

FIGURE & CHATOYANCE

FIGURE

The surface grain design on a piece of wood, known as the figure, results from the interactions of several natural features.

These features include:

- The difference in density between earlywood and latewood cells

- The quantity of growth rings

- The natural pigments and markings in the cell structure

- The reactions of the tree to the effects of tension or compression due to external forces during its life

- Contortions and knots, swollen butts or limbs, and the stunted growth of burrs or burls.

These natural features, combined with a variety of grain types, and the method of the cut, produce the figure that is so highly desirable and pleasing to the eye.

CHATOYANCE

Some woods offer different looks when struck by light at different angles. Call it shimmer, moire, chatoyance, cat's eye. or whatever. The effect can be likened to the sheen off a spool of silk, as the luminous streak of reflected light is always perpendicular to the direction of the fibers.

Chatoyance is the result of light reflected from wood cells that are not all nicely aligned.

Rather, sometime during the growth cycle cell groups took on different wavy directions. When viewed from one direction, some cell groups will reflect more than others, but as the piece is moved, a reversal occurs. Seeing the cell groups from a different aspect makes their colors or tones change.

TYPES OF WOOD

Of the 70,000 different woods known to man, fewer than 400 are commercially available for use in woodworking. Many of these are consumed in their country of origin and not exported to other parts of the world.