

Wood: From Forest to Furniture

Wood has accompanied human societies for millennia: initially for heating or shelter, then for construction, furniture, energy — and today as a pillar of ecological transition. A renewable resource (if sustainably managed), wood embodies a balance between tradition, industry, and environmental challenges.



1. From History to Modern Wood Industries

- From Prehistory: tools, habitats, fuels.
- Antiquity and Middle Ages: shipbuilding, timber infrastructure, frameworks, carpentry.
- Industrial Revolution: mechanisation of sawmills, international log trade, beginning of a global sector.
- 20th–21st Centuries: development of a complex industry: sawing, panels, construction timber, furniture, paper/stationery, biomaterials, wood energy.

Today, wood retains a central place in construction, furniture, energy, and the bioeconomy, while being at the heart of ecological, industrial, and socio-economic issues.

2. From Forest to Furniture: The Transformation Chain

The transformation of wood follows several classic stages, before leading to finished products (furniture, flooring, construction, panels, etc.):

01	02
Felling and Skidding in the Forest	Sawmilling
Exploitation of raw timber (roundwood).	Conversion of logs into timber (planks, beams, joists, etc.).
03	04
Drying	Planing / Cutting / Shaping
Air-drying or kiln-drying to stabilise the wood.	Carpentry, furniture, flooring, panelling ...
05	06
Manufacturing According to Use	Finishing & Assembly
Solid wood, engineered wood, panels (MDF, OSB), plywood, etc.	Treatment, varnishing, assembly, fittings, etc.

Depending on the finished product (high-end furniture, parquet flooring, building, panel, energy, paper, etc.), the sector diverges significantly. This process remains central to the rise of furniture, timber construction, and derivative products.

3. Global Data & Europe's Role (2023–2025)

Here are recent benchmarks that provide a factual framework for today's timber market:

445M	381M	35%	120M
Global Sawnwood Production	Panel Production	European Share	EU Softwood Timber
In 2023, global sawnwood production was approximately 445 million m³.	In the same year, global wood-based panel production reached approximately 381 million m³.	In 2023, Europe produced approximately 35% of the world's sawnwood, confirming its important role in the international sector.	Total volumes were around 115-120 million m³ in 2023.

Regarding the production of softwood sawn timber in the European Union and associated countries (Scandinavia, Norway, Switzerland, UK), total volumes were around 115-120 million m³ in 2023, marking a notable decrease compared to the peaks of 2021 and a continuous contraction forecast for 2024, due to the economic climate and fragile construction demand.

These figures show that Europe remains a major player in global timber production and processing, even in a context of recent contraction (2022-2024 production & trade) of finished forest products.

4. Market, Prices & Volatility (2024–2025)

Recent Indicators

- The international timber (sawnwood) market continues to be monitored via indices/futures: "lumber" (sawnwood) prices are quoted on commodity markets, making it a "financially" volatile raw material, sensitive to construction demand, forest policies, logistics costs, etc.
- In Europe, "softwood sawn timber" production declined in 2023: according to the European Organisation of the Sawmilling Industry (EOS), production fell sharply in 2023-2024, while demand (construction, renovation) remains fragile and subject to economic conditions, costs, and inflation.

Influencing Factors

The main factors influencing the supply, demand, and prices of timber are:

Construction & Renovation Residential & commercial construction, renovation, and the development of timber / low-carbon buildings.	Natural Risks Fires, infestations, climate change, which can reduce forest supply.	Forest Policies Regulations, export/import restrictions, quotas, traceability, environmental requirements.
Logistics & Freight Transport of logs, transport costs, availability of infrastructure.	Material Competition Competition with other materials (concrete, steel, polymers): wood must prove its competitiveness in terms of price + durability + performance.	

5. Challenges 2025–2030: Risks & Opportunities

Opportunities

- The rise of timber construction and low-carbon buildings: in a context of ecological transition, wood, a renewable and relatively low-carbon footprint material, is gaining attractiveness.
- The development of biomaterials, engineered wood (CLT, cross-laminated timber, mass timber, technical panels): diversification of supply, innovation, added value.
- Growing potential demand for sustainable, eco-responsible, local furniture, which can revitalise production-processing chains.

Risks & Challenges

- Price and supply volatility: sensitive to natural hazards, economic cycles, regulations.
- Environmental and social sustainability: forest management, workers' rights, reforestation, traceability.
- Competition from materials and evolving consumer preferences (durability, recycling, second-hand...).
- Market fragmentation: variability according to country, type of wood, standards, logistics costs, raw material availability.

Conclusion: A Sector in Transition, Between Tradition & Modernity

Wood remains a central material, historically fundamental, and today holds ambitious promise: sustainable construction, biodiversity, circular economy, biomaterials. But the market is under pressure: global production and trade show recent signs of contraction (2022–2023), demand dynamics are uncertain, and volatility remains high.

For an informed reader or investor, wood represents both a strategic asset (raw material + sustainable material + long-term potential) and a risk to monitor (supply, regulation, economic conditions, environment).

Sources

- Forest Research (2025). Forestry Statistics 2025 – Chapter 9 International Forestry. https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2025/09/FS2025_Ch9.pdf
- Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). Global Forest Products Statistics 2023 – Sawnwood, Panels, Pulp & Paper. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/statistics/data/en>
- European Organisation of the Sawmilling Industry (EOS) / European softwood market reports 2024–2025. https://www.globalwood.org/news/2024/news_20240619a.htm
- GlobalWood.org (2025). « European timber & softwood sawn timber market – recent trends & forecasts ». https://www.globalwood.org/news/2024/news_20240619a.htm