Finkell, Cotton to Launch Private-Label Wood Floor Company

When Don Finkell retired last year after more than three decades in wood flooring manufacturing, he wasn’t sure he was going to like it. As it turns out, he didn’t. Although he traveled to every continent but one in the last year, “I couldn’t feel like I was doing something significant or that I enjoyed doing,” he says. “I really do enjoy the wood flooring business and making beautiful products that people want to put in their homes.”

To that end, Finkell is re-entering the wood flooring marketplace with American OEM Wood Floors, an engineered wood floor manufacturing company that will officially launch at the NWFA Wood Flooring Expo in Nashville later this month.

Finkell, who ran Anderson until it was bought by Shaw in 2007 and then worked for Shaw until his retirement in February of last year, will be joined by familiar faces, most notably fellow former NWFA Chairman Wayne Cotton, who will head up the sales and marketing.

Finkell sees an opportunity in the growing private-label business that has been dominated by Chinese companies. “In the last 10 years, China has captured about 43 percent of the [engineered] marketplace; only 42 percent is from the U.S. and the other 15 percent is from all over the world,” he says, citing statistics from the 2011 ITC investigation regarding Chinese engineered flooring imports. The majority of that Chinese product is produced for the private-label business, whether wholesale distributors, buying groups, big box stores or others, he says. “What we’re talking about doing is to give an alternative to private-label programs that is domestically produced.”

To accomplish that, Finkell plans to use a model he and his team are familiar with: prison labor. The company has leased a former prison furniture factory in Only, Tenn., from the state of Tennessee, and plans to use what is referred to in the state as “offender labor,” as well as civilian workers. This marks the eighth and most sophisticated prison plan Finkell has created, he says.

Finkell expects the factory to be running by the end of the summer and fully integrated by the end of the year.

He says his team is “very optimistic about the possibilities.” It’s different from what’s historically been done. We’re not looking to replace any American-made business; we’re looking to replace imports, because we feel like that’s where the opportunity is,” adding that oftentimes companies importing products are frustrated by long lead times and having to carry excess inventory.

“Since we’re not going to have a brand, we’re taking a model from what the Chinese do, which is to make a good product at a good price,” he says.

The company will have a booth at the NWFA Expo this month and will hold its official launch party during the show.

The new company can be reached at info@americanoem.com or (888) 415-9496.
Good job guys! Sounds exciting.

Just my opinion of course. He did have a career in the industry and credit is deserved for that.

The real reason most guys come back after retirement is the cold realization of why they worked so much to begin with: To get away from the wife!

While I'm happy to see more domestic production it is still a race to the bottom. As a Canadian retailer we can't import prison made product which also applied to the majority of Anderson's good products. The new products from Anderson that we can sell are mainly price based and are not resalable which makes them 'short term' like a lot of Chinese product. So in the end I won't be directly affected but I'm still not a great fan of private label programs and the lack of identity and responsibility they enable.

Congrats Don & Wayne!
I can only imagine success will follow such men of integrity. Best of luck! See you in Nashville.

Great Men and I expect great things.

What a great announcement for our industry...finally 'well designed' hardwood floors that we know are from sustainably and responsibly forested hardwoods. Am pretty sure the 'haters' are really 'failures' or possibly 'cheap importers'. Just sayin...SOOOOO Congrats and best of wishes to Don Finkel!!

Prison labor, the 'new' slave labor business model.

This is great news! I am retailer who has to deal with customers who complain about the quality of the Chinese floors and I also know that the Chinese producers are manipulating the hardwood flooring market. Competition is good for our industry. It is the people who don't want to compete who are the haters. Best of luck to your company and thanks for keeping your products American made!

Don and Wayne a great and dynamic team. I'm anxious to see the products you all produce. Don was a great mentor for many of us as was Wayne. This is exciting news for the industry. Congratulations Don and Wayne.

Looking forward to checking out the products! I'm definitely for 'Made in America'! Hope their company does well!!

Just to set the record straight, for those of you who are not familiar with the PIE program, inmates are paid the same as private citizens doing the same job. It's not slave labor.

Great! Congrats :)