

Between heaven and earth

by Patrick Kruithof

Bamboo is a great material to work with. For thousands of years, people have used bamboo stalks in all kinds of fascinating applications. The material is currently also available as blockboard, parquet and veneer, all three of which have been developed from standard bamboo strips derived by splitting the stalk. My investigation is focussed on these industrial variants.

First, I researched the properties of bamboo through experimentation. By sawing, burning, tearing and cutting the material, I managed to expose valuable, unique and intrinsic properties such as fibre structure, irregularity, and the velvety shine of silica. I also discovered that the industrial variants of bamboo are in fact imitations of wood. Through the manufacturing processes however, the bamboo plant loses part of its narrative. The tightly glued bamboo strips and the varied coloured tones create a crowded visual image.

My first idea came up when I was trying to make a lampshade of bamboo veneer. To this end I had bent the material in a circular form, with a vertical instead of a horizontal line pattern. As I wasn't satisfied with the visual image of the lampshade in combination with the light source, I stuck narrow strips of silver foil onto the seams between the bamboo strips to highlight the strips in the veneer.

The lampshade reminded me of an old oak floor with narrow-seamed boards. The seams highlight the separate boards and the pattern of knots. The image of the oak floor inspired me to design a new type of blockboard. What we have here are two different innovations.

First, I attached a narrower bamboo strip in a different colour between the individual bamboo strips to create a visual division line. Secondly, when put in an upright position, the bamboo sheeting shows a differently patterned underside and top, determined by the direction in which the bamboo plant grows. This is because on the underside, the nodes are closer to one another than on the top. If blockboard is used in this position, the narrative of the growing direction remains intact. My design is therefore an ode to the bamboo plant that grows from the earth in the direction of the sky.

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