WALNUT

WOOD VENEER | SPEC BRIEF

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01 – DESIGN OVERVIEW

Walnut provides a rich, refined appearance ranging from lighter brown to deep chocolate brown. Its warmth and depth make it suitable for both contemporary and formal interior applications. It has a fine texture, generally straight grain, and gentle figure.

Walnut accepts stains and topcoats evenly. Unlike most species, its heartwood color may become lighter as it ages—a characteristic that should be considered when selecting a finish direction and setting client expectations.

DEFAULT CUT	DEFAULT MATCH
Plain Sliced	**Book Match**
PORE STRUCTURE	**RELATIVE COST**
Fine/ Semi-Open	**Premium**

02 – COLOR & TONE

Walnut ranges from lighter tan-brown to deep chocolate brown, with natural variation between heartwood and sapwood. Heartwood provides the rich, warm brown tones most associated with the species. Sapwood is distinctly lighter—creamy to pale gray—and is generally not present in premium specifications.

TYPICAL COLOR RANGE



Lighter-Tan-Brown — Deep Chocolate

SPECIFICATION NOTE

Unlike most species, walnut's heartwood typically becomes lighter and more golden over time with light exposure. Initial deep-brown tones may shift meaningfully in installed conditions. Evaluate finish options with this aging behavior in mind.

***Aging note:** Walnut is unusual in that its heartwood lightens rather than darkens with prolonged light exposure. The color shift can be significant in applications with strong natural or artificial lighting.*

03 – GRAIN & TEXTURE

Walnut has a fine, moderately open texture with a generally straight grain. Plain-sliced faces can introduce gentle cathedral figure and natural grain movement. The semi-open pore structure produces a refined surface that accepts both clear and stained finishes evenly and with good depth.

SPECIFICATION NOTE | STAIN ABSORPTION

Walnut's semi-open grain generally accepts stains evenly. However, natural heartwood-to-sapwood variation can produce color differences after finishing. Where color uniformity is important, define acceptable sapwood content and evaluate on a finished 8"x10" sample.

Adjacent leaves are mirrored in book matching. Walnut's depth of color makes the barber-pole reflectivity effect generally less pronounced than in lighter species, though it may still be present.

SEE ALSO: CHERRY

For a warmer, medium-brown species with a lighter natural tone, see the **Cherry** Spec Brief. Walnut occupies the darkest end of Forte's standard species range; cherry is a complementary choice for medium-warm applications.

02 – CUT OPTIONS

CUT	GRAIN APPEARANCE	TYPICAL USE	KEY CONSIDERATION
Plain Sliced DEFAULT	Cathedral and straighter grain combined; gentle figure possible; most expressive	Contemporary, formal, hospitality, and high-visibility interiors	Most available and most common; some cathedral movement across face
Rotary	Broader, flowing grain; more expressive variation	Cost-effective applications	More grain variation; stronger natural walnut character; confirm availability
Quarter Sliced	Straighter, more linear grain; minimal figure	Where a controlled, linear grain direction is preferred	Lower yield; more restrained character; confirm with manufacturer

**Plain sliced is the default specification for walnut. Quarter sliced is preferred where a quieter, more linear grain expression is required.*



PLAIN SLICED



ROTARY



QUARTER SLICED

WALNUT

05 – NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS TO ANTICIPATE

CHARACTERISTIC	APPEARANCE	GRADE CONSIDERATION
Color Variation	Range from lighter tan-brown to deeper chocolate brown within same installation	Allowable by grade; define acceptable color range and heartwood-to-sapwood balance
Color Streaks	Linear or irregular color changes in grain direction	Allowable by grade
Mineral Streaks	Darker marks from natural mineral uptake	Allowable by grade; generally less prominent than in light species
Figure	Irregular grain movement; may appear in plain-sliced and rotary faces	Not grade-controlled; can be valued as natural character
Cross Bars	Faint horizontal bands crossing grain direction	Natural; cannot be fully eliminated
Barber-Pole Effect	Alternating light/dark reflectivity in book match; less prominent in darker species	Result of book matching; not a fabrication defect
Small Burls/Pin Knots	Small circular or localized grain features	Allowable by grade; limited at AA

06 – FINISHING

FINISH DIRECTION	EXPECTED BEHAVIOR
Clear	Preferred; best preserves walnut's natural warmth and depth; allows heartwood color and grain to read fully; lowest risk for an even, natural appearance
Might-to-Medium Stain	Use only where color equalization is needed; evaluate on a finished full-size sample before approving; can help reduce visible sapwood-to-heartwood contrast
Dark Stain	Use only for a deliberate, more uniform dark appearance; additional dark stain can make walnut appear muddy or reduce grain definition; validate on a finished sample before proceeding

RECOMMENDED DIRECTION

Clear UV finish is the preferred direction for walnut and is lowest risk. If color equalization is needed, use a light-to-medium stain only after sample approval. Dark stain should be used only for a deliberate, more uniform dark appearance and must be validated with a finished full-size sample before approving production.

07 – SPECIFICATION WATCH-OUTS

Critical considerations prior to material release

01

Walnut lightens with age—the reverse of most species

Unlike cherry, mahogany, and most other architectural veneers, walnut's heartwood typically becomes lighter and more golden over time through light exposure. Initial deep brown tones may shift meaningfully—particularly in installations with strong natural or artificial lighting. Uneven light exposure across a door group can produce visible color differences within the same installation over time.

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE: Discuss expected color aging with the client before finalizing finish selection. Document anticipated color development in the project specification and obtain owner acknowledgment. For installations with mixed sun exposure, evaluate whether a finish that stabilizes color may reduce long-term variation.

02

Natural heartwood-to-sapwood contrast requires active management

Walnut's heartwood provides the rich brown tones most associated with the species. Sapwood is distinctly lighter—creamy to pale gray—and can be visually prominent within a door face or across a door group. The proportion of sapwood to heartwood varies within a flitch and between flitches. Where color consistency is important, this variation must be actively managed through specification.

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE: Define the acceptable sapwood content and color range explicitly in the project specification. For premium applications, consider specifying heartwood-only veneer where available. Review a finished 8"x10" sample before approving production on visually sensitive applications.

03

Cathedral grain from plain-sliced veneer may not suit all design intents

Plain-sliced walnut can produce pronounced cathedral grain and visible figure—an expressive, natural character appropriate to many interiors but which may conflict with design intents calling for a quieter, more linear appearance. Plain-sliced specification does not guarantee a subdued surface.

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE: If a quieter, more linear appearance is required, specify quarter-sliced walnut for a straighter, more controlled grain expression. Review a finished sample of the specified cut before approving. For the most restrained expression in walnut, quarter-sliced is the preferred specification.

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