Veneer specification: cut, match, backing and balance

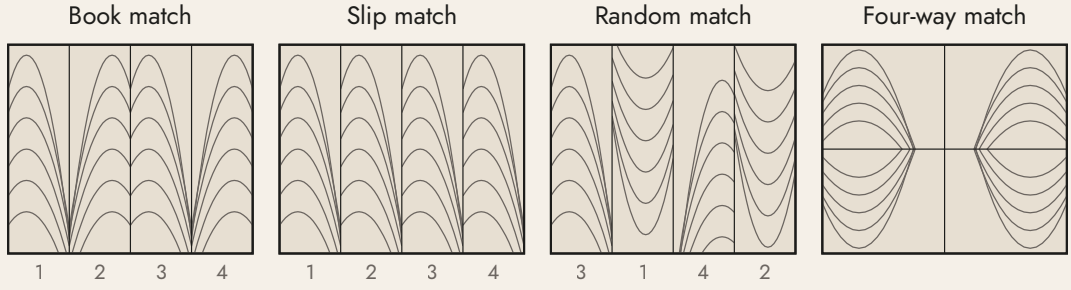
Nine decisions fix a veneered panel. This sheet draws the matches, fixes the terms and gives wording to paste into a specification.

AT A GLANCE

Decision	Options (AWS Section 4 unless stated)	Say in the specification
1 Species, cut, characteristics	Plain, quarter or rift sliced; sapwood, heartwood, figure (1.2.3 to 1.2.6, 1.2.18).	Name species and cut. "Natural" allows any amount of sapwood and heartwood.
2 Leaf match	Book, slip, random (1.2.19).	One of the three, defined here or by drawing.
3 Match in a panel face	Running, balanced, centre-balanced (1.2.20).	State it. Running is the default at the standard's middle grade and the cheapest.
4 Match between panels	Non-sequenced, sequenced, blueprint (Section 8, 1.2.10.6).	Say whether neighbouring panels, doors and drawers must read as one run.
5 End and pattern matches	End: architectural, panel, continuous. Pattern: sunburst, box, diamond (1.2.21, 1.2.22).	For tall panels and long tables. Draw a pattern as well as naming it.
6 Flitch and layout	One flitch for the job or per elevation (Section 8, 1.2.10.6.6).	Which flitch, approved from a sample and a layout drawing before pressing.
7 Thickness, core, backing, balance	Supplier's data; MDF, plywood or lumber core; a balancer on the reverse (1.2.1, 1.2.17).	Balanced construction, all faces finished; no show-through of the core (Section 9, 1.2.18.2.8).
8 Supply route	Stock pre-veneered sheet, pressed to order, applied on site (Section 8, 1.2.10.6).	Say which. It decides how much match you can expect.
9 Edges and finish	Solid lipping, veneered or wrapped edge (Section 8, 1.2.10.7).	Edge by drawing; finish system and sheen by sample.

AWS is the US Architectural Woodwork Standards, 1st edition (2009), read from the free section PDFs; clause numbers are in brackets. It is the nearest published reference we could read, not a UK standard, so partners should confirm the terms.

THE MATCHES DRAWN



Leaf matches (drawn, not measured). Within a face: running, balanced or centre-balanced. Between panels: non-sequenced, sequenced or blueprint.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

VENEER FACE

Veneer: [species], [plain sliced / quarter sliced / rift sliced], [thickness] mm, [natural sapwood and heartwood / heartwood only], figure [none / ribbon stripe / as sample S-03]. Supplier [ ], flitch [reference]. Leaves kept in cutting sequence and numbered.

MATCH

Leaf match: [book matched / slip matched]. Within each panel face: [balanced / centre-balanced / running] match. Between panels: [sequence matched across elevation [A] / blueprint matched to drawing [number] / non-sequenced]. End match: [none / architectural]. Terms as defined in Technical library sheet TL-JOI-08, version [1.0]. Variation in light reflection between alternate leaves of a book match is a natural characteristic and not a defect.

FLITCH, LAYOUT AND APPROVAL

One flitch to cover [elevations A to D], reserved before [date]; flitches not to be mixed within an elevation. Leaf layout drawing [number] showing panel numbers, leaf joints, leaf numbers and hang order to be approved in writing by [designer] before pressing, together with veneer layout and flitch sample [S-03]. No change to approved dimensions without a revised layout drawing and a written variation.

CORE, BACKING, EDGES AND FINISH

Core [MDF / plywood / other], [thickness] mm finished, [fire and emission class] with [data sheet / declaration of performance]. Balancing veneer [of the same species and thickness / of equal behaviour] on the reverse of every veneered panel; all faces and edges finished, including the reverse. Veneer thick enough that the core or crossbanding does not show after sanding and finishing. Edges [solid lipping to match / veneered / wrapped] as sample [S-04]. Finish [system] to sample [S-02], viewed in [the lighting of the room].

TERMS USED

Leaf
One sheet of veneer as it comes off the slicer.

Flitch
The bundle of consecutive leaves from one section of log, in cutting order.

Book match
Every other leaf is turned over, so the figure mirrors at each joint.

Slip match
Leaves slid side by side, not turned, so the figure repeats.

Sequence match
Panels made from consecutive leaves, numbered and hung in order.

Balancer
A veneer or sheet on the reverse that stops the panel bowing.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Architectural Woodwork Standards, 1st edition (1 October 2009), AWI, AWMAC and Woodwork Institute: Sections 4, 8, 9, 10; read 5 Nov 2026. US standard; grade rules not in the free copy.
- USDA Forest Products Laboratory, Wood Handbook, FPL-GTR-282 (2021): Ch. 10, p. 10-3 (loose and tight sides); Ch. 19, p. 19-14 (balancing a laminate).
- BS EN 635-2:1995 Plywood. Classification by surface appearance. Hardwood: BSI listing only; not read.
- Make Bespoke Studio: Wood veneer glossary and Veneer matching: our own definitions.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/veneer-specification. 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.