

**“Merriam Webster’s Dictionary dates the word veneer back to 1702, even though veneering is a much older craft”<sup>1</sup>.**

Many feel that the veneering technique is “reserved for the most skilled woodworker” and some involved in solid wood construction “might think of veneering as a low grade substitute for the real thing”<sup>1</sup>. Veneered surfaces are as durable and attractive as solid wood. While veneer adds dimensional stability, it can also “unify the appearance of a piece or serve the design of a furnishing as a work of art”<sup>1</sup>.

***“I use veneer on much of my woodworking because to me veneered surfaces are as durable and attractive as solid wood”.***

## **HISTORY OF VENEERING**

***Veneer Production has been around for more than 4000 Years:*** “Ancient Egyptians were the inventors of wood veneer. “Exotic materials were commonly used to decorate artifacts the Pharaohs planned to take with them in the afterlife beginning with the earliest dynasties”<sup>2</sup>. Fabulous veneer work in Ebony and Ivory were put into King Tut’s tomb and veneer fragments as old as 5000 years have been found in King Semerkhet’s tomb”<sup>1</sup>. Wood was a very scarce resource. “The Egyptians strove for maximum utilization of wood”<sup>5</sup>, therefore they “developed tools for shaving veneer from logs shipped in from Lebanon, Syria and Phoenicia”<sup>3</sup>.

***Renaissance Period:*** “Around A.D.1300 in Italy, marquetry or intarsia work became the signature construction for furnishings of royalty”<sup>1</sup>. “Intricate designs and lavish scenes using the finest species of wood and tiny pieces of burl or exotic grain”<sup>4</sup> were used in veneer construction. “Furniture in England was decorated with veneers of Walnut and Ebony”<sup>3</sup>.

***14<sup>th</sup> Century:*** “Intricately inlaid veneered panels were created by Italian craftsmen”<sup>3</sup>. Veneering was now done on a larger scale.

***16<sup>th</sup> Century:*** “Spain saw the advent of the inlaid furniture and cabinetwork. This period also saw “the invention of the fretsaw in Germany. France under the Bourbon Dynasty became the cultural centre of the world and French Cabinetmakers produced lavish Ebony veneered cabinets”<sup>3</sup>.

***17<sup>th</sup> Century:*** “Veneering took a major step forward with the development of better woodworking tools”<sup>2</sup>, as “finer and thinner saw blades allowed craftsmen to cut thinner sheets of veneer and more intricate pieces for inlays”<sup>1</sup>. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century was “the Age of Walnut in England as craftsmen used matching leaves of walnut on veneered furniture”<sup>3</sup>.

***18<sup>th</sup> Century:*** “Veneering began to take center stage when a shift in furniture making style replaced frame and panel construction with case and drawer construction and surfaces of figured veneer were favored over shaped panels and carved surfaces”<sup>2</sup>. Furniture’s beauty was based more on “the beauty of the wood grain than the artists’ details”<sup>1</sup>.

***19<sup>th</sup> Century:*** “A major advance occurred in the early part of the century when machines for veneer peeling and slicing were patented in England, finally the veneering craft was freed from limitations imposed by sawing”<sup>3</sup>. The Regency Period developed when much of the “furniture produced was veneered from Mahogany and Rosewood”<sup>3</sup>. New production techniques were slowly gaining acceptance. During this period, manufacturers began using plywood. “Piano manufacturers were the first to start using plywood in 1830”<sup>1</sup>. “Veneering started to develop a bad reputation when some furniture manufacturers used veneer mainly as a method of covering badly constructed furniture”<sup>5</sup>. By the middle of the 1800’s, “commercial furniture producers in America had grown into factory-type operations that weren’t reliant on skilled cabinetmakers and woodworkers, and veneer was seen as a way to save on material costs more than as unique decorative technique. *The result was thousands of pieces of cheaply constructed furniture with low quality veneered surfaces*”<sup>2</sup>.

***20<sup>th</sup> Century:*** “In the first half of the century, the manufacture of veneers developed all over the world”<sup>3</sup>. “Technology advanced-slicing a thinner veneer began in the 1970’s”<sup>1</sup>. Veneer could be as thin as 1/64 of an inch. “Over the past few decades, using wood veneering has been on the upswing”<sup>2</sup>. Through the centuries, Veneering has become a cultural legacy. Veneering “also offers a method for using exotic wood species that’s much less demanding on hardwood resources”<sup>2</sup>.

1 ([http://www.ehow.com/about\\_6726771\\_history-veneer-wood.html](http://www.ehow.com/about_6726771_history-veneer-wood.html))

2 (<http://www.rockler.com/articles/how-to-veneer.cfm>)

3 (<http://oak.arch.utas.edu.au/tech/veneer/history.htm>)

4 (<http://www.harpgallery.com/library/veneer.htm>)

5 (<http://www.davidrwebb.com/A-History-of-Veneer.405.0.html>)