

Gain A Better Understanding of American Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)

The demand for cherry has risen steadily during the past few years and today ranks number one for many owners, architects and suppliers. According to the HPVA's most recent usage survey, cherry veneer comprises 28% of all US hardwood veneer production, well ahead of white oak (22%), red oak (21%) and hard maple (13%). From a market pricing perspective, American Black Cherry logs cost approximately 30% more today than on January 1, 1999.

Although cherry is tops in popularity, the availability of this popular wood veneer is strained at best. Industry veneer suppliers thus far have been able to meet demand, however, suppliers are alerting buyers to increased costs, diminished supply and reduced quality of cherry veneers. The shortage of cherry is not from lack of trees, but rather due to a reduced harvest of trees on public lands. While most domestic cherry is grown and harvested in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Indiana, according to some suppliers, cherry is still available to a great extent because European demand has decreased.

When cut from the tree, cherry veneer is light pink to reddish-brown in color and has a straight-grained, satiny pattern. It may have a figured grain pattern, but this varies dramatically. If figured cherry is desired, it needs to be specified by selecting a specific flitch from a veneer supplier.

In addition to cherry's popularity and distinctive natural beauty, there are some misunderstandings related to cherry's appearance. Cherry veneer generally exhibits three (3) natural characteristics: **sap**, **gum pockets** and **pin knots**. These are not defects in the wood. On the contrary, these identifying characteristics will appear in cherry veneer to varying degrees, regardless of cut and grade.

Sap is the outer portion of the veneer and is white in color. **Gum pockets** are well-defined openings between rings of annual growth containing sticky deposits or evidence of gum prior to accumulations. **Pin knots** are small, dark, round ringed areas, 1/4" or less in diameter. (NOTE: Blending pin knots, detectable from a distance of 6' to 8', generally do not detract from overall door appearance).

Cherry is also susceptible to **oxidation** from light. When cherry veneer is exposed to any light, both natural and artificial, the veneer will gradually darken depending on the intensity and duration of the light. Be sure to cover the doors, if they're to be stored for a period of time, so light is unable to affect the surface color. It's important to note the results of oxidation are not reversible and can not be sanded out.

When you specify or order cherry, remember these natural characteristics of the wood. If these characteristics are not acceptable, if costs are a consideration or if the end result can be achieved by selecting a factory finish color, it may be advisable to select a different wood species, such as select white birch. Whatever species of wood you choose always be sure to review samples prior to final wood selection to ensure a door product that meets your expectations

