

“Lightweight technology is the future”

Interview with Frieder Schuler, Furniture Component Team Leader at HOMAG Group Engineering, on the growing and specific significance of lightweight construction technology for the furniture industry.

Editorial team: Mr Schuler, the issue of lightweight construction has not yet been able to gain the same foothold in the furniture industry as it has already done in other sectors. What do you think are the reasons?

Frieder Schuler: I believe that the furniture industry has also grasped the many benefits of lightweight construction but has not been in a position to put them into practice in such a consistent way as other branches of industry – such as the automotive or aviation sector. Process reliability still carries a lot of weight when dealing with chipboard panels. Another factor could well be a certain prejudice on the part of the end consumer which tells them that to be of high quality, an item of furniture has to be heavy. This is the reason why a dedicated lightweight construction platform was staged at the LIGNA, the aim of which was to place this whole issue more firmly in the spotlight. We also exhibited a number of machines for processing lightweight panels at the show. Today, we are already seeing a shift in people’s perceptions, which is being driven in particular by the younger, more mobile generation.

Editorial team: So do you envisage a promising future for lightweight construction?

Frieder Schuler: Guided by the underlying precept that less is more, we are seeing lightweight construction increasingly gaining acceptance. Economically and ecologically speaking, lightweight technology offers so many advantages that I believe it is inevitably the way forward. It is undoubtedly in my mind the

technology of the future.

Editorial team: Could you briefly outline the most important benefits?

Frieder Schuler: The most important advantage is certainly that of material savings. This will allow producers to save money, achieving the same product characteristics with a reduced input of resources. At the same time, encouraging more sparing use of wood as a precious natural resource makes ecological sense. The reduced weight of lightweight construction products also has other benefits to offer: Saved transportation tonnage, easier handling of flat-pack furniture for end users and also cheaper postal delivery service for the increasingly important internet shopping sales market. Lightweight components will also enjoy more popular use for interior fittings on aircraft, and for caravan and ship building.

Editorial team: Do you envisage any other benefits of this modern technology alongside weight and material savings?

Frieder Schuler: Absolutely. For instance it will open up all kinds of new design possibilities for our customers, as it allows the use of chunkier panel thicknesses. It is also far easier to integrate functional features into the honeycomb panels, opening up interesting design solutions and creating convincing sales arguments. There is increased scope for mounting electronic components such as LED lighting, loudspeaker cables or integrating flat screens.

Editorial team: What do you envisage is the HOMAG Group's position in the lightweight technology market?

Frieder Schuler: Lightweight construction is a classical HOMAG issue: strong green credentials, technically challenging and future-oriented. This is why we

have been driving forward the whole topic of lightweight construction for years now, as one of its leading pioneers worldwide. The door sector is one particular area in which we have been processing lightweight panels already for several years. Lightweight construction also fits in perfectly with our currently evolving corporate ethos, embracing the principle of sustainability and increased responsibility towards the community and the environment.

Editorial team: What does the HOMAG Group have to offer customers in the field of lightweight technology?

Frieder Schuler: An awful lot. Our machines and plants cover every production step in the lightweight construction process: From panel manufacture through panel dividing, coating, sanding and edging to hardware mounting, assembly and packaging. And this applies not only to woodworking shops and medium-sized enterprises, but to industrial customers too. We are talking here about matured and exhaustively tested technology: As I mentioned earlier, we have been engaging with this whole topic for a long time already, and will continue to invest in the further development of this technology in the future.

Editorial team: Has this technology already been established in the marketplace?

Frieder Schuler: Up until now, the furniture industry has been hesitant in taking up the offer of machines for the manufacture of lightweight furniture. But we are currently experiencing a marked and growing increase of interest from our furniture manufacturing customers in environmentally aware production. We are registering an unmistakably high level of interest among our customers in the manufacture of lightweight products – in particular among the large-scale furniture producers. In 2012, for example, we received a large-scale order for a total of four plants and several individual machines for the efficient production of lightweight furniture from our customer Maja. And for IKEA Industry, we have

even completed the first production plant for lightweight furniture in China, which manufactures around 21.8 million lightweight components every year.

I am confident that we are ideally placed in this up-and-coming market segment, as we are already in a position to supply our customers with the right solutions to address their individual needs.

Picture material courtesy of: HOMAG Group AG



Fig. 1:
Lightweight panel with **supportEdge**



Fig. 2:
Directly upstream from the edge banding process, the support and decor edge are joined (married) using the patented **doubleEdge**

technique.



Fig. 3:
Edge sealing of railless honeycomb panels using **doubleEdge** in a single work step



Fig. 4:
The support edges are fed and banded on the honeycomb panels for edge sealing.



Fig. 5:
Furniture Component Team Leader Frieder SCHULER at this year's LIGNA

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