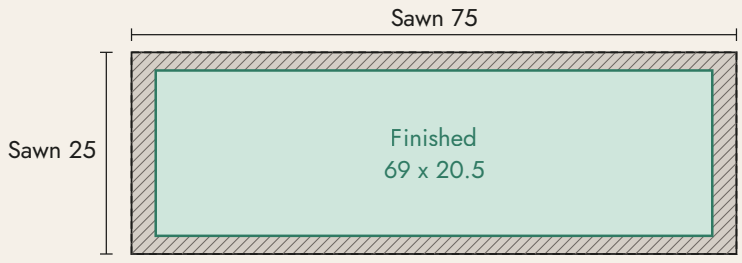
Sawn *versus* finished timber sizes

Why timber finishes smaller than its label, with the arithmetic, and how to draw to the finished size.

AT A GLANCE

What it is	Size on the label (mm)	Finished (mm)	Lost	Where it comes from
UK planed softwood, rounded architrave	19 x 50	15 x 45	4 thick, 5 wide	Merchant listing
UK planed softwood, torus architrave	25 x 75	20.5 x 69	4.5 thick, 6 wide	Merchant listing
UK planed softwood, a nominal section	22 x 100	18 x 94	4 thick, 6 wide	Listing on the standard-sizes sheet ('typically 2-5mm smaller')
UK rough sawn oak, for a finished 25 x 100 part	Buy 35 to 40 x 110 or more	25 x 100	10 to 15 thick, 10 wide	One merchant's advice, on the standard-sizes sheet
US hardwood, rough to surfaced two sides	25, 32, 51 thick	21, 27, 44	4, 5, 7 thick	Wood Handbook Table 6-4
US softwood, dry, nominal to dressed	1 in. board; 2 x 4	19; 38 x 89	6.4; 12.8 and 12.6	Wood Handbook Table 6-6
Sheet boards sold by thickness	18 plywood; 18 MDF.H; 18 chipboard	17.1 to 18.1; 18 ± 0.2; 18 ± 0.3	Within the stated tolerance	Three data sheets
BS EN 1313-1 and -2	Permitted deviations and preferred sizes of sawn timber	Not read	Not read	BSI listings

Millimetres. The UK figures are one or two merchants' planed softwood listings and one merchant's advice for rough oak, not a rule; we could not read BS EN 1313. The US figures are from the Wood Handbook and show the pattern. Ask your partner workshop for the allowances it works to.



2.25 off each face, 3 off each edge

25 – 20.5 = 4.5 thick. 75 – 69 = 6 wide.

A 25 x 75 mm sawn section and the 20.5 x 69 mm it finishes at in one merchant's listing, drawn to one scale. The shaded border is planed away. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

THE STOCK STEP

Using the US hardwood ladder as the model: drawn 21 mm comes from the 25 mm stock, drawn 22 mm needs the 32 mm stock (31% of it planed away against 16%). Ask for the partner's own thicknesses and draw just under a step.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

FINISHED SIZES

All timber sizes on drawings and schedules are finished sizes after planing, sanding, veneering and edge banding. A nominal size is marked 'nom.' and its finished size is given beside it. Dimensions are thickness x width x length.

SOLID TIMBER SECTIONS

[Oak] sections finished [40 x 40] mm, from [kiln-dried] stock at [8 to 12] per cent moisture content. The maker is to state the sawn size it will buy for each section and the planing allowance it works to, before drawings are approved.

MOULDINGS AND TRIM

[Skirting / architrave] finished [15 x 45] mm, [planed softwood / hardwood], to drawing [number]. A section of the same nominal size is not to be substituted without the designer's approval.

TOLERANCE ON FINISHED SIZE

Finished thickness and width within [+/- 0.5] mm and length within [+/- 2] mm of the drawing, at [ ] per cent moisture content. The maker is to state the tolerance it works to if it differs.

TERMS USED

Nominal size

The size a piece of timber is sold as before planing, which is larger than the finished size. A '25 x 75' board may finish nearer 20 x 70 mm.

Sawn size

The size a piece of timber has as it leaves the saw, before any planing. A target with permitted deviations, not the size it is used at.

Finished size

The size of a part after planing, sanding, veneering and edge banding: the size that goes on the drawing.

PAR (planed all round)

Timber planed on all four faces, so smaller than its sawn size on every dimension. Trade shorthand; the US equivalent is S4S, surfaced four sides.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- USDA Forest Products Laboratory, Wood Handbook FPL-GTR-282 (2021), Chapter 6: Tables 6-4 and 6-6 and the text on dry and green sizes. US practice. Read 5 Nov 2026.
- BS EN 1313-1:2010 and BS EN 1313-2:1999 Round and sawn timber: permitted deviations and preferred sizes (softwood; hardwood): BSI listings, and the contents of -1 from BSI's preview; the numbers were not read.
- BS 584:1967 Specification for wood trim (softwood), superseded by BS 1186-3:1990: a distributor's listing; BS 1186-3 not read.
- Architectural Woodwork Standards, 1st edition (2009), Section 3 Lumber: 1.2.2, 1.5.1. US practice.
- Merchant listings and product data sheets, read 5 Nov 2026: two planed softwood listings; plywood, MDF.H and chipboard data sheets. Names in the studio's notes file.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/sawn-versus-finished-timber-sizes. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.