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Architecture is not just about solving problems, but about thinking laterally and innovating to understand all the forces working on a project and striving to achieve a delicate equilibrium.

AR. TUSHAR DESAI,
Tushar Desai Associates



RESIDENTIAL WOODEN FURNITURE



a sector that has evolved with the demands of newer customers, but stood strong in the traditions of the centuries, wooden furniture designed and made in india is now increasingly coming into its own

With one of the fastest growing populations in the world, it is no surprise that India has a vibrant and growing residential furniture market. The industry has more of a leg to stand on today with the rapid growth in customer demand, spending capacity and exposure to international trends, over the last decade. This has resulted in significant improvements from product design to quality and pricing. There is no mystery to the strong preference for wooden furniture; its durability, sustainability and aesthetic qualities make it appropriate to a range of uses and customer preferences.



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The figures offer a glimpse of the scale of the markets. The Indian furniture market was estimated at US\$ 17.9 billion in 2015, with wooden furniture accounting for over US\$ 5.3 billion. Of this, products worth US\$ 852 million were imported, with annual import growth projected at between 50 and 60 per cent. In the same year (2015), India was the largest furniture importer in the world, with a 19 per cent share of furniture imports. A total of 10,476 importers shipped furniture to India, mainly from Italy, Germany, Spain, China, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Japan (Source: Value Research).

The country's residential wooden furniture market is currently largely comprised of small-scale carpenters and contractors customizing pieces to customers' requirements. Aarti Aggarwal, Founder and Principal Designer, Knock on Wood, New Delhi, says, "The domestic industry still falls in the non-organized sector, while internationally, it is accounted as organized. In terms of exports, too, the scenario is not impressive." It is estimated that around

85 per cent of the domestic furniture segment lies within the unorganized sector. (Source: Economic Times)

The organized share of the market is fast catching up, with customers opting to make purchases of branded items, rather than go the old route of the neighborhood carpenter. Sameer Hora, Managing Director, IDUS, New Delhi, explains, "Customers now have increased knowledge about designs, wood materials, finishes and pricing schemes, which propels them towards branded pieces."

According to Abhishek Kathuria, Director, Mari Gold Furnishers, New Delhi, "The wooden furniture industry is no longer restricted to demand for a sofa, chair or bed; there is a steady requirement for the finest range and designs in different categories, from pieces required for living and dining rooms, bedrooms and kids' rooms, home offices and outdoor areas." The category also includes home furnishings and designed interiors conceptualized from scratch.



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material choices

India abounds in several species of lumber that are suited to furniture making, though some woods are imported, to supplement domestic supply. Teak accounts for almost 50 per cent of the total wood consumption for furniture in India, Sal and Deodar account for about 20 per cent, and the balance includes Mahogany, Cedar and others. India also has an abundant supply of Rubber wood. Natural rubber plantations cover 520,000 hectares with an additional 6,000 hectares being replanted almost every year since 1994, the bulk of which, 95 per cent of the total supply, is found in Kerala. (Source: AHEC)

Today, people are well aware of the quality and type of wood used to manufacture furniture, influencing manufacturers as well. Mamta Gupta, Founder and Owner, Buzzaria Dukaan, New Delhi, says, "These days, people prefer organic and environment-friendly products."

Experts say, that in order to manufacture good quality wooden furniture, the designer or the manufacturer must understand the nature of the raw material. It is important to understand the unique mechanical properties of the wood, such as swelling, shrinkage and warping on account of atmospheric moisture. Additionally, each species of wood has different properties; with the same wood species sourced from different locations displaying different properties.



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product trends

A clearly visible trend is the change from the more traditional artisan furniture to the more design-driven. Gobind Kapur, Director, Maison Du Luxe, Faridabad, says, "Earlier, it was all about traditional craftsmanship, but now you can witness fabulous shapes, cuts and finishes. Designers have been translating their designs into reality, and over the last five years, we have created a fusion of different materials incorporated with wood, such as marble, wood and steel."

The increasing exposure to international design and products has resulted in furniture with more than just a utilitarian aspect. Nomita Kohli, Owner, Wisma Atria Interiors, New Delhi, says, "Furniture has become a style statement. Home owners are beginning to want to proclaim their individuality and stay on top of national and international design trends, thanks to their exposure to the Internet and social media."

Even as customers take account of international trends, there is a need for furniture to conform to uniquely Indian needs as well. Gopika Parekh and Pooja Malhotra, Partners and Co-Owners, The Fuchsia Lane, Mumbai, explain, "One cannot afford to completely ignore our individual lifestyle and cultural factors. For example, while designing residential furniture, one needs to consider that families still have multiple generations living under the same roof, so a blending of functions as well as the choices of various age groups must be considered."

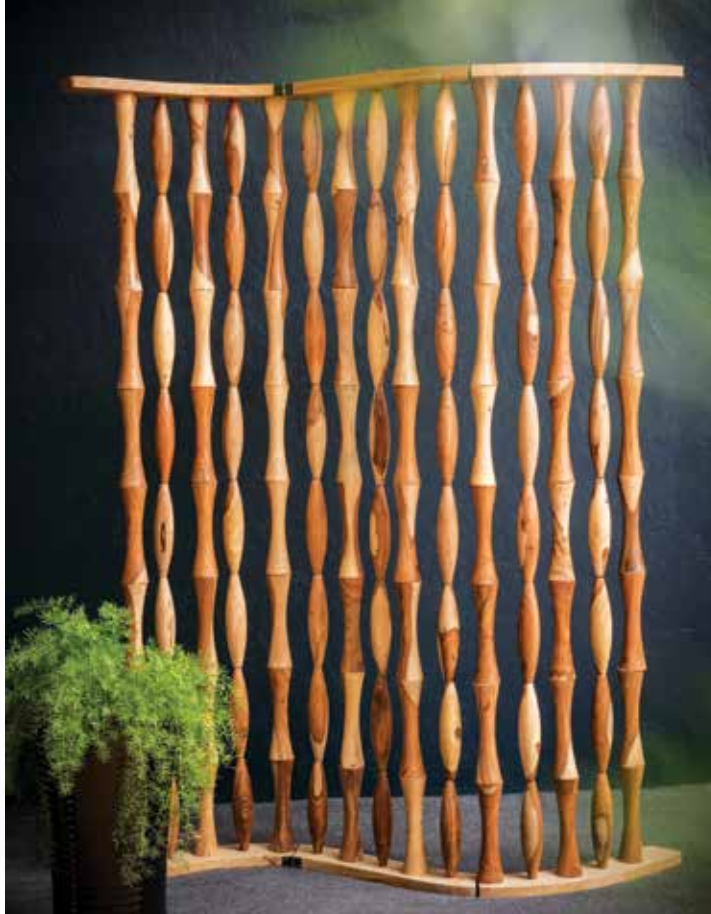
Despite changing tastes and design trends, Ar. Rooshad Shroff, Principal, Rooshad Shroff Architecture + Design, Mumbai, says, the classic will stay unchanged. "The design and trends that were in vogue in the 1960s are still very popular and in a way have become absolutely timeless."



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how it's made

The major shift in the manufacturing process has been an increase in mechanized mass production. According to Jaspreet Kaur, Partner and Co-Founder, Exclamation, South Delhi, "Mass production and uniformity in design, quality and costs has been one of the recent features of the industry, leading to cost reduction and a decrease in the use of craftsmen." Ashish Gupta, Managing Director, Inliving Pvt. Ltd., Noida, adds, "Growing sophistication in technology has brought a revolutionary change to the process, as advanced machines are used at every stage for fast and efficient results. We have 5 Axis CNC machines and a veneering plant, which helps to create complex product lines, ensure consistency and reproducibility."

Despite the many positive changes, some challenges remain. Anuya Naik, Designer, TDW Furniture, Ahmedabad, explains, "The progress that has taken place in mechanization has not sieved through to the finishing processes. Sanding, lamination and edge-banding

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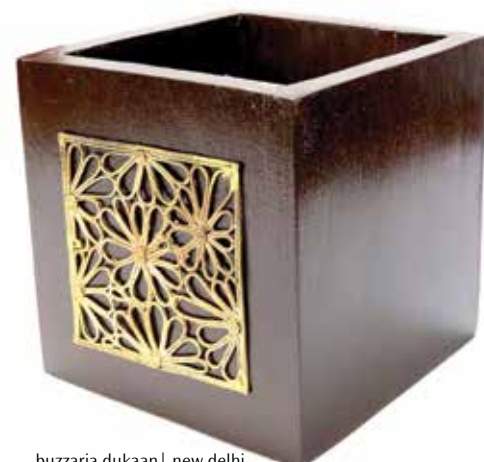


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are probably done by machines in the organized segment, but a large percentage of manufacturers still use manual finishing processes. These are often detrimental to the health of the craftsman as they are exposed to sawdust, chemicals from varnishes and paints for long hours and do not use preventive gear in most cases. They also do not guarantee standardized quality, are time-consuming, and affect the economics of the product."

Some firms continue to work with hand-made techniques. Rooshad Shroff explains, "The kind of approach I have towards furniture is more research oriented, particularly in terms of enhancing the craft and its technique of making. Each piece is made by artisans from different regions of the country."



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the distribution network

Indian furniture companies in the retail space operate both through stand-alone showrooms and standard dealer-distribution networks. The expanding presence of on-line retailing has also impacted buying behavior. Companies with a large local customer base often have their own stand-alone stores, with commercial offices and showrooms across India. Appreciating the distribution system, Ar. Anupriya Sahu and Dhwanit Parmar, Partners, Alankaram, New Delhi, say, "Customers usually like to experience pieces before buying them. Hence, easy availability of a given brand through the widest possible distribution network is of great value when it comes to reaching potential buyers."

The steady growth of showrooms in urban hubs has contributed to the rise in demand for readymade furniture versus custom-made products. Sameer Hora adds, "Fully fledged destination stores act as an attraction for a significant number of people, as compared to online stores or furniture websites, as such outlets act as a 'one-stop-shop' for products that serve the added advantage of tangibility, i.e. 'touch and feel' availability, which is not possible online." Such showrooms also allow customers to buy an entire suite of furniture, which allows them to furnish a whole house in a single visit.



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Online portals have also made their mark in this category. Furniture e-tailing is pegged at a mere \$200 million, compared to the US\$13 billion Indian e-commerce market, but is growing at a healthy 10 per cent annually (Source: Business Standard). Jaspreet Kaur says, "The boom in e-retail has offered immense opportunities to national and

international companies by raising the benchmark for quality in the market. There has also been an increase in investment in machinery and the manufacturing processes. Handmade furniture is still the biggest segment, though metal and modular furniture has seen a rapid growth over the last few years."



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future challenges

The Indian market has a very specific set of in-built challenges from pricing to skilled resources. Aditya Gupta, Founder, The Furniture Republic, Noida, explains, "India is a very price sensitive market, even so, there has been a shift in customer attitudes towards buying branded furniture." Ar. Anupriya Sahu and Dhwanit Parmar say, "Those who can afford it look for quality first; other customers look at the cost of the piece, and getting value for money. Hence, the 'correct price' of a given product is a relative term. Every product should offer value to the customer, in terms of design, utility and longevity, then they would definitely pay the correct price for it."

Social customs and traditions, such as following an established artisan or craft tradition, are also changing, leaving fewer crafts persons in the field as the craft is no longer passed on down the generations of a family. "The dearth of organized training institutes also complicates the matter," says Jaspreet Kaur.

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future outlook

The Indian furniture retail industry is estimated to be the 14th largest furniture market in the world. It is expected to reach a size of Rs 2,708 billion by 2019, registering a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 25% (Source: Cushman and Wakefield).

Which direction will the industry move in? According to Jaspreet Kaur, "I foresee rapid growth in the online market, and

correspondingly huge progress in the mass produced inexpensive furniture segment. We would like to also see a parallel encouragement and growth of skilled carpenters who need to receive their due recognition."

Ar. Anupriya Sahu and Dhwanit Parmar have a different opinion. They say, "The huge interest of multi-national players in entering our market suggests that there are still lacunae in our products as well as the manufacturing process. We need to focus on those areas."

The Indian residential furniture market is also dependent to a significant extent on the fortunes of the real estate sector in the country. Jaspreet Kaur says, "With the real estate market facing a downward trend, the furniture industry too is facing challenges."

Finally, explaining the Indian market, Aarti Aggarwal says, "It has just opened itself to the concept of design-focused products and people are beginning to appreciate design. This is definitely going to be a big trend in the future." if



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Government... are you listening?

- creation of a common platform where standards and functioning norms can be established and assistance provided in the form of funding and grants
- better import-export laws and processes and taxation rules
- aid to Indian entrepreneurs in small scale firms and start ups
- vocational institutes that offer courses in carpentry and training for polishers and painters
- reduction of duty structure for furniture imports
- promotion of Indian traditional furniture all over the world
- increase land facilities to farmers for plantation and ease import / export procedures for wood to increase material availability



industry forum

the respondents



USP : Provides customers with pieces as per their taste and serve them with the best designer furniture and furnishing brands from all over the world. We make sure to deliver exclusive handpicked furniture pieces based on evolving modern trends in a contemporary form.

Products : A one-stop destination providing solutions for living rooms, dining zones, bedrooms, outdoor areas, and a wide range of products like sofas, beds, ottomans, coffee tables and centre tables.

Sameer Hora,

Managing Director, IDUS Furniture store, New Delhi

USP : Elegant handcrafted and eco-friendly products with the concept of 'Made in India', and we also provide a major platform to new startups that are based on the same concepts.

Products : Unique and different range of pieces, featuring natural wood, such as coasters, trays, jewellery boxes, light stands, photo frames, wall clocks, other items of home décor and home furnishings.

Mamta Gupta,

Founder and Owner, Buzzaria Dukaan, New Delhi



USP : Provides customers with world-class sustainable solid wood furniture. The brand's responsibility to the environment ensures that the wood used is cultivated through sustainable forestry practices.

Products : Wide range of designs in beds, dining tables, coffee tables, statement chairs, sideboards, consoles, wall dividers, poufs and stools, as well as a variety of wall art and wall décor.

Ashish Gupta,

Managing Director, Inliving Pvt. Ltd., Noida

USP : To offer 'concepts in furniture design' based on learnings from architecture, interior design and urban design. Along with quality and a close customer relationship, we offer new designs using new materials and techniques.

Products : Beds, sofas, chairs, dining tables, coffee tables, bar stools, bookshelves, consoles, sideboards and customized pieces.

Jaspreet Kaur and Capt Abhinav Singh Rawat,

Partners and Founders, Exclamation, New Delhi



USP : The ability to offer custom-made furniture with great aesthetics, utility and strength. We make modern furniture using wood, a traditional raw material, with the help of modern techniques. The unique feature of our furniture range has been the use of two woods, two colors or two tones of a color in a single piece.

Products : Custom-made, built-in or standalone, solid wood furniture for residential, office or hospitality segments.

Ar. Anupriya Sahu and Dhwani Parmar,

Partners, Alankaram, New Delhi

USP : Our focus to design and comfort. The collections are aesthetic, usage driven, contemporary and timeless. We give attention to detail and form, which grows out of an understanding of the material and technology.

Products : TDW Furniture offers a wide range of furniture that caters to residences, commercial spaces, institutions, the hospitality industry and public spaces.

Anuya Naik,

Designer, TDW Furniture, Ahmedabad





USP : Gives priority to quality over quantity, understanding unique customer requirements and ensures that both the furniture and experience are bespoke.

Products : Custom-created contemporary, quality wooden furniture.

Aarti Aggarwal,

Founder and Principal Designer, Knock On Wood, Delhi

USP : Conceptualization of designs and manufacture of all products according to the customer's specific needs, to provide best solutions for the space available.

Products : Sofa sets, dining tables, coffee tables, bedroom sets, decorative consoles and small furniture accessories like service trolleys, ottomans, side tables and decorative mirrors.

Abhishek Kathuria,

Director, Mari Gold Furnishers, New Delhi



USP : Integration of locally sourced materials with innovative handmade and machine-made production processes, producing unique designs that are durable and have unmatched curves and finishes.

Products : Beds, sofa sets, sectionals, centre tables, dining tables, designer wooden doors, wardrobes, entertainment units, etc.

Gobind Kapur,

Director, Maison Du Luxe, Faridabad

USP : Handmade artisan furniture from different regions of the country.

Products : Handcrafted chairs, tables, sofas, bookshelves and coffee tables.

Ar. Rooshad Shroff,

Principal, Rooshad Shroff Architecture+Design, Mumbai



USP : The Furniture Republic (TFR) is a storehouse of exquisite hand-picked pieces of furniture and home decor accessories from across the globe. Our selection offers excellent choices at different price levels as for different tastes.

Products : sofa, chair, cabinet, coffee table, shelves, bar units, Bed, bed side and kids zone, dinning sets, dining chairs and tables, Decor accessories, mirrors, rugs and carpets.

Aditya Gupta,

Founder, The Furniture Republic, Noida

USP : We offer bespoke design solutions as well as manufacture our products. We understand that client taste and comfort are important along with the design and markets.

Products : bedroom sets, furniture for the living and dining spaces accent pieces, exclusive accessories to match our furniture workstations and units for commercial spaces.

Gopika Parekh and Pooja Malhotra,

Patners and Co-owners, The Fuchsia Lane, Mumbai



USP : Our firm offers the insightful customers with a lifestyle that is crisp and catering to esthetics, and attentive to even the minutest details. We offer well-designed products guaranteeing its core strength and durability with noticeable refined finishing touches for outstanding proficiency.

Products : Variety of products across the living room, dining zone, bedroom, outdoor areas and even for offices holding the range of products like sofas, beds, ottomans, coffee tables, center tables, then the dining tables, outdoor or patio furniture like a daybed, garden set.

Nomita Kohli,

Owner, Wisma Atria Interiors, New Delhi