

# WOODNEWS

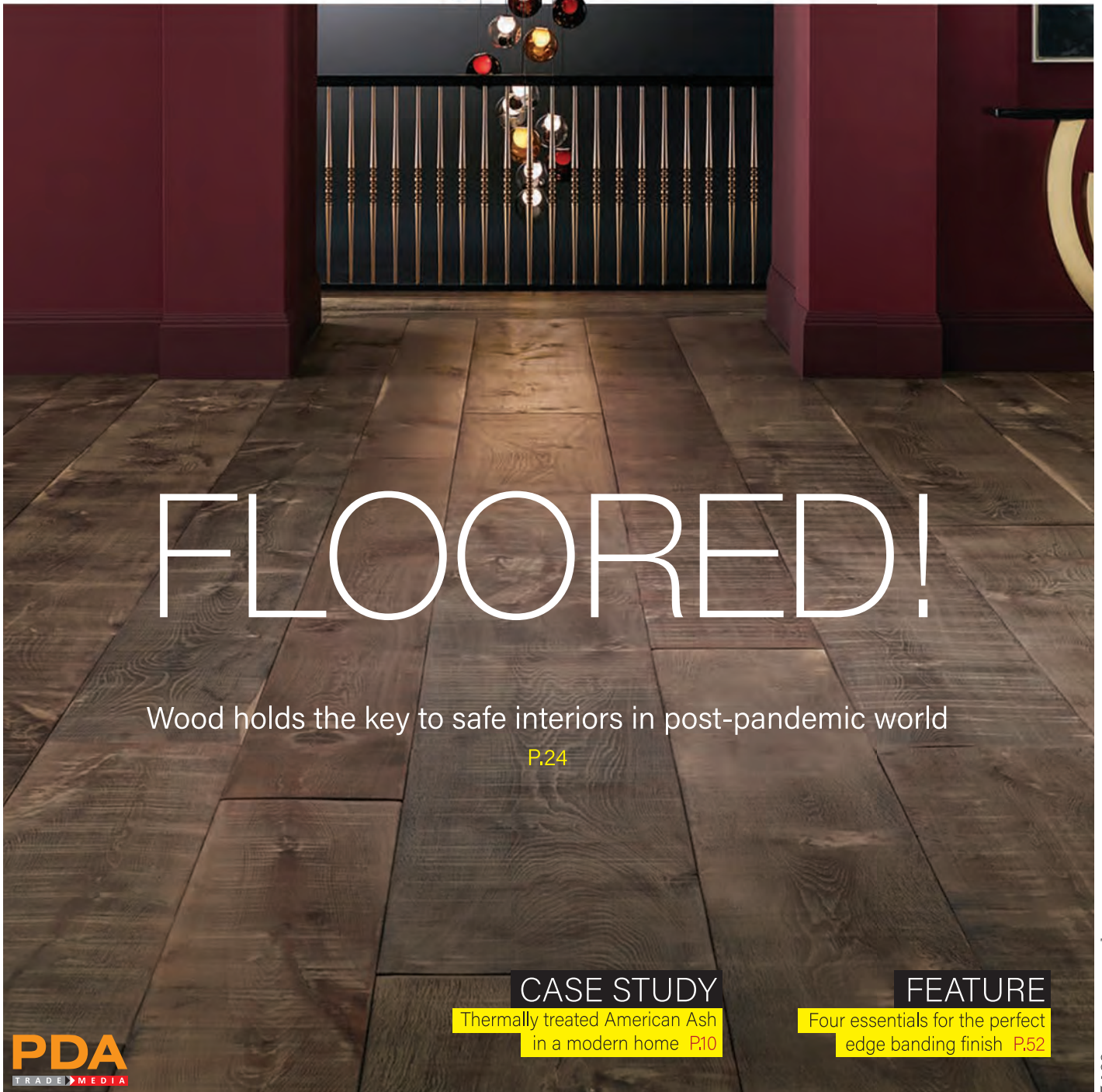
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**30**  
YEARS

Pioneer in the  
service of the  
woodworking  
industry



## FLOORED!

Wood holds the key to safe interiors in post-pandemic world

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### CASE STUDY

Thermally treated American Ash  
in a modern home P.10

### FEATURE

Four essentials for the perfect  
edge banding finish P.52

# 'Good design, work efficiency will see us through'



## Sohel Contractor

Solli Concepts is a design studio that specialises in hand-crafted and hand-finished furniture. Traditional woodworking methods are used alongside modern machinery to ensure products are built to last.

At Solli function and design are of equal importance and we believe one cannot work without the other. The intended primary function of the product is the inspiration for the design to take form.

I like to keep things simple, by taking everything out that is not needed, to present an elegant yet

simple piece for someone to enjoy. Due to our extensive understanding and knowledge of manufacturing wooden products, Solli Concepts also has a dedicated manufacturing space for corporate clients and clients who are looking for their designs to be manufactured.

Within the indoor furniture space, we specialise in wardrobes, beds, bedside tables, dressers, sofas, bar stools, lounge chairs, dining tables and chairs, upholstered furniture, storage units, bars, media units and mirrors.

We also have a very interesting line of products for the washroom area to

*Sohel kept himself occupied with his craft, developing many hand-tools that he always wanted, and repairing the dosa pan handle.*

include wooden washbasins, shower trays, vanities and bathtubs. High-quality outdoor furniture includes doors, façades, seating and tables.

### Maintaining morale

In order to protect the welfare of our team, we decided to house our key staff members within the work premises, providing them with all necessary sleeping and cooking materials even before the lockdown began.

During the time the premises were not operating we made the some things a priority for our workforce. To ensure that



they stayed mentally fit, we encouraged them to start a new hobby, finished pending personal projects and set goals to keep them focused and motivated.

We also took the time to develop a lot of the hand-tools that we always wanted to make ourselves, but always took a backseat due to project pressures. A particular favourite was the rosewood smoothing/finishing plane in our own customised design that is really a treat to use. It leaves a glass-smooth finish on all our wooden surfaces!

We constantly spoke to all our team members, educating them about the right sort of news and updates. We tried to ensure that they were aware of “fake news” and forwarded digital messages that would normally disillusion them into making the wrong decisions.

Like most businesses, our work depends on so many other people up and down the chain. Initially we struggled because some of the vendors we relied on were not operational and clients needed urgent deliveries. Once the lockdown started to ease we were able to start work.

### Fast forward

As things get back to some sort of new normal in Mumbai, we are now facing site

issues with some clients. Our furniture is ready to be dispatched, but client sites have been delayed so; we are stacking and stocking our furniture till they are ready.

I personally don't think the industry will change the way it does business on a permanent basis. But with the current issues the industry is facing, plus the importance of implementing new social distancing norms, I feel we will definitely see an interim change.

Marketing and soliciting of new business is changing. Events, exhibitions, conferences and other such public activities have either been put on hold or are being taken onto a digital platform. Digital is already taking the helm and I feel this is only the start.

As people spend more time at home, I feel they will look more closely at their furniture and surroundings. Requirements for better build, more functional and better thought-out furniture will be the order of the hour. Even in the office space, big companies like Twitter, Google and multinationals are making 'work from home' a permanent feature.

As this happens, I feel and hope that more and more designers and architects will look to collaborate with local furniture

manufacturing units, rather than outsourcing to bigger international manufacturers. They will have more control over the production and they will be able to support/keep it local.

### Digital footprint

Solli Concepts is well placed for this for this interim period in two main respects. A lot of our business comes from our digital footprint. Clients call because they have liked something on our website or on our social media pages.

We then customise furniture based on personal requirements. Communication is through emails, calls and 3D drawings once orders are confirmed. This way of doing business will continue and most likely grow.

We work with select corporates and architects on developing their designs using our manufacturing expertise. A lot of this work happens through 3D drawings, samples and product viewings.

With the way our process is set up, plus our plans for a “viewing ▶



*We have looked at ourselves as craftsmen first and a business next. We feel we are very adept at dealing with change, reinventing ourselves and keeping it all moving in the right direction.*

– Sohel Contractor, Owner, Solli Concepts.

gallery” we are confident that we can continue to produce excellent quality furniture while keeping the client and the new norms in mind.

In order to create this viewing gallery, within this time, we have actually managed to secure additional premises. With our products it is very important that clients get to touch and feel our furniture, be it a sample or a finished product.

Set within city limits, this space will allow us to continue working, with both more efficiency and transparency. The viewing gallery will allow clients to come and see their work while maintaining sufficient physical distancing.

**New 'normal'**

We have looked at ourselves as craftsmen first and a business next. As a result, we feel we are very adept at dealing with change, reinventing ourselves and keeping it all moving in the right direction.

While I am very confident that we will return to way we do business, I do believe we will see a restructuring of businesses to

streamline and reduce unnecessary expenses.

Efficient use of time and resources, as well as shortage of labour, needs to be managed with planned manufacturing methods and smart design. Since we know that a lot of international imports of raw material and machinery are either going to take longer and or will cost more, we are looking at local options and stocking up on local materials that will see us through this time.

While we deal with the temporary 'new normal', we are certain to walk away with changes that will stay with us because they will lead to a more efficient way of manufacturing and doing business.

Our work is all about using our hands and the skill that comes with it in order to keep the craft alive – and in times like this, the importance of these are only reinforced. Buying locally, buying sustainably and not living beyond your means are lessons that keep coming to my mind.

**Home work!**

The lockdown has reinforced something that I have been thinking of for a very long time. We have been living a life where the only aim has been to get to the next level/ stage; usually to the detriment of enjoying

the 'here' and 'now'. We need this to stop and we need to unlearn the way we used to live.

I was forced to spend more time at home with the family than initially I appreciated. It was quite an adjustment for everybody, and not without its perils!

The kids and I spent time building and cooking together. I also took the time out to research how to do things – such as making toys for the kids, making a cajone for myself, and experimenting with fermented food.

When the handle of our dosa pan broke, I took some time and made a new handle for it rather than ordering a new pan. It was definitely the longer way to do things, but with a lot more satisfaction and, in my opinion, a better outcome!

After ecommerce opened up again there was a sense of relief and sadness. The relief is self-explanatory; the sadness because I knew that the throwaway spending cycle was about to restart.

This is the real lesson that we should all learn from the pandemic: respect for Mother Nature and all it gives us. We have been taking things for granted for so long, forgetting that we are merely guests.

*During lockdown, it was teaching some basics to and making toys with the kids.*

