

## Sierra Leone Wood Master Craftsman & Furniture Makers

During Sierra Leone's 10 year war I had the privilege of spending 7 months in the region as a military advisor. As part of the British Lead Tasks Force I was lucky enough to spend most of my time working in the jungle and surrounding communities in Sierra Leone. So, it only stands to reason that I would spend some of my time trying to understand the local communities and the economy, which like all countries, drives the country. Plus, I am an amateur furniture maker and designer and woodcarver to boot. So, my eye was always looking for related items.

Now, after 6 months I decided I knew everything I could possibly know about how wood was processed and all the steps required to create fine African furniture. So let me tell you all about it. First the wood is Iron Wood, Mahogany and Rose Wood and as most of us know, these trees grow to be monstrous in size. During one of my patrols I noticed a lumber operation in the jungle tree line so I stopped and had a look. What they had done was build a bush stick frame or scaffolding about 10 meters from the tree that was to be harvested. Once they cut through the tree they would lower the monster slowly onto the bush stick frame using block and tackle. Now one thing you should know is that this is a two man operation. Once the tree is resting on the frame, the African Lumber Jacks pull out this monster bow saw just like we used back in the early days of logging. They would start at one end of the log and slowly rip the tree into 2 inch and 1 inch strips that would be used for furniture. Now they would do this without cutting the bush stick frame, one man on top pulling up and one man underneath pulling down.

Once the log is ripped into strips it's sent to the carpenter to prepare it for the master carpenter. The basic carpenter would pull out his block plane and plane the entire board by hand on both sides. The end result was very clean, smooth and exactly the thickness required by the master carpenter: 1 inch 2 inch, or whatever was required depending on the furniture to be built.



The next step was for the master carpenter to build the furniture by hand without using any power tools at all! Why? Because there isn't any power! He would chisel, sand, saw and finesse this slice of Rose Wood into a table, dresser, bed or whatever you wanted.



(Photo of local furniture showroom)

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