

Wightman Specialty Woods Lumber Mill Tour

On Friday, September 28, a tour of the Wightman Lumber mill in Portlandville, NY was provided by co-owner Dave Wightman. Dave, and his brother Dan, took over the mill's operation from their father, who founded the mill in 1945. The mill has expanded its operation significantly since their father first started, and now employs some 50 people, including other family members. Dave and Dan's sister Pat manages the retail operation, while Dave's son Matt runs the custom molding portion of the business, which includes the manufacture of the dies necessary for the production of customer specific moldings, and wooden parts.



Metal detection in timbered logs is noted by the dark stain deep within the tree.



Undetected metal destroys saw blades.

Dave's knowledge of local timber traits provided the participants in the tour with some of the reasons for their selection of timber they purchase locally with the help of area foresters. They purchase much of the White Pine, and Red Oak used in the operation locally. Not only does it help area landowners, but as it turns out the Red Oak from the local hills are among the most uniform in color anywhere. The color uniformity, especially with the manufacturing of cabinetry and flooring, is an extremely desirable trait. Dave mentioned that some PA areas have similar desirability, but that comes at a cost since much of it has a higher board foot cost, in addition to the added transportation.



One thing metal detectors cannot find is old porcelain insulators, left in trees from when the area was farmed and electric fencing was used.

Though a significant amount of lumber produced at the mill is Red Oak, and White Pine, the mill also produces wood products from Cherry, Hickory, Basswood & Maple, depending on the time of year since moisture content, and sourcing, vary greatly with each

species. While softwoods can be kiln dried to 10-11% for acceptable use, hardwoods require a much lower moisture content after drying, ranging normally in the 6-8% acceptability area. Some applications with hardwood such as those dealing with RF(radio frequency) glueing require moisture contents of no greater than 5% for acceptable performance. Such is the requirement they had from Gibson Guitar.



Stacking lumber for drying. It is essential to provide ventilation between the layers of boards. This is accomplished with stickers, which are laid in place using laser guidance.



Stickers, which are narrow strips of wood used to separate layers of boards, allow for air flow during the drying process.



Lumber drying in the kiln.

A tour of the lumber mill included stops at the debarking station, metal detection, kiln drying, saw operation, storage, as well as the specialty products produced on site such as molding, flooring, and customer specific wood parts. As part of the tour participants were able to see a unique part of the operation, where the kiln dried boards were subject to a final quality control check on their way to storing, and shipping. Wightman lumber is the only mill which passes every kiln dried board over a chain driven belt with capacitance meters to measure the moisture content of the boards. Those that are above acceptable moisture levels stop the belt, and the board is removed to be returned to the kiln for additional processing.



Capacitance meters along the line inspect every board for moisture content.

In addition to the retail operation which is open to area residents, the mill ships boards throughout the country by container. Each container holds 12,500 board feet of product. They also ship internationally, especially to China and Canada, as well as within the states.

The Wightman family prides themselves on providing a superior product for distribution. Returns are virtually unheard of, which is not only a matter of reputation, but also affects the bottom line, and overall profits.

The SOT would like to thank Dave Wightman, and his staff for a really informative day, and we hope others will have the opportunity to see this wonderful piece of Americana manufacturing for themselves.

Wightman Specialty Woods is located at 146 County Highway 35A, Portlandville, NY 13834.

The mill does offer tours to the public as the schedule permits. Interested parties, and individuals interested in visiting the mill should contact them at (607) 286-9201 for further information.