



EDITOR'S PICK SHIN YANG FORESTRY: GIVING BACK TO THE FOREST

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Shin Yang Forestry,Miri,Sarawak,legality,plywood

The Shin Yang Group, one of East Malaysia's largest plywood producers, spares no effort in returning the green back to Sarawak's landscape.

Cover image: An aerial view of Shin Yang's forest plantation in Sarawak, a land area totalling 350,000ha.

The landscape is not a pretty sight. Recent felling has brought the forest to its knees and the view is one of broken branches, muddy mounds and tractor tracks. When taken at face value, it is compelling evidence of Man's destructive impact on Mother Nature, a scoop relished by well-meaning but misinformed environmental activists.



Falcata saplings growing in a nursery in Miri, Sarawak



Seed sowing

But Sarawak's wilderness paints a different story. New young saplings are thriving in the tropical humidity, put in the ground almost immediately after its predecessors have been felled. Giving back to the forest is a practice Shin Yang has adopted since 1999, shortly after the local government began issuing LPFs (License for Planted Forest) that same year. These areas are licensed for several cycles and only meant for cultivating tree farms. After securing three LPFs in Bintulu, Masama and Long Lama, Shin Yang began commercial planting in 2003.

This makes Shin Yang one of the earliest wood-processing companies to embrace reforestation as a business philosophy. Every log is tagged with a date and place of 'birth', which means that all plywood can be traced back to its original source. In this way, not only will there always be a renewable source of logs for plywood, the trees are always there to maintain Nature's balance.

"We never take logs from unsustainable sources," said James Ling, managing director of Shin Yang's wood-based division. "We don't support illegal logging because illegal logs fetch a much cheaper price and this undercuts the price of our plywood. If everyone sources legally, it creates a more level playing field in the game."

Even though licensees are entitled to utilise an LPF area at their own discretion, Shin Yang reserves about one-third of the land untouched to prevent landslides and serve as natural water catchment areas. These natural habitats are also home to Sarawak's indigenous tribes, as well as rare flora and fauna. The Long Lama estate is accredited ISO 14001:2004, the badge given in recognition of environmental protection.

To date, nearly three hundred million saplings have taken root on a land area totalling 350,000 ha. The main species grown are Falcata (*parrserianthes falcataria*), Acacia Mangium, Eucalyptus and other fast-growing species harvested on a 10-year cycle. The second cycle of planting has begun (up to 30,000 seedlings per day) just as the first batch of logs are leaving for the mills. The harvesting volume stands at 8,000m³ per month and is set to double in future.

Patience pays off

Good trees come from good seeds and proper care in the nursery. Although they can reach up to 15 metres in two years, Akira Kitaoka, a forest engineer from Japan, is finding ways to shorten their growth period.

He has 19 years of experience in Sarawak, spending the past six at Shin Yang Forestry studying development patterns in tropical vegetation to yield more consistent growth. These days Kitaoka-san spends his time sourcing for good seeds and site maintenance. He also spends time in the tissue culture laboratory, set up about four years ago.



Shin Yang Plywood mill in Miri, Sarawak

His work has been supported by Shin Yang's management for nearly 16 years—a privilege few enjoy. Not many private companies are willing to spend on silviculture as it takes months, sometimes years, of incubation before returns on investment are evident.

Today Shin Yang Forestry's patience has paid off. After rounds of trial and error, about 10,000 seedlings per day have sprouted successfully in the nursery. Before, the yield was only 5% of the current output. Also even though consecutive rounds of agriculture would starve the soil of nutrients, the trees in the field have about 50% survival rate. Simple details matter; such as using tweezers to sow seeds and positioning saplings at least 3m apart in the field.

In response, all of the plywood mills were gradually upgraded with patented technology to peel logs from 30cm down to 1cm in diameter, thus fully utilising every log and reducing wastage.

Next year if you visit that same spot, the broken branches, muddy mounds and tractor tracks would have disappeared. The landscape should now be a pleasant emerald green.

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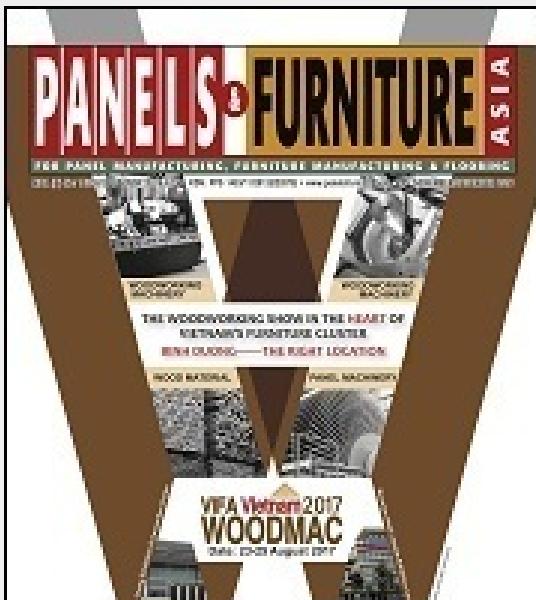
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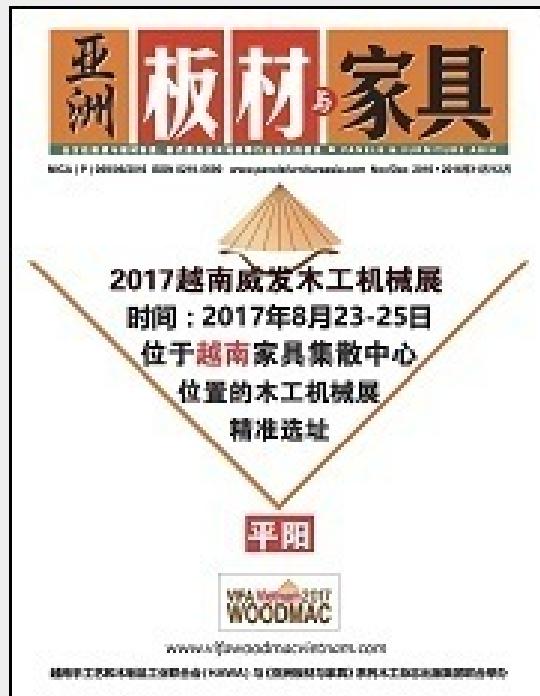
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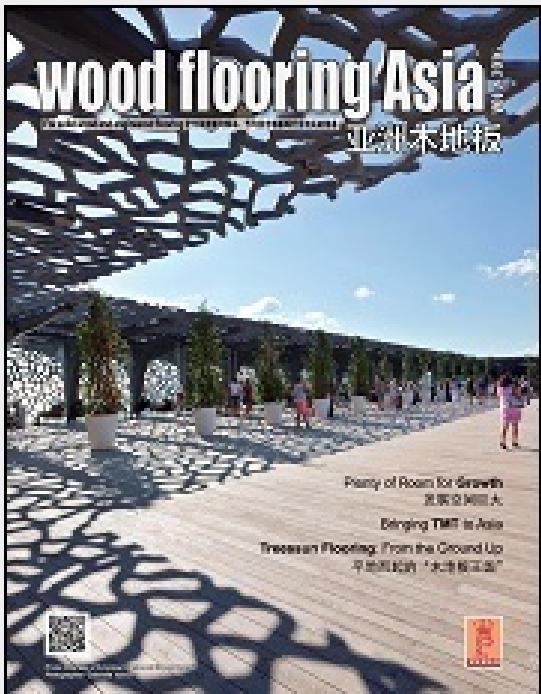
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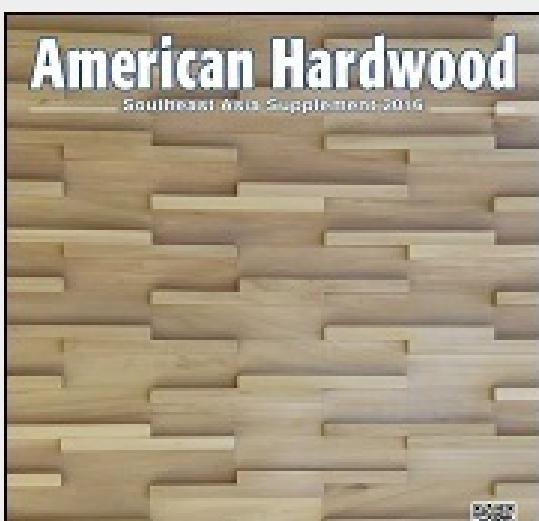
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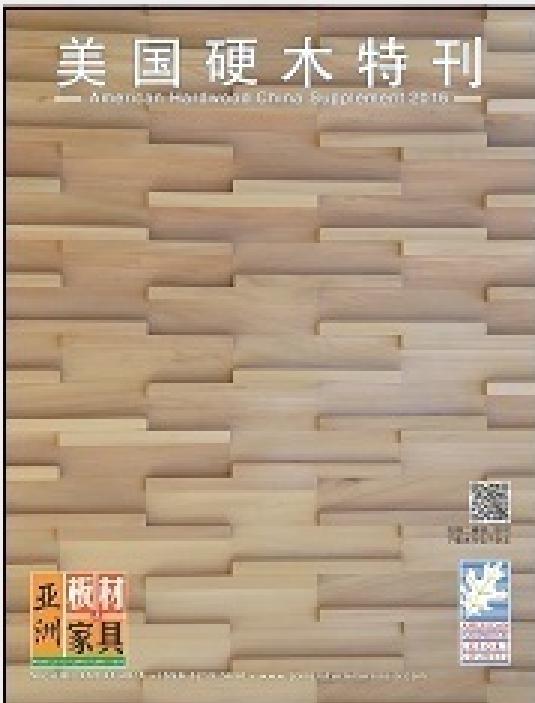
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