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Technical Course on Criteria for the
Selection of Woodworking Machines

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THE FURNITURE AND JOINERY INDUSTRIES IN KUWAIT ✓

by

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The joinery and furniture industries as such date back to the early fifties when Kuwait started with the large-scale exploration, and export of crude. The old established joinery shops failed to cope with the heavy demands made by the oil companies and Government agencies which required support facilities involving all types of joinery and carpentry activities.

From the beginning and even today all the required materials for the joinery, carpentry and furniture industries have to be imported. Skilled and semi-skilled labour has been hired from neighbouring Arab countries, Pakistan, Iran and India, and expert technicians are still recruited from abroad. The Oil Industry's demand support facilities in the field as well as housing for its staff, gave rise to the procurement of furniture and allied products through local market channels. Encouraged by future prospects, local entrepreneurs started importing in bulk various types of timber, plywood, blockboard, etc. and several small joinery workshops were set up to cut timber to size and produce joinery for buildings. Owing to their lack of technical knowledge and acute shortage of skilled labour, some workshops failed and others had to seek joint-ventures with industrialists from other Arab countries. Only when mechanised and properly supervised by competent and experienced personnel, could these workshops cope with the production of building joinery and other support facilities for the oil industry.

The influx of manpower in the oil industry and Government agencies gave rise to a demand for furniture and furnishing. Both domestic and office furniture was imported in bulk up until the late fifties. Local workshops were too busy with building joinery and could hardly pay attention to this problem. However, by the early sixties the building joinery industry had established its position and took the initiative in the furniture industry sector (for domestic use by the staff of the oil companies and Government agencies staff). The imports were thus reduced to some extent. However, the difficulty of obtaining materials and skilled technicians for upholstery continues. Furthermore, individual buyers specify materials of their own choice which have to be imported, consequently, delivery dates of the

Finished goods have to be extended. The importers of upholstery materials are still hesitant about stocking a wide range of fabrics in sufficient quantity. Even today manufacturers are obliged to airfreight basic materials to meet stipulated contract dates.

General specifications for timber and allied products have been compiled by the Ministry of Public Works. These specifications conform to British Standards in general. The timbers in normal use are teak, moranti and Yang (known as red-wood) and spruce as soft-wood. Teak logs are imported from Burma and Thailand; red-woods from Malaysia and Singapore, and soft-wood from east European countries. Beech-wood is mostly used in the furniture industry. Timber is seasoned in kilns, but there are no plants for pressure preservation treatment of timber. Other types of timber, such as mahogany, oak, maple, pine, etc. are imported by manufacturers direct from Lebanon for their own specific projects. These timbers are not available ex - stock from any importers in Kuwait. Plywood and blockboard of various grades and thickness are imported from European and Far Eastern countries. Blockboard and particle board (chipboard) is also manufactured locally, but production is just enough for the manufacturer's own needs. The only decorative plywood is teak (5 m/m thickness). Normally MR grade plywood is used for flush doors, while for flooring grade 20 m/m plywood is always available locally.

Various types of commercial and decorative wood veneers are imported for panelling and the furniture industry. Two workshops are equipped with machinery to splice veneers and glue it to boards. Plastic laminates are imported. However, there are reports that a plastic - laminate factory is to be set up in Kuwait. Flush doors, solid core or semi-solid, have been standardized and are manufactured locally, however, good quality foam rubber is still being imported.

There being no restrictions on imports, Kuwait market is open to any exporter from any part of the world. Consequently, locally available materials vary in quality and prices. Qualified interior decorators and designers are needed to propagate the use of new materials. Even today,

industry lacks designers with imagination and initiative, with the result that the wide range of new materials in vogue in other countries are just lying in the show rooms of local importers. The public in general is well versed with modern decor and furnishing and would be only too pleased to discuss their requirements with qualified designers and to order their products.

The local industry competes very keenly for various Government and Oil Company tenders for furniture and furnishings. Each year various Ministries viz. Education, Health, Housing and Defence etc., issue tenders for the supply of furniture of local or foreign manufacture. Although local industry is given protection to a certain extent, it needs further assistance. This system has encouraged mass production of typical furniture and the reduction of production costs.

The extreme climatic conditions pose problems. Summer temperatures rise to 43°C with frequent dust storms; humid conditions also prevail. Glues, lacquers and paints have to be stored in air - conditioned ware houses and imports regulated to keep pace with consumption in order to avoid longer storage periods. Furniture finish is of comparatively poor quality owing to dust particles suspended in the air. It is practically impossible to have air-tight areas for finishing operations. Moreover, something must be done to encourage local labour to learn technical trades in order to overcome the shortage of skilled labour.

Finally, there is a problem of marketing the manufactured goods. The show rooms are being run directly by the manufacturers and the tendering is also direct. There has been no agreement between the various manufacturers to manufacture selected items only, leaving other items to be manufactured by others. Thus, each manufacturer is endeavouring to meet all customer requirements under one roof. This increase in costs and unhealthy competition results in comparatively poor workmanship.

Industry is thus confronted with a complex of problems and needs a common platform to discuss the shortcomings with guidance from developed nations and local Government agencies.

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF WOOD PRODUCTS IN KUWAIT IN 1974.

<u>Description</u>	<u>Import/K.D.</u>	<u>Export/K.D.</u>
Wood lumber and cork	5,386.629	359.108
Wood and cork manufacture (excluding furniture)	3,077.627	2,439.537
Furniture and parts	3,244.137	544,816
Laminated plastics	141.039	—
Plywood	2,368.125	178,817
Particle board	196.831	16,902
Doors windows and shutters	11.671	18,984
Prefabricated and portable wooden houses	16.283	2,131.708
Household utensils of wood	35.915	420
Machine tools for wood working	100.410	26.787

Source of Information: The Planning Board, Central Office of Statistics
Kuwait.

STATISTICS ON NUMBER AND SIZE OF WOODWORKING FIRMS IN KUWAIT.

1) Number and Size of Firms:

- 20 firms employing 30 persons and up.
- 20 firms employing 60 persons and up.
- 12 firms employing 120 persons and up.
- 6 firms employing 350 persons and up.

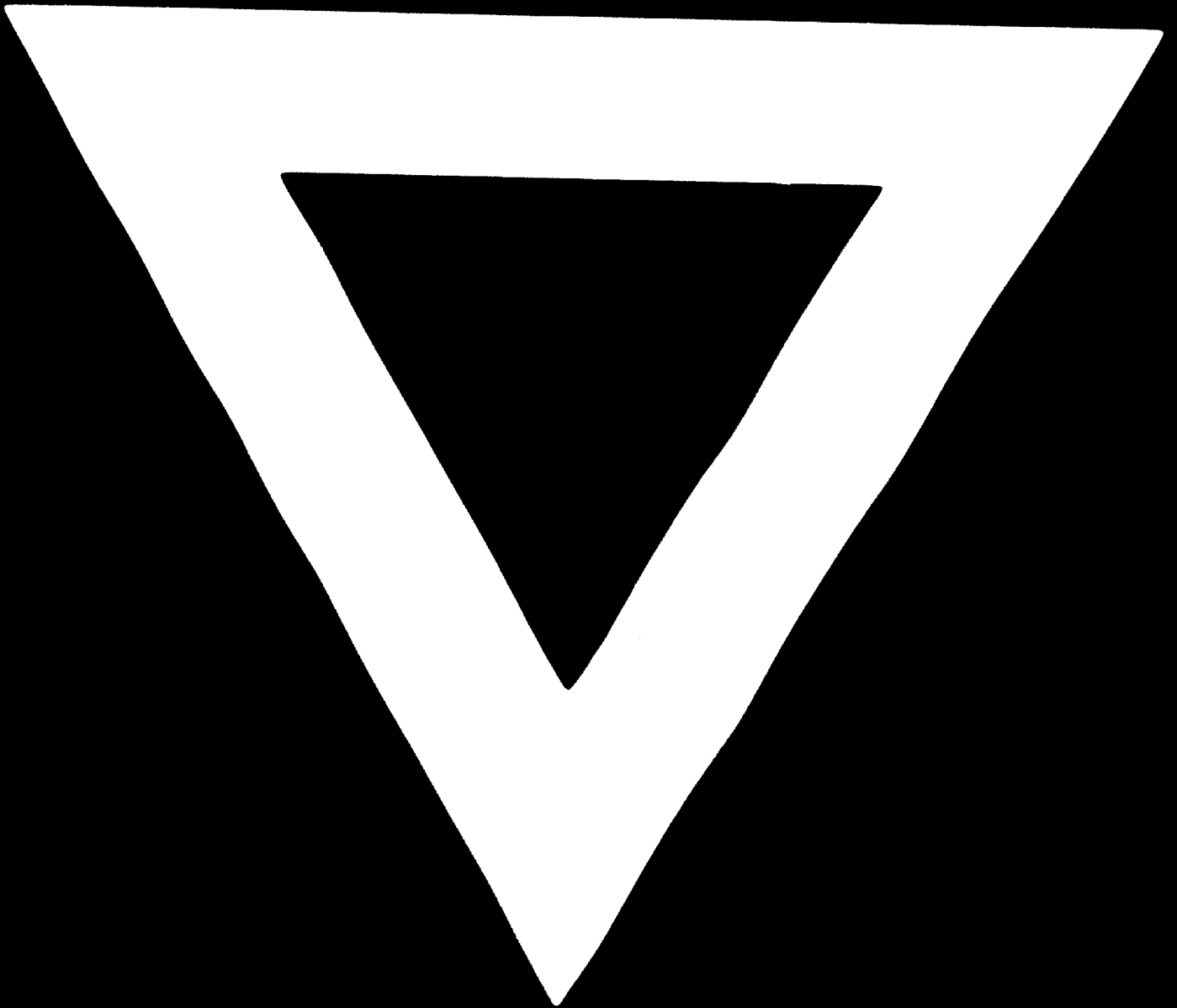
Source of Information: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Kuwait.

The approximate number of people employed by these firms is 4,000.

There are some firms using modern advanced machinery. One firm is producing particle boards and four big firms are manufacturing pre-fabricated and portable wooden houses.



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