

Supplying Exotic Lumber to a Global Market: Cook Woods – Industrial 1st Place Winner

By Jacob Mooney

Equipment: LT300, E430 Edger, Material handling equipment, WM1000 ordered

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Established in 1999

Connect Online: cookwoods.com, facebook.com/cook.woods

Employees: 6

Cooks Woods isn't your average sawmill. Specializing in high quality, exotic domestic and foreign lumber, they work hard with their small crew to supply turners, woodworkers, instrument makers and others with truly one-of-a-kind materials. A quick visit to their well-organized website with instant click-to-buy functionality will give a good idea of the range of species they stock from A to Z: everything from Amazique to Ziricote! Wood is sold in various sizes and forms - for turning, knife blanks, slabs, burls, veneer, gun blanks, furniture, instruments and more.

Christopher and Catherine Cook's present business grew initially out of Chris's love for woodworking and their entrepreneurial spirit. "It all started when I began making fly fishing boxes out of hardwoods. I used my first mill, the LT25, to increase my profits... by cutting my own wood. When people began asking to purchase my lumber I realized that I was in the wrong market. Beginning in 2000, we switched over to solely selling wood... Beginning in 2004 we purchased and began operating our LT300 which has now cut logs and cants from the US, as well as from many countries all around the world, enabling us to supply the exact sizes of wood that our customers need in the diverse species that they want."

The Cooks work with carefully selected sources around the world to bring in their sought-after species, some arriving in containers from overseas. Logs are sawn on the Wood-Mizer LT300 industrial headrig, and processed using an industrial E430 Wood-Mizer edger, and various material handling equipment. They then kiln or air-dry their lumber. Once dried, the lumber is photographed and posted online for customers to purchase. They have six employees that help them answer phones, take orders, update the website, ship, warehouse, and saw lumber!

Chris is adamant that without thin-kerf Wood-Mizer equipment, he wouldn't have a business. "Since some of our woods cost up to \$300 per board foot, we are intensely grateful for the precision of these blades in allowing us to continue to make a profit when cutting woods that are extraordinarily rare."

Their website has been crucial to their success since the very beginning, enabling them to reach customers globally. Instead of just listing general information about their inventory and forcing people to call for more details and ordering information, they spend the extra time and effort to photograph every item, so that customers can browse the inventory, select their product, and buy instantly online, similar to how they would shop on websites like Amazon.com. "We mainly sell online at www.cookwoods.com where we are able to take pictures of individual lumber and blanks for sale. We spend most of our day running our sawmill, preparing products to be sold, and then packaging up the

items and sending them out to our customers.” They also utilize Facebook and weekly email ‘deals’ to update customers on new products and specials they are running.

One of the areas that Chris and Catherine plan to grow in is their ability to offer large slabs of wood for customers. With that market in mind, this fall they are installing a brand new WM1000, which boasts a 67” center capacity cut. “With the WM1000, we can offer... slabs and thicker blanks that are very hard for us to currently offer. We spend a lot of time breaking things down with a chainsaw.” Chris expects that the increased efficiency and profits resulting from the WM1000 will enable him to pay for the machine in its first year or so in operation.

In spite of the successes they have experienced, the economy did hit hard. One strategy they implemented to keep sales coming in was dropping their minimum order requirement of \$40. “We found that many customers who planned on spending only twenty or thirty dollars ended up spending more. We had to rely heavily on cutting products from our mill in order to pay our bills on time and maintain our business... Through the diverse species we are able to offer... we are able to keep our customer base interested in what we have to offer.”

“Our sawmill is crucial in providing us with profits... We are able to cut our own burls & logs with such extreme efficiency from our LT300, we see profits that allow us to continue operating in this current economy. There is a reason that mill after mill in our business continues to be purchased from Wood-Mizer. Wood-Mizer is simply the best on the market.”