and be ready for delivery within a matter of a few minutes. Customer orders are then despatched on a maximum two-day delivery service.

## The end of the journey

As you can see, a great deal of work goes into changing a piece of wood into the beautifully crafted products we see in the framing shop window. But it doesn't quite end there.

Each day thousands of picture framers across the UK take these mouldings and produce a vast variety of frames, from the simplest photo frame to the most complex projects, ready for customers to take home and cherish.