The demand for tropical timber in the UK and Europe is very high, with most of it focusing on a few well-known species. Some are so popular that high quality timber in these species can be difficult to find.

In natural tropical forests certified to FSC standards a wide variety of timber species is harvested, all in lower volumes. This prevents negative effects on biodiversity and species composition. Many timber importers have no interest in the so-called Lesser Known Species, leaving producers with difficult to sell timbers.

It is essential to find markets for Lesser Known Species in order to make FSC forest management in highly diverse tropical forests economically viable. Many companies perceive this as a major problem, but Precious Woods approached it as an opportunity and – as experience shows – rightly so.

Ten years ago – before anyone outside hardcore forest NGO and timber circles had ever heard about FSC – *Angelim pedra* could have been anything. A new rockband perhaps? Or the new Brazilian centre forward of a football team? It certainly wasn’t a timber that was in high demand. Neither were Red louro, Andira, Louro preto or Muiracatiara. Now these species are examples of what makes Precious Woods Europe a successful timber trader.

Red louro is increasingly used for cladding in the UK. *Angelim pedra* has become one of the Netherlands’ most wanted timbers for window frames; a huge and very demanding market. A few Lesser Known Species are now preferred timbers for groynes in the Baltic Sea as these are amongst the very few that do not appear on the menu of *Teredo spp.*, a small but numerous and hungry shipworm capable of decaying piles of Greenheart.
Precious Woods currently supplies over 50 timber species and architects love the possibilities provided by these woods, which are often very beautiful.

Typically, samples of new Lesser Known Species from Precious Woods’ Brazilian forest operations are sent to the offices and yards of Precious Woods Europe in the Netherlands. Here the R&D team checks literature and performs a few basic tests. If the species is available in good volumes and the first indications are positive, one or more applications are chosen. Sometimes further testing is necessary and Precious Woods works with professional institutes and universities.

Subsequently, if the results are encouraging, the new timber species is introduced to the market. This is often the hardest part. But in the UK, the Netherlands and elsewhere, Precious Woods has a number of valued partners that share the company’s dedication to FSC.

These partners buy small volumes of Lesser Known Species and use them in projects. This way – step by step – Lesser Known Species may become well-known timbers. The process is costly and the pioneers pay most of the costs. But pioneers are also the first to benefit.

There may be other benefits of Precious Woods Europe’s learning atmosphere. Recent research links sustainability and innovation with economic performance. Precious Woods’ experience with Lesser Known Species confirms this lesson.

Marketing Lesser Known Species is a crucial part of the economic viability of Responsible Forest Management in natural tropical forests. This may provide challenges and even – admittedly – occasional headaches. But the new species certainly provide wonderful opportunities to dedicated timber companies and their partners in manufacturing and construction.

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