

The Importance of Wood in Home Furniture and Interior Decoration

Labode J. Oladoyin

Home Science and Technology, University of Agriculture Abeokuta

Lovina Ebele Onwuakpa

Department of Fine and Applied Arts University of Benin

Abstract

This study is a survey of the use of wood in the art of interior decoration and home furnishing. Attention is given to selection of wood, wood preservation, wood structure, methods of seasoning, wood finishing, maintenance and the care for wood materials. There is focus on the uses of wood, cleaning agents for wood, arrangements of furniture in homes and advantages of wood furniture. The researchers identify the types of woods that are used for interior construction and home furnishing. They discuss the factors that contribute to consumers' choice of materials for home furnishing and also investigate wood materials that are durable for house construction. The study was carried out in Abeokuta South Local Government Area. Abeokuta South Local Government occupies an area of 57.35sq Kilometers with an estimated population of 250,278 according to the 2006 population census.

Key words: House construction, Home furniture, Interior decoration, Wood usage, Consumers' choice

Introduction

Through the ages, human beings have lived in different types of houses, which are peculiar to their geographical environment and socio-economic status. The materials used for building a house are related to their environment. Houses that people live are of different shapes and sizes with different materials to furnish and decorate them. Home furniture in the context of this study is used for material within the interior of a house to make it functional and to show its aesthetic value.

Home furniture and interior decoration articles have been in existence for years. The home furniture and interior decoration articles cannot be in existence without giving wood its due regard. Wood is one of the major materials used for home furniture, interior decorations and home constructions. Wood generally is meant to serve the basic aesthetic and functional purpose and this purpose has not changed over the years, but the design on both the art of furniture and aesthetic of using it, for many other things such as house construction, carving of house-posts and so on, are taking a new shape.

Although, the interior decoration articles mentioned above can be made of different materials and their materials determine the type of finishing given to them. Such materials are raffia, bamboo, wood, metal, glass, plastic, and so on. Wood, as a vegetable material, has been grossly given prominence in home decoration. In spite of technological advancement and competition, from other materials like metal and plastic, wood still maintains its place as a domestic material. Due to the technological advancement and change in taste of fashion the consumers imbibed a lot of ideas into wood usage by including glass and metal materials. This has, however, reduced the demand for wood in home furnishing and it has resulted into a low patronage of wood in home furnishing. This study, therefore, tries to show how people have been able to articulate the use and-benefit of wood for aesthetic works such as home furnishing and interior decoration.

Furniture articles are materials such as chair, table, bed and cupboard, among others. These are articles of beauty that people put in their homes. Interior decoration is the art of beautifying rooms and other interior areas of a house and a home is a place where people live with their households and family members. Wood is a material used in such homes for furniture making and

interior decorations. Furniture articles used in homes vary in styles, sizes and shapes from time to time. In the past wood furniture were made locally and these furniture were badly handled and not durable, but in the early 1920s some Nigerians learnt carpentry and cabinet works and they were able to produce beautiful furniture like wardrobes, cupboards, tables and chairs from fine woods such as mahogany and ebony, which are more durable. This trend continued and lighter and more durable articles were produced and beautifully finished (Andreas, 2005).

Fixture materials are structures that are fixed permanently in the living room. Man adopts these structures to his use and taste and woods that are used for these fixtures are remarkable materials that come in variety of strengths, colours, grains, patterns and texture (Anyakoha, 2005). They have natural beauty that is valued for building, furnishing and decorating. Wood is one of the world's renewable resources. It has been in use since the origin of man on this planet earth and it is still in abundant supply. Wood is constantly replenished and there is constant demand for it. An example of wood is timber.

Types of wood

There are two types of wood: soft and hard wood. Soft wood has a simpler structure than hard wood. It is known as evergreen. Softwood is cut from cone bearing trees called coniferous. Part of it consists of tracheas, which are both water conducting and supporting elements. The tracheas of soft wood are very long with a length of 11mm. Soft wood is constantly replenished and split more easily than hard wood. Examples are araba, gmelina and omo, among others.

Hard wood comes from the tree called deciduous, because it sheds its leaves annually. Most hardwoods have attractive grain; the natural line that forms a pattern in the wood. It is hard in texture unlike softwood. It is used for most site construction work; because it gives good finishing when sand papered and polished to give a smooth surface. Examples are mahogany, teak and walnut (Baldwin, 2007).

To select the best wood for a given carpentry job, the worker must know the properties and characteristics of wood. Wood for house construction must be hard enough to resist denting and it must have the ability to accept nail penetration without splitting, and it must present a good appearance. Most wood-works are done with hard wood. When selecting wood for furnishing in the home, one must think of the comfort that it will give. It should be selected for utility, durability and for the need of the family.

A good wood should be portable, easy to repair and not too expensive. It is important for a furniture maker to be able to identify the various species of wood that are used in making furniture. Each of the specie has its own property and characteristic such as weight, colour, hardness and highly figured grain. Some of the indigenous woods that are used in furniture making are mahogany, iroko, obeche, teak, masonia, African walnut, afzelia and afara.

Wood Seasoning

Seasoning is simply the drying out of moisture from wood so that it is conditioned and well prepared before use (Carpenter, 1999). It reduces the moisture content of wood to a stage to give equilibrium with the relative humidity of the atmosphere at which the lumber is to be used. Basically, there are two methods of wood seasoning: air seasoning and kiln seasoning. Air seasoning is known as natural method of seasoning. In this method the woods or timbers are staked and piled under a shed or shelter in the open air where they are dried by prevailing weather conditions. The floor on which the woods are to be air seasoned is concreted to prevent further growth of weeds. The woods are not lumped together to allow free flow of air. Air circulation is controlled to certain extent.

In air seasoning method, the shed is covered with water proof materials to prevent the woods from direct sunlight or rain. Air seasoning can only reduce the moisture content to 15% -20% of dry weight. This method requires little attention and it cost very low amount of money to operate. Kiln seasoning method is done by using a brick-built kiln chamber in which the woods are stacked in-between boards. It is different from air seasoning in such that heat is applied at a controlled temperature through a large oven known as kiln in order to get rid of moisturized content in the wood.

These wood preservation methods are means of preventing wood from being infected by insects and fungi and sustaining it for longer period of time. The processes, according to Evans (1973), extend the life span of the timber. Wood preservations are used mainly to increase the resistance of timbers to gradual attack or residual damages.

Brush coating seems to be the simplest method of wood preservation, but it is the least effective. Hadley (2007) notes that the treatment used on the wood by dipping the brush inside the preservative and rubbing it on the wood surface may not be highly effective as other preventive methods do. He avers that care should be taken when applying the chemical solvent with the brush on the wood in order to achieve good penetration of the chemical used. Cold immersion is the process of immersing the whole wood for a day or two in an unheated solution. In this method little supervision is required during soaking.

Spraying is usually not so effective as brush coating since there is a risk when the surface is not thoroughly wetted with the chemical while spraying. Dipping method is the most effective because the wood is in direct contact with preservative for the duration of the dipping process. Sleeping method treatment is done by immersing seasoned wood in a water solution of preservative or any other soluble preservative salts. The latter process requires a week or two before good penetration of the chemical can be achieved (Morton, 1970).

The first thing to take into consideration in wood processing is the wood surface. It must be perfectly smooth, dry, clean and free of grease before any finishing material is applied. Each wood must have moderate moisture content to facilitate a good job. Cabinet scrappers are used to remove small defect from the wood. The cabinet scrappers have plain marks, guide line and marking pencil that give a clean and clear surface

After matching or patching and plain of rough surface wood, joints are cut and assembled dry for possible adjustment and medication. Possible medication and adjustment are made before the whole work is later glued together. After plain of all rounds where needed with smoothing plane, the wood scraper is used and sand papering of the assemblage comes into the fore. Sand paper comes in various forms; there are sheets, belts, tapes, disc and rolls of sandpapering. For common hand sanding, sheets are normally used (Oyelola, 1981).

Patching is filling of holes or cracks with poly-filler. Poly-filler is a mixture of sawdust and glue. After patching, the cabinet scraper must be used and re-scrape and re-sandpapering must be done. Wood finishing is the term used for the processes of coating or polishing that gives a job its final appearance. The finishing occurs in three coatings, we have first and second coating and the third coating. When the first coating is applied to the surface, the material is left to dry up for some minutes. This is followed by slightly sandpapering before the application of the second coating. There is also a need for the third coating to produce satisfactory surface. However, finishing process include filling uneven splits, applying stain, sealing the wood, applying oil, wax, lacquer, polish and paint on the wood surface. Wax is made by dissolving bees' wax in turpentine or kerosene. Several coats of wax polishing is required before finishing can be attained. Wax polished is mainly used on furniture.

The wood surface is first stained and dried before polish is applied using a brush.

This is followed by sandpapering. Before application of any paint, the surface of the wood is primed and allowed to dry first. An undercoat is applied and this is followed by two or more coats of the finishing paint. Each coat must dry well before another is applied. Vanish gives the wood surface a durable and transparent finish. Sandpaper is first used on the wood and this is followed by several coats of vanish. Vanish is used on the door frames, window and window frames, but not on furniture (Morton, 1970). Wood finishing are used to improve the appearance of wood surface; to prevent the wood from absorbing moisture; to protect the wood from attack of boring pests and fungi and to check and step-down balanced discolouration

Synthetic detergents were first produced in 1973 for wood preparation, but were later more developed with enzyme products such as pepsin benzole, which dissolves grease and some stains and it is used for washing floors, soft furniture and wood surfaces. It is also in form of scouring powder, paste and wash up liquid. Abrasives are made to rub or scratch wood surface until it is clean. An example of this is scouring leaf used for white wood in Nigeria; it has a rough sandy surface.

Wood for Home Furniture

In this part of the world, wood is not commonly used as brick in constructing four walls of houses, except in some cases when they are used for office partitioning. This notwithstanding, a good home must have wood furnishings that can contribute to its total functionality, efficiency and taste. Personal preference for wood determines whether an individual has penchant for selected antique or contemporary African style of art in furniture or some other furniture style and design. Within the context of Nigerian architecture and furniture are compatible with the home size. If a room is large, then the furniture can have a feel of strength and dignity. Thus, home that consists of sitting room, dining room, bedroom, study room and kitchen must have its own suitable furniture.

The sitting room is called the living room. It is one of the most important rooms in the home. It is usually a meeting place and centre of activities in the home. The sitting room furniture is made up of upholstery. Furniture found in the sitting are: cushion chair, centre table, side-stools and a sound cabinet, which serves as a stand for gadget. It is also called a divider. The dining room is a room in which family members sit and eat their meals. In some homes, the dining section is part of the sitting room while in some it is a separate room entirely. Furniture in the dining room include dining table and chair. The chairs must match the table in design, style, texture and colour. Dining room side boards are for storing the cutleries, glasses and table mat. Trolley in a standard dining room could be wooden or made of other synthetic materials.

The bedroom should be made comfortable for sleeping. Furniture found in the bedroom include **Bed:** the framework of the bed can be made of wood or metal. It must have a perfect finish to avoid discomfort. **Wardrobe/wall hanger:** it can be in-built or built separately and made to rest on the wall. It is used for storing clothing materials. **Dressing table and chair:** on the dressing table is a mirror that is usually mounted and drawers that are large enough to keep articles like body cream and cosmetics. **Stools:** this goes with dressing table and matches the design and pattern of the dressing table.

The kitchen is a room designed for food preparation, food storage and food serving in the home. It should be well planned, arranged and furnished so as to avoid accident and to ensure good health for the family. Furniture in the kitchen includes sink, cooking range, refrigerator, work-table, cupboard, plate rack, stool and chairs. The arrangement of furniture in the kitchen can affect the cooking activities. It is, therefore, essential that the selection and

arrangement of furniture should be considered along with the space. Nowadays, in-built furniture materials are used to save space and to economize money as well as to avoid moving wooden materials from one end to the other.

Care and maintenance of wood furniture in the home is very important. When wood is properly cared for, it will have a long life and constant repair will be prevented. Wood furniture can be maintained through the following methods: (1) dust furniture frequently with a soft clean cloth (2) wash wooden legs and arm rest with warm soapy water (3) clean the surface of the furniture with soft oil and it should not be used on a wax surface because oil softens a wax finish and (4) do not place furniture near a heat source because it will affect it.

Wood for Interior Decoration

Interior decorations are art of beautifying rooms and other inner areas of a house. Decoration makes the home attractive, comfortable and functional. Apart from the use of paints, rugs, carpet, linoleum, curtains and fixtures there are other home accessories that can be used to beautify the interior of a room. These accessories are wooden picture frame, wooden carved decorations; wooden wall clock; wooden bead work; wooden railing; wooden lamp stand; wooden coat stand; wooden shoe rack and wooden floor. Other decorative articles used in beautifying a home include flowers, frames, feathers, animal skin, pottery work and unusual ornaments.

Wood is a durable material for interior decoration, because it is easily available for use; it is less expensive compared to other materials. It is easy to construct and join together unlike metal which is heavy. It serves as an insulator to the homes and it uses less energy to process than steel, aluminium or plastic. Interior decoration has contributed greatly to the appearance of living space; it adds colour, design, pattern and texture to it. It also adds warmth, peace and tranquility to human existence. It makes rooms to look attractive and welcoming and it changes the look or appearance of a room. It adds beauty to the room; this is an aesthetic value that makes a home functional and brings security which establishes a sense of continuity in the family life.

Conclusion

The study has established the fact that wood is one of the most significant materials used for home furniture and interior decoration. It is also discovered that wood can be used for many other genres apart from home furniture and interior decoration. It is easy to maneuver when machine tools are applied and it is easily available in the wood markets. The Government should ensure that timber (wood) is readily available for sale at a considerable price. Woods should be well seasoned and preserved so that it can last long without being damaged by insect or fungi and furniture should be well assessed by the consumers before purchasing them.

References

- Andreas, F. (2005) "Architectural Forms of Massive Timber: Structural Forms and System", *PhD Thesis* Sweden: Lulea University of Technology.
- Anyakoha, U. E. (2005) *Home Management for Schools and Colleges*, London: Macmillan Company
- Baidwin, B.T. (2007) *Interior Decoration in the Home*, New York: McGraw Hill Publishing

Company

Carpenter, E.E. (1999) *Home Management and House Care*, London: Fans and Sons Limited

Evans, H.M. (1973) *Man the Designer* London: Collier Macmillan Publishers Limited

Hadley, A. H. (2007) *The Story of Americas' Pre-eminent Interior Decoration* London: Blackwell International Publishing Company

Morton, G. (1970) *The Home, its Furnishing and Equipment* New-York: McGraw Hill Inc.

Oyelola, P. *Nigerian Craft* London: Macmillan Educational Limited