



Mastering Master Plank

Finnforest USA is a Heavyweight
in the Lightweight Lumber Industry



The 10th largest forest product in the world enters the United States through the Port of Baltimore.

Known in the United States as Master Plank (marketed under the name Kerto in Europe), the Finnforest USA product is a laminated veneer lumber that is stronger than ordinary wood yet more workable and lighter in weight than steel.

Jim Gilleran, Managing Director of Finnforest USA, explains that the engineered wood, made of Norway spruce, originally was developed in the 1970s as a scaffolding material. Gilleran was already in the timber industry and was dealing with Metsäliitto Cooperative, which represents Finnish forest owners, when he saw the possibilities of the engineered wood. He showed a sample to representatives from Metsäliitto and asked if they could make it. "One guy at the mill said, 'Yeah, we can, but it sounds like a crazy idea,'" Gilleran recalled.

Master Plank quickly grew from scaffolding to be used in "very safety conscious" areas such as nuclear power plants and shipyards. It became widely used in all types of construction as structural beams and headers. "We have all the code approvals and structural integrity," Gilleran said, noting that Master Plank is particularly successful in modular home and panel home construction because it is the lightest beam on the market.

Now, the company is expanding the use of the engineered wood into the interior design market. "We happen to be the player that's able to bring that product to them," Gilleran said. >>>

BY NANCY MENELEE JACKSON
Photography By Kathy Bergren Smith



An ECO-CENTRIC Answer



Finnforest is committed to the environment, and using the Port of Baltimore helps the company reduce its carbon footprint.

The company's product, Master Plank, is an engineered wood produced from spruce grown in replanted forests in Finland. To create a truly "green" wood product, explained John Dawick, a technical consultant to Finnforest, "You need to manufacture it from responsibly managed forests and forests that are replanted, and you have to prove that you do it." The timber resources used by Finnforest come under Finnish guidelines for responsible forests, and nonprofit organizations monitor the chain of custody "from resource to end user, to make sure nobody ships in a product from the Amazon rainforest," Dawick said.

Dawick added that transporting Finnforest's products from Finland to the Port of Baltimore can be a more efficient solution than bringing a competitor's product from the West Coast to the Baltimore area via trucks or even rail.

It's good to know that sailing across the ocean blue is a green way to go.



COURESTY OF FINNFOREST USA

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"This has been a constant, growing business," said Rick Schiappacasse, a Maryland Port Administration (MPA) trade development director specializing in forest products. "Through careful and quality handling at

8 feet wide, with varying thicknesses from ¼-inch to 3 inches. The panels are wrapped in coated paper, but the underside is left open to allow the package to breathe and to minimize condensation. Two truckloads

ports of Liverpool, Antwerp, Hamburg and Gothenburg to Baltimore. This service is operated with five of the world's largest G-3 combination RO/RO container ships.

After the Mafi roll trailers are unloaded from the ships, they're stripped and two forklifts lift the panels. Because the material is so flexible, it requires skilled forklift operators to make sure it doesn't bend too much. As forklifts hold the panels aloft, a flatbed truck maneuvers into position. Once loaded, the product is ready for convenient transportation to a large percentage of the nation that is in close proximity to Baltimore.

The process is "very well managed," Gilleran said. "The Port of Baltimore has been superior to work with. It's a people game, and they understand what we're doing. They have learned how to handle it."

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Dundalk Marine Terminal, this customer has been very happy with the Port."

Master Plank is shipped here from Finland on board Atlantic Container Line (ACL) roll-on/roll-off (RO/RO) vessels in panels that are 48 feet long and 4 feet to

of Master Plank LVL fit on a Mafi roll trailer.

ACL, which has been calling on Baltimore for more than 40 years, operates liner transportation services for containers, project and oversized cargo, heavy equipment and vehicles between the European



The Knight of the Master Plank

Jim Gilleran's co-workers kid-dingly call him Sir James, but the honor he received is no joke. He is proud and touched that the President of Finland awarded him the Knight of the Order of the White Rose of Finland.

Only the tenth American to have been knighted since the Order of the White Rose was established in 1919, Gilleran received the honor on Sept. 12, 2008, in recognition of his contributions to the Finnish forest industry in the North American market.

"I didn't know what the issue was – I was told to be at headquarters in a black suit," Gilleran recently recalled with a laugh. "I thought, 'My God, am I going to get a pink slip?'"

Instead, he found the American ambassador and 35 friends, colleagues and family members dressed up and drinking champagne. "I was really taken aback and humbled by it," Gilleran said.

When he received the award, he told those assembled, "It's been a pleasure to work with my Finnish colleagues, as I regard them as honest, ethical and serious – their word is their bond. I've always had so much respect and admiration for the Finnish way of doing business, and this is the idea that I've brought to my customers in North America."



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