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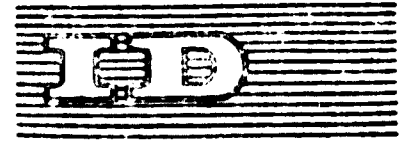
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FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRIES IN SINGAPORE

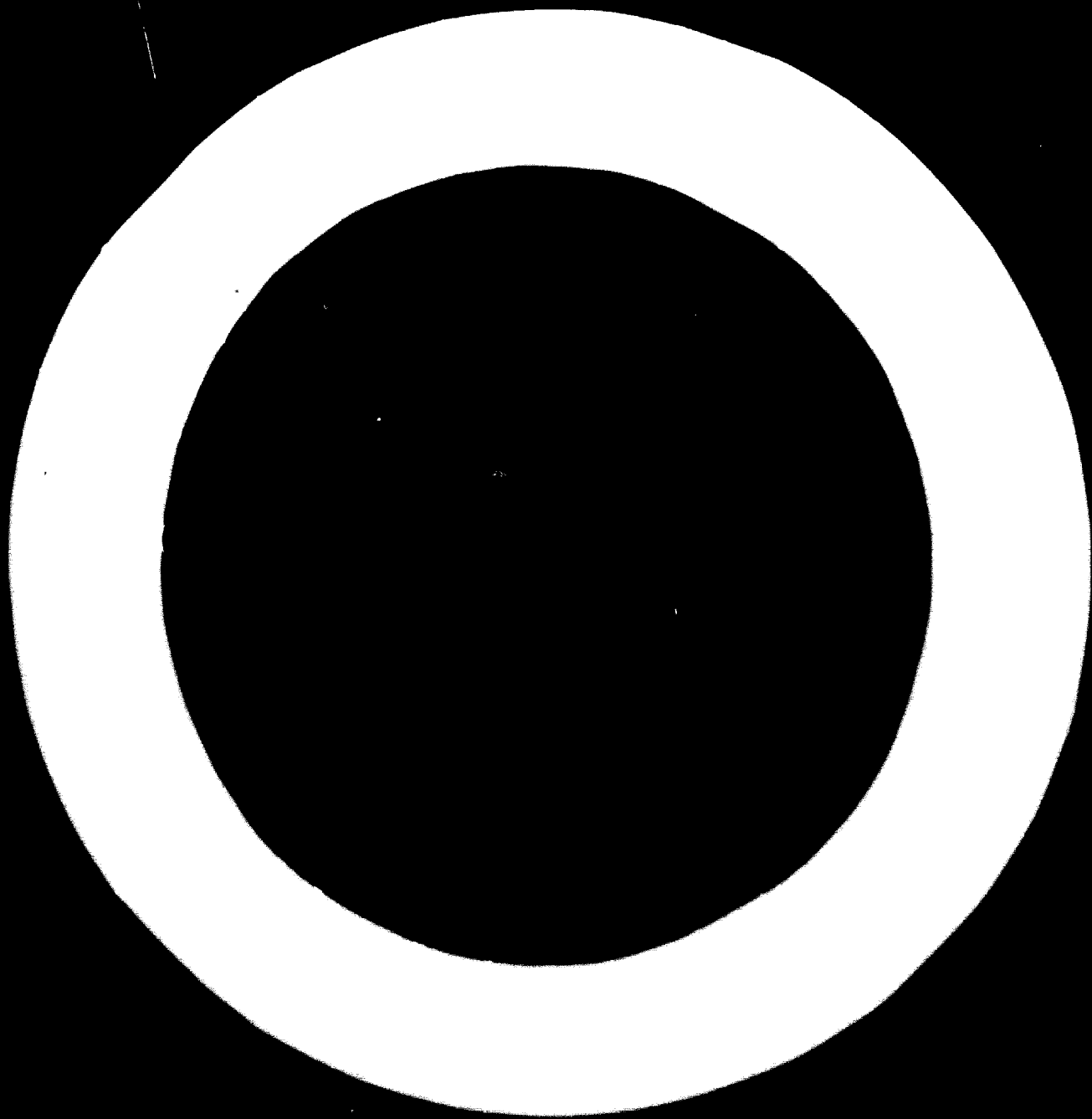
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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Singapore though small in size (220 sq. miles in area) serves as a regional centre for the processing and shipment of wood products in South-East Asia.

Whilst possessing no natural resources of great commercial value, Singapore is fortunate to be in the midst of a rich timber producing belt.

With efficient infrastructures like public utilities, transportation, telecommunication services, commercial facilities including banking and a high level of general education and health among its workers, Singapore has attracted long-term investments by foreign enterprises.

Coupled with industrial peace and political stability, it has created a proper climate for great economic growth.

It is therefore no accident that in Singapore today the furniture and joinery industries, though not considered great among numerous other industries, flourish at a pace much to the encouragement of those who are directly or indirectly connected with them, and to the sustained welfare of the young nation.

Trade prospects

Total 1970 production value on furniture and fixtures alone increased by 33% over the previous year. In 1960 the total production value was 3.8 million Singapore dollars. By 1970 it had reached 37.9 million Singapore dollars. Details for other years are shown in Table 1.

Furniture Trade

	<u>1970</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1960</u>
Furniture and Fixtures	37.9	28.5	21.7	12.8	13.9	3.8

Work force

A total of 15,000 persons or 3.33% of the total work force out of a population of 2 million are engaged in the furniture industry. A trade which traditionally catered for domestic needs in the past has, over the last decade, made some headway in the export industry.

Exports

Significant in-roads have been made into foreign markets and among more popular items of export are knock-down furniture, high-gloss T.V. cabinets and wooden toys. However, only 4% of total production is exported. The rest is absorbed by local hotels, offices and apartment houses.

Subsidiary industries

The demand for modern furniture has given rise to complementary industries such as the manufacture of synthetic glues, wood-finishes, fixtures and upholstery materials. A substantial bulk of the last item mentioned and a good number of plastic or fibre-glass carcasses are also imported for ultra-modern upholstery jobs.

The manufacture of fancy veneers, plywood, laminated boards, chip-boards, particle-boards from waste materials and mouldings - continues to be among the fore-front producers of industrial products.

Impetus: building industry

The current vigorous building industry absorbs the bulk of locally-made plywood used in formworking.

High-rise buildings, apartment houses and hotels, completed and those under construction, form a common sight in Singapore today.

Reason for demand

The building trend continues. The resultant effect is a

need for more joiners and building carpenters. A further impetus is also given to the furniture industry as a greater demand for furnishing arises.

The total construction value for 1970 was 290 million Singapore dollars - a rise of 36.0% over 1969.

Details are as shown in Table 2

<u>Construction trade</u>	<u>Table 2</u>					
	<u>(Million - Singapore Dollars)</u>					
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1965</u>
Building						
Construction	290.4	212.9	177.8	150.1	128.7	41.9
Industry						

Large modern factories numbering 20 and with an average of 110 workers each, are engaged in round-the-clock production to meet local and foreign orders.

Prefabricated materials

Among items of building materials for export are pre-finished and prefabricated casement window frames, doors, panels, laminated boards, chipboards, particle boards, blockboards and flooring materials such as paving boards and parquet.

Export sales to Japan, Europe, U.S.A. and East Africa are significant. Export to Australia under wood-shaped/ worked for the year 1971 was 6.5 million Singapore dollars. There is every possibility of further increases in the export value of furniture and joinery from Singapore. Some 29,000 persons are employed in the construction industry. Out of this number 32% or roughly one-third are involved in building joinery.

More joinery trades

The construction of wooden boxes for industrial needs has reached an unprecedented level, while pleasure-boat building

gives further testimony to the brisk joinery industry.

Local and foreign companies such as American Marine are building luxury pleasure-boats for demanding world markets.

Long term policy

Long-term planning has given rise to a unique educational system whereby for the first two years in the secondary schools all male pupils and 50% of female pupils are exposed to woodwork, metalwork and basic electricity in addition to normal school subjects.

At the end of the second year of secondary education (Grade 8), a pupil undergoes a national aptitude test. Together with his cumulative workshop records he is advised accordingly and, if found suitable, is offered further instruction for the next two years in one of the three disciplines i.e. woodwork, metalwork or electricity.

Further vocational institute training

On completion of general education in the secondary school (from 12 - 15 years of age - Grade 7 - 10) those who so wish can join three of the 8 existing vocational institutes where trade courses in furniture production and building carpentry, as well as artisan courses are offered.

Practical building carpentry courses of 6 months' duration are planned for those who have completed only two years of secondary education. However, for those of this group who wish to follow a one-year course in furniture production the training is spread out to double the duration.

Overage pupils with only primary school education can join special pre-vocational classes organized by the Adult Education Board. On completion after two years such pupils are permitted to follow artisan courses. An average of 120 students per year take up building carpentry. All graduates find ready employment.

The Economic Development Board, a statutory government body, has recently set up a Wood-based Industries Development Centre (W.I.D.C.) for the purpose of training technicians, designers and joiners for the furniture industry.

The Singapore Technical Institute runs 18-month full-time courses in furniture production and design for students of good academic and technical backgrounds. It has so far produced 11 graduates. There will be graduating each year in future.

The Construction Trade Advisory Committee with prominent industrialists as members, serves as a liaison body between the industry concerned and the Government training establishments, and recommends ways and means of co-ordinating training.

Another advisory body to be named Wood-Based Industries Advisory Committee is in the process of formation. It will advise on all training matters pertaining to woodworking industries in the near future.

Among the furniture and joinery workers is a type which has not had any formal institutional training. These were young apprentices trained under experienced craftsmen in small establishments found in less affluent sections of Singapore.

Weak Areas

The areas where W.I.D.C. could be of great assistance are:-

1. Modern furniture design
2. Upholstery for modern furniture
3. Plastic and fibre-glass furniture
4. Management of personnel in furniture and joinery industries

With the trend veering away from what is mundane toward the ultra-modern there is room for new and up-to-date furniture designers. Young people with the right aptitude could benefit tremendously from training in more developed countries.

The art of upholstery should also be taken up as a complementary aspect to the furniture and joinery industries.

Practical working with plastic and fibre-glass materials in furniture construction is an avenue well worth looking into. In this particular area there is room for advancement, provided proper training is offered.

The training of managerial personnel is of no less importance. Suitable persons could be attached for on-the-job training with woodworking companies or firms which are leaders in furniture and joinery trades.

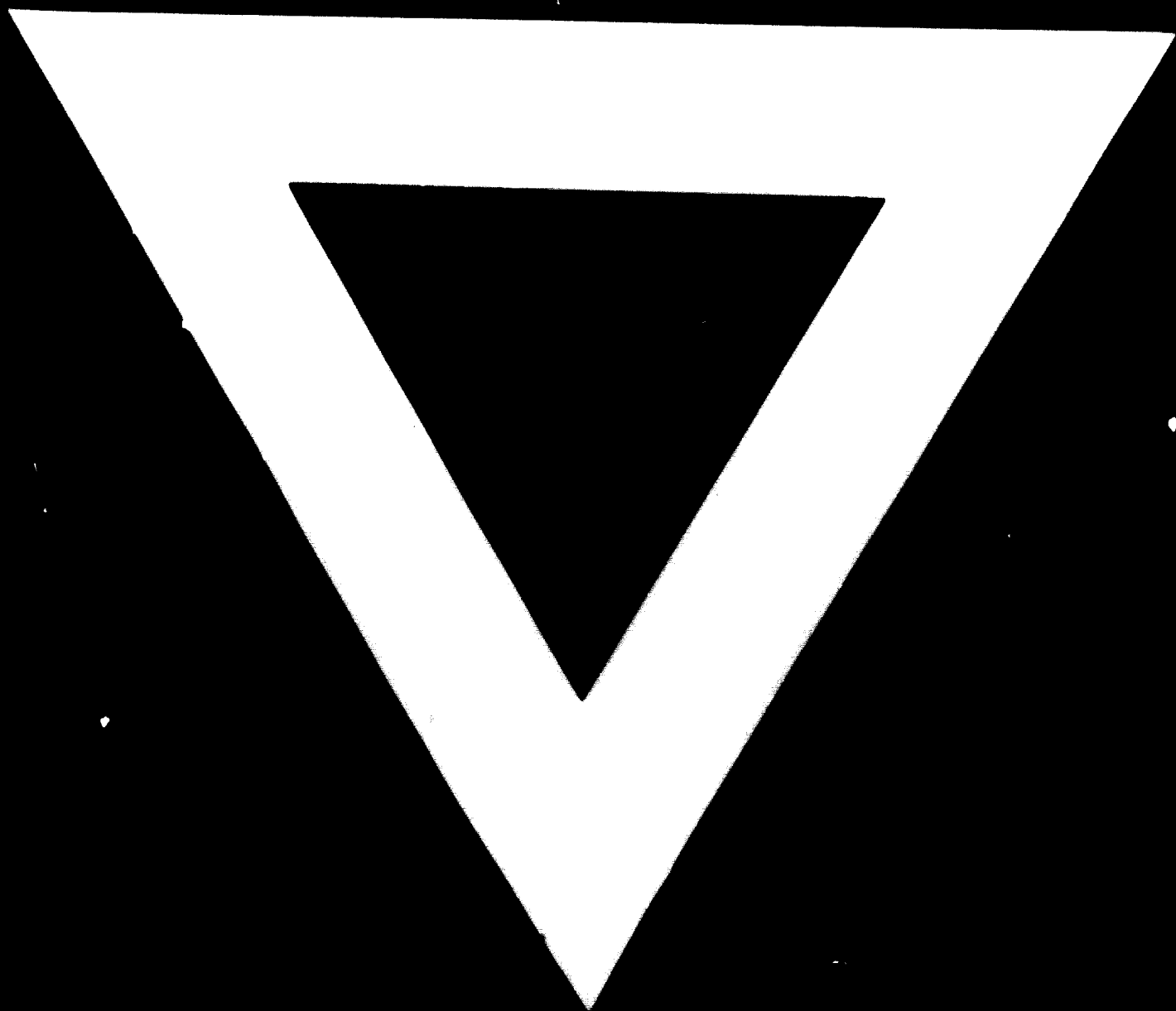
Future prospects

The prospects look good for the furniture and joinery industries in Singapore due, not only to its strategic position as an international cross-road but also to the fact that it is in the midst of a timber-rich region.

With more sophisticated machinery and expertise to be gained from experience over the years, Singapore enjoys a decisive advantage for a continuing expansion and upgrading of woodworking in the Republic.

Singapore will continue to be a great regional centre for processing and shipment of wood products in South-East Asia.





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