

Congolese Wood in the Antwerp Interwar Interior

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Abstract : During the interwar period artificial materials were often preferred, but many Antwerp architects relied on the application of wood for most of the interior finishing works and furnishings. Archival, literature and on site research of interwar suburban townhouses and the Belgian wood and furniture industry gave a new insight to the application of wood in the interwar interior. Many interwar designers favored the decorative values in all treatments of wood because of its warmth, comfort, good-wearing, and therefore, economic qualities. For the creation of a successful modern interior the texture and surface of the wood becomes as important as the color itself. This aesthetics valuation was the result of the modernization of the wood industry. The development of veneer and plywood gave the possibility to create strong, flat, long and plain wooden surfaces which are capable of retaining their shape. Also the modernization of cutting machines resulted in high quality and diversity in texture of veneer. The flat and plain plywood surfaces were modern decorated with all kinds of veneer-sliced options. In addition, wood species from the former Belgian Colony Congo were imported. Limba (*Terminalia superba*), kambala (*Chlorophora excelsa*), mubala (*Pentaclethra macrophylla*) and sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*) were used in the interior of many Antwerp interwar suburban town houses. From the thirties onwards Belgian wood firms established modern manufactures in Congo. There the local wood was dried, cut and prepared for exportation to the harbor of Antwerp. The presence of all kinds of strong and decorative Congolese wood products supported its application in the interwar interior design. The Antwerp architects combined them in their designs for doors, floors, stairs, built-in-furniture, wall paneling and movable furniture.

Keywords : Antwerp, congo, furniture, interwar

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