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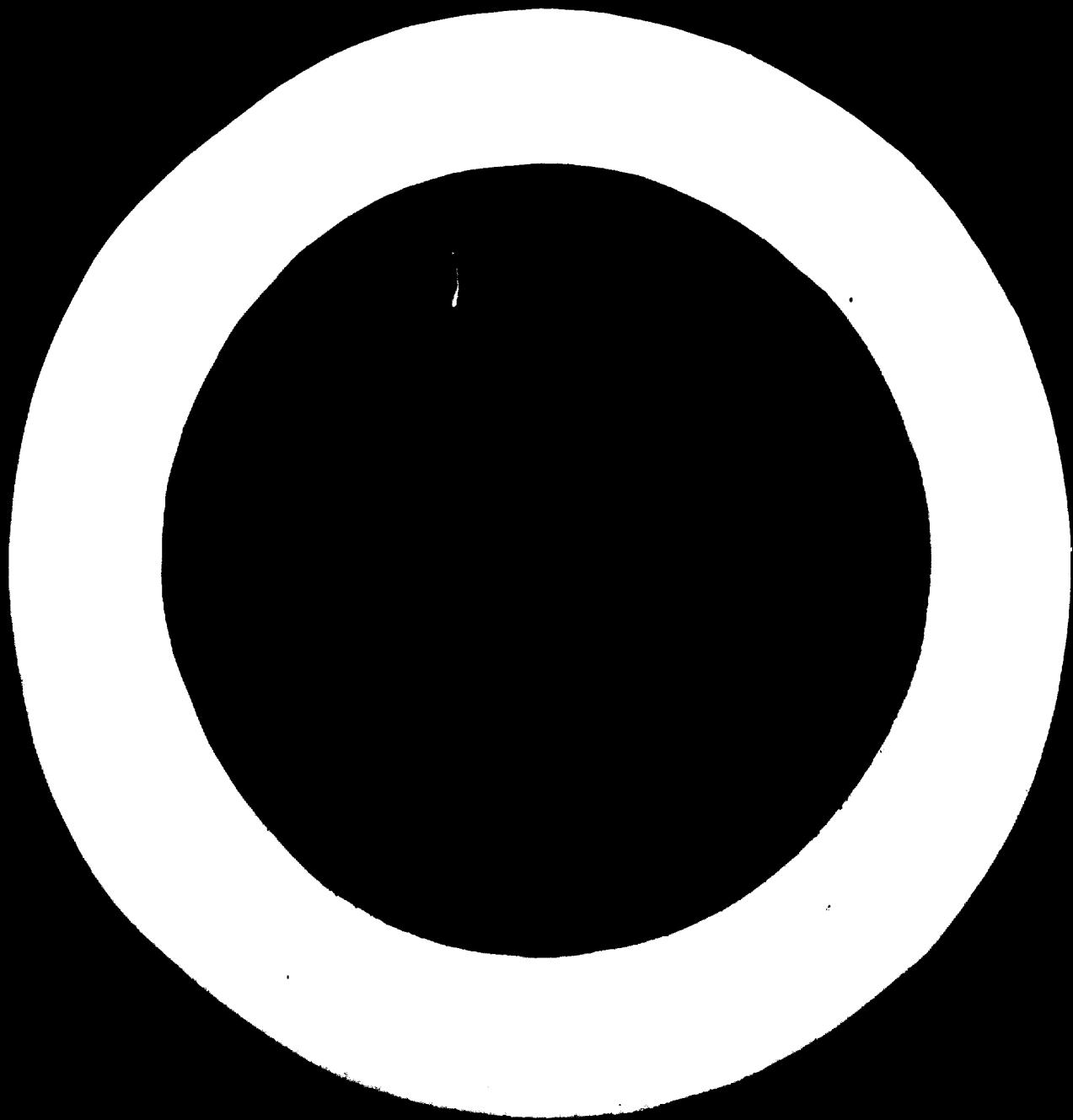
THE WOODWORKING AND FURNITURE INDUSTRIES
IN GHANA

Country Paper
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I. The Woodworking Industries

Timber continues to be one of Ghana's major assets and one of the main foreign exchange earners. In view of favourable prices on export market, loggers extract mainly the primary species which result in low yield and considerable waste. There is however great awareness to develop the exploitation and utilization of secondary species of timber to the maximum.

This will discourage the previous system of selective exploitation of the forest and instead ensure production of enough timber at all times for all our timber processing industries.

The main sawmillers which process the timbers are mostly expatriate firms or establishments. The main ones are Messrs:

- (a) Ghana Primewoods Ltd., Takoradi (formerly F. Hills)
- (b) R.T. Briscoe, Takoradi
- (c) Africa Timber and Plywood, Samreboi
- (d) Naja David Veneer and Plywoods, Kumasi.

Most of these run large sawmills and plywood mills and produce sawn timber veneer and plywood for both the local market and for export. They also produce rotary peeled plywood and plywood faced with sliced veneer on one side which are in great demand both on the export and local markets.

The sawmills are, however, encountering difficulties in getting enough logs for conversion into primary timbers for the decorative veneer which is in short supply even to the local market. Few of these sawmills also engage on production of ready to lay parquet flooring blocks and mosaic flooring squares - also both for export and local use.

There is increasing demand by the local wood-based industries for timbers and plywoods. The furniture and joinery industry is expanding fast. Locally, there is a clamour for modern design furniture. Turned wooden furniture parts are also exported.

Prices for timber products which are high as a result of high foreign exchange components in the conversion of timber tend to affect demand. Small local furniture workshops have sprung up and are scattered all round, particularly in the cities in view of demand for furniture. The demand for joinery and carpentry items on the other hand has decreased comparatively in recent years due to a reduction in local building development projects.

Much effort has already been made by some of the government bodies to popularise the use of wooden houses which could be an extensive outlet for the secondary species of timber.

All timber in use locally is still seasoned by air drying. There is considerable interest in a scheme to establish an industry to process sawdust and timber slabs into soft board, woodwool slabs for ceilings or sound and heat proofing items, which could even develop into bricks for building. The sawmills could expand to cater for these products too.

On the whole there is a decrease in the total extraction of timber due to considerable reduction in local demand for timber, mainly for construction works. Lack of logs also contributed to a decrease in the production of sawn timbers.

There is however an increase in the exploitation of secondary species and a decrease in some primary species. Suppliers thereby fail to meet the demand of the overseas market.

The production of plywood increases because of greater demand for local consumption of furniture and joinery items requiring plywood.

Retail shops for sale of plywoods have thus sprung up, mostly in the cities. Decorative plywoods are in short supply both on the overseas and the local markets.

II. The Furniture Industry

Interest in modern furniture has grown much in recent times in Ghana. In view of this there is much demand for furniture with the result that the furniture industry is expanding fast in order to meet the situation.

In the past, some of the construction companies maintained only small joinery and furniture workshops to cater for their furniture needs on a small scale. But because of the increase in interest for furniture they have made considerable expansion in this field of operation. Examples of these include some Italian firms and a State-owned corporation. There are also few expatriate firms - Scandinavian, etc. operating side by side with one or two Ghanaian companies solely engaged in production of furniture. All these are based in the capital.

There are yet another group of numerous small Ghanaian companies or individual enterprises scattered in the cities all over the country. These workshops do joinery items and other wood products in addition to furniture. Most of these do not have all the essential woodworking machines for the production of furniture. The machines they use are mostly not of a modern type and they therefore depend on manual labour to make several products.

The bulk of the furniture produced is for use locally and comprises furniture for offices, government bungalows and schools. A small proportion is for private bodies and individuals. The local radio and wireless assembly enterprises have just started procuring their cabinets locally and this is a good outlet for the industry. The continued expansion of these other industries is therefore a real asset.

Presently, a long-term country-wide Rural Development Programme has been launched by the Government and this will add to the furniture requirements and thereby aid the industry. There is also a steady increase in export of wooden chair parts, particularly lathe-turned items. However, although interest and demand continue to grow, prices continue to rise. The high prices are mostly due to the foreign exchange component in the items. Apart from timber, almost all other materials for furniture are imported.

Furniture designs in greatest demand are those of the Scandinavian type with little or no alterations. Cane and bamboo furniture is also gaining interest, mostly in restaurants. Glossy finish on furniture is most popular. Mainly cellulose spray lacquer is used. Although polyester finish is preferred, it is not so common.

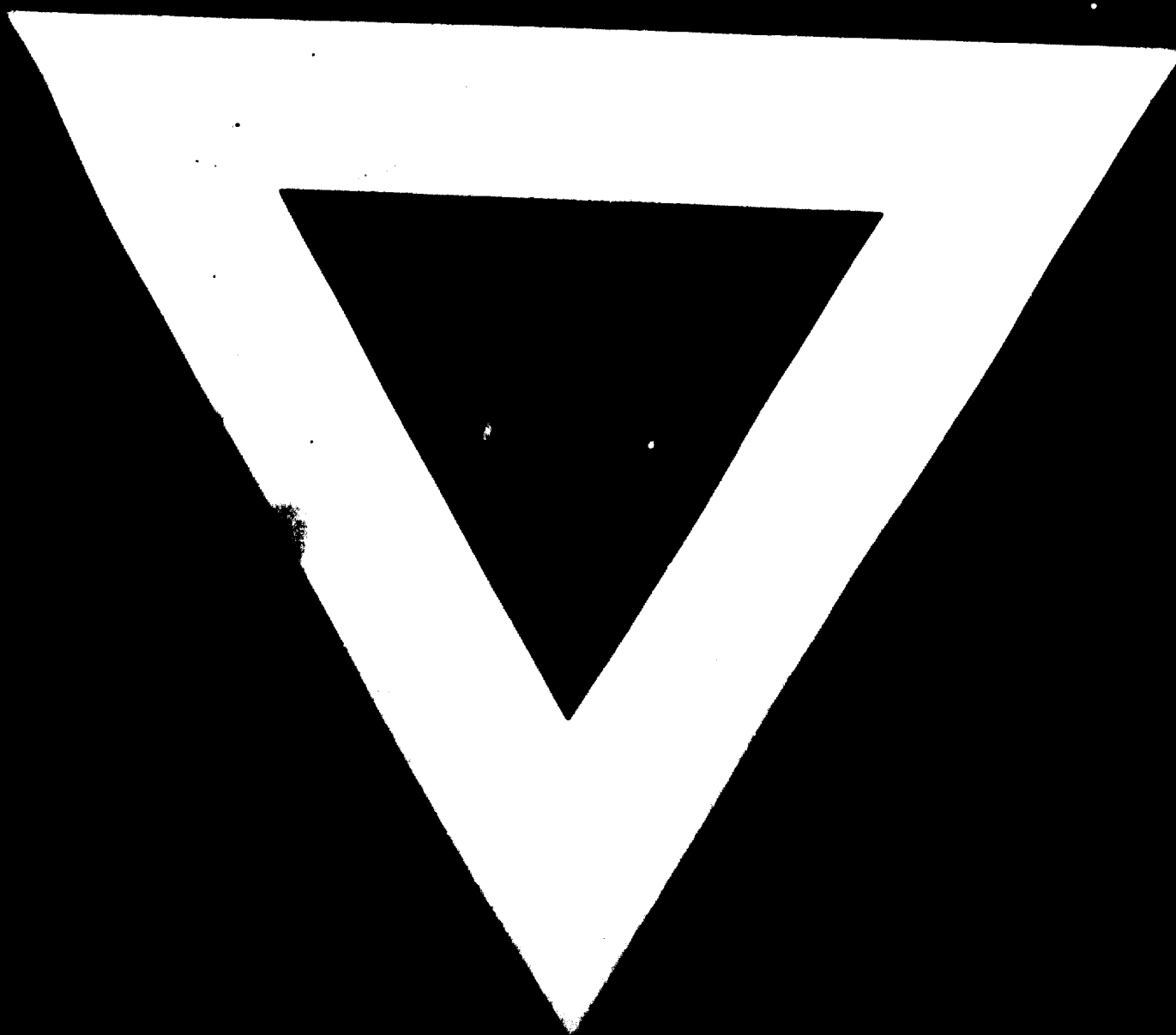
The taste of a lot of expatriates resident here is for a more or less matt or stain finish using wax polishing or teak oil. Interest in dull finish to furniture is however also gaining place with the Ghanaians. Although the majority of artisans working in the furniture workshops are illiterate the quality of the work is high. Illiterate workers are now giving way to literate ones.

A regular scheme of industrial training for the workers in highly industrialised furniture workshops overseas or locally would be ideal. This will help them keep abreast with up-to-date improved methods and techniques. These will improve on efficiency and lower costs. A scheme on profitable utilization of sawdust, slabs, shavings, etc. for production of boards and woodwool slabs, etc. could also reduce the waste on timber and bring about reduction of the furniture prices per unit. This reduction will also affect the furniture industry.

However, an Industrial Training Scheme by UNIDO should be set up whereby it will provide a training centre solely for the teaching of furniture making. This will help improve the quality of the products and will boost up the industry. The training should cover designing of furniture and other necessary allied subjects which go to make a good cabinet maker.

After the basic training at this centre these students should further be attached to advanced furniture workshops overseas for industrial experience. Successful candidates of this scheme should be aided by the Government financially as much as possible to set up their own furniture factories, and UNIDO providing the necessary basic modern woodworking machines as technical assistance.





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