

MATERIALS

Birch Plywood

A professional product due to go amateur

One noticeable difference between the average amateur and professional cabinetmaker is in the use of one material—solid birch plywood. The professional is likely to have several varieties of it in his shop, the amateur none. That's because it isn't found at most lumber yards; but there are signs that it will become increasingly available.

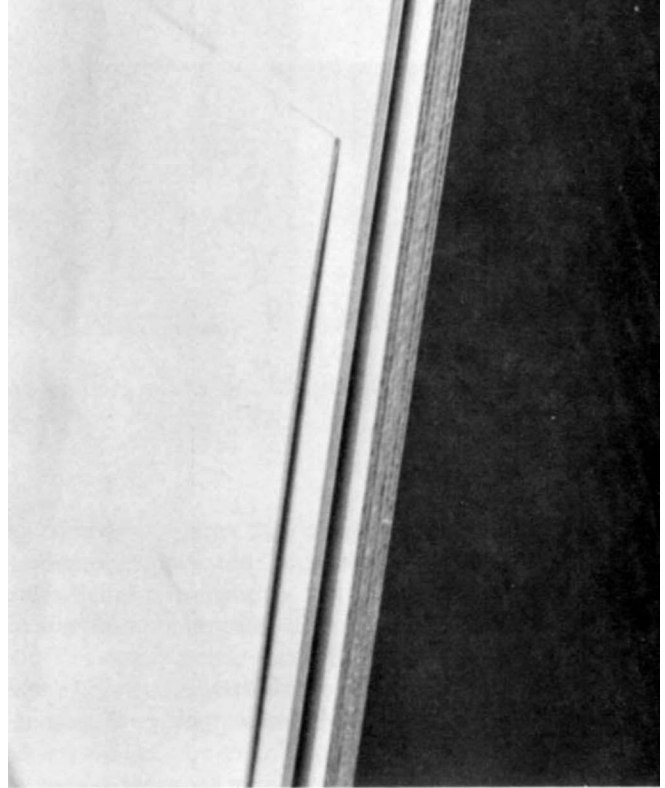
Actually, it's been in use here for decades. It's known variously as Finnish, Swedish, Baltic, Arctic, and white birch. There's also American and Japanese birch plywood, but it has a generally yellower, less regularly white finish.

Cabinetmakers like it because it has so many uses. In its thinner varieties of 1/8 to 1/4 inch it can be bent, and built up and glued into curved laminations either to use alone or as a base for veneering. It's used for drawer bottoms, cabinet backs (and fronts), and even for turning (see p. 14). It combines the advantages of both plywoods and hardwoods, and unlike particle board, has edge gluing strength.

Birch plywood is easily recognized by its thin, evenly-spaced laminations, and the clear whiteness of its face. It comes in several grades and thicknesses (from 1/8 inch to well over an inch), and most commonly in the metric five-foot-square sheets. Depending on grade and source, it costs twice as much (and more) as fir plywood.

Finland has been the main supplier for many years. Now, some Russian birch is being imported under the Baltic Birch trademark.

For further information, including how to obtain it locally, write the Finnish Plywood Development Association at 210 East Broad Street, Falls Church, Va. 22046, or Allied International, Inc. Boston, Mass. 02129, which is importing the Russian birch.



A quick tour at the Rhode Island School of Design's wood-working shop shows birch plywood stacked against a wall, used as a combination drawer bottom and slide in a student's tool cabinet, as the curved base for veneer, and a cut-off from laminated furniture.

