

HARDWOODS AND HIGH QUALITY SOFTWOODS

West African Sapele



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What is Sapele?

Sapele timber, predominantly from West Africa, is a reddish-brown hardwood. Although some parts of the Sapele logs will produce straight-grain or 'quartered' effect, generally it has a more random grain appearance, thus meaning it is liable to interlocked grain. Interlocked grain spirals around the centre of the tree thus alternating intermittently and causing a 'rough' effect, this can generally be reduced if not eliminated by heavy sanding. Sapele is used for numerous mahogany like products, for example conservatories, door frames and solid wood doors, furniture and countertops. It is available kiln dried in thicknesses 26mm, 38mm, 50mm, 63mm, 76mm and 100mm. Random widths range from 100mm to about 400mm and lengths 2m to about 5m. It is essential to specify the narrowest and shortest dimensions to optimise the lowest priced sizes.

Latin name Entandrophragma cylindricum

Also known as saplewood (Nigeria), aboudikro (Ivory Coast), Sapelli (Cameroons)

Environmental Listed in the [IUCN Red List](#) of Threatened Species as VU - Vulnerable: at risk of extinction. Not listed in CITES. Available from well-managed sources.

Distribution It is found in the rain forests of West Africa from the Ivory Coast through Ghana and Nigeria to the Cameroons, and it extends eastwards to Uganda and Tanzania.



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Sapele Properties

The Tree A very large tree with cylindrical bole and small or not buttresses. Grows to a height of 45m or more, and a diameter at breast height of 10m or slightly more.

The Timber The sapwood is pale yellow or whitish, the heartwood pinkish when freshly cut, darkening to typical mahogany colour of reddish brown. Sapele is characterised by a marked and regular stripe, particularly pronounced on quarter-sawn surfaces. Occasionally mottle figures is present, it is fairly close textured, and the grain is interlocked. It is harder and heavier than African mahogany, weighing about 640 kg/m³ when dried. It has pronounced cedar-like scent when freshly cut.

Drying The timber dries rapidly with a marked tendency to distort. Quarter-sawn material is less liable to degrade in drying.

Strength Sapele is much harder than African or American mahogany, and in resistance to indentation, bending strength, stiffness, and resistance to shock loads, is practically equal with English Oak.

Working Qualities Medium, works fairly well with hand and machine tools, but the interlocked grain is often troublesome in planing and moulding, and a reduction of cutting angle to 15° is needed to obtain a good finish. It takes screws and nails well, glues satisfactorily, and takes an excellent polish.



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Durability Moderately durable. Heartwood is moderately durable. Resistance to termite attack is variable. Sapwood liable to powder-post beetle attack. Heartwood resistant, sapwood moderately resistant.

Treatability Difficult

Moisture Movement Medium

Physical Properties Moderate hardness and weight. Medium bending and crushing strengths, not recommended for steam bending. Seasons fairly rapidly but with a marked tendency to warp. Very variable in drying properties, requires careful stacking. Movement in service is rated as medium.

Density (mean, Kg/m³) 640

Texture Medium

Availability Readily available

Working with Sapele

Use(s) Joinery interior and exterior, furniture, flooring cabinet work, decorative veneers and paneling.

Colour(s) Pink / pale red (when freshly cut), reddish brown (typical mahogany colour)



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What is FAS Grade?

The FAS grade, which derives from an original grade 'First and Seconds', will provide the user with long, clear cuttings - best suited for high quality furniture, interior joinery and solid wood mouldings. Minimum board size is 6" (152mm) and wider and 8' (2.44m) and longer. The FAS grade includes a range of boards that yield from 83.3% (10/12ths) to 100% clear-wood cuttings over the entire surface of the board. The clear cuttings must be a minimum size of 3" (76mm) wide and 7' (2.13m) long or 4" (102mm) wide by 5' (1.52m) long. The number of these cuttings permitted depends on the size of the board with most boards permitting one to two. The minimum width and length will vary, depending on species and whether the board is green or kiln dried. Both faces of the board must meet the minimum requirement for FAS.

Timbersource are a leading online hardwood timber merchant in the UK, supplying Sapele timber to the joinery, carpentry, construction and building trade at competitive prices. To contact us, [Click Here](#).



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