



SOUTH AFRICAN  
FURNITURE INITIATIVE



# Message from the CEO

Dear SAFI Members,

As we move into 2025, there's a renewed energy in our industry. The South African (SA) furniture sector is evolving, and while we still face challenges, we have more opportunities than ever to grow, innovate and make our mark locally and internationally. At SAFI, we are committed to supporting you – whether it's securing fairer government procurement policies, expanding export opportunities, or ensuring our workforce has the skills to meet future demands.

One of the key areas we've been focusing on is local procurement. After extensive discussions with the DTIC procurement department, we've successfully clarified how local content should be calculated to ensure fairer tender processes for SA manufacturers.

Beyond our borders, exports remain one of the most exciting growth opportunities for SA furniture manufacturers. We recently completed an in-depth export research project, which identified key markets where demand is strong and where our products have the best chance of success. Among international markets, the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Canada and Germany have emerged as strong contenders, while within Africa – Zambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Mauritius and Morocco present great opportunities for local exports too.

A major step forward in connecting local manufacturers with buyers is the SAFI Catalogue Initiative, a digital platform designed to showcase SA furniture to corporate buyers, government procurement officials, and international resellers. This structured, user-friendly resource will feature detailed product listings, a SAFI product ID system for easier tendering, downloadable spec sheets, and a dealer locator. The soft launch will be rolled out soon, which will allow for refinements before the full release scheduled for mid-2025. In parallel, SAFI's website redesign will offer a more accessible and engaging experience for industry members.

On the marketing front, SAFI's visibility continues to grow. Our transition to Adhesion as our social media and PR partner has already yielded great results, and you may have seen our recent media features highlighting the importance of local manufacturing in the face of rising imports.

As we look ahead, our focus remains on practical solutions – whether it's advocating for better procurement policies, helping businesses explore export markets or ensuring that our workforce is skilled and future-ready. The success of our industry depends on collaboration, and we encourage all members to take advantage of the opportunities available, whether through training, research or industry events.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we can strengthen the SA furniture industry and build a future that benefits us all.

Here's to a successful and productive 2025!

*Greg Boule*

Greg Boule  
CEO, South African Furniture Initiative (SAFI)





# Unlocking export potential

## *SAFI's role in the SA furniture industry's export strategy.*

SAFI, in partnership with the Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTIC), commissioned a comprehensive study to develop an export strategy for the SA furniture industry. The report, conducted by Trade Research Advisory (Pty) Ltd, a research firm affiliated with North-West University, was finalised on 7 January 2025, after more than 6 months of extensive research, data analysis and industry engagement.

The study provides a data-driven roadmap for furniture manufacturers, identifying realistic export opportunities (REOs) and outlining strategies to enhance global competitiveness. With a focus on market access, capacity building and product innovation, it offers a structured approach to position SA furniture businesses for export success.

## Why this report matters

For local furniture manufacturers, exporting is no longer just an option – it's a necessity in an increasingly competitive global market. This report provides data-backed insights into where local furniture has the most potential for success, how to overcome trade barriers, and what steps manufacturers should take to become internationally competitive.

It focuses on 15 key furniture product categories, including upholstered seating, case goods, office and school furniture and mattresses. By analysing market demand, trade patterns and accessibility, it prioritises export destinations and provides actionable recommendations to help businesses expand their footprint beyond local shores.

## How this report formalises the export strategy

One of the key achievements of this study is its structured methodology, which balances short-term growth opportunities with long-term market expansion. The TRADE-DSM® methodology, combined with Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA), was used to match export-ready products with viable international markets.



## Key elements of the strategy include:

1

**Market prioritisation:** The study identifies top export destinations based on trade potential, market connectedness and industry interest. The leading export markets include the United States, the UK, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, while African markets such as Zambia, Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique also offer strong growth potential.

2

**Capacity building:** Many manufacturers are not yet export-ready. The strategy highlights the need for training, technical support and infrastructure investment to enhance competitiveness and meet international trade standards. The report encourages businesses to improve product quality, streamline logistics and reduce export costs.

3

**Industry collaboration:** The study recommends that businesses pool resources for market research, branding initiatives, and strategic collaboration to enhance South Africa's presence in global furniture markets. Given the high costs of trade fairs, SAFI is exploring the facilitation of inward-bound trade missions (IBMs) as a more viable alternative. Once buyers are identified in the target markets, these IBMs will provide a focused and cost-effective platform for engagement. SAFI will drive this collaboration to ensure a unified and competitive export offering.

4

**Product development and sustainability:** Global consumers are increasingly prioritising sustainable and innovative designs. The strategy encourages manufacturers to align with this demand by focusing on eco-friendly materials, unique design elements and high-quality craftsmanship.

5

**Branding and marketing:** A strong national identity for SA furniture is essential for long-term export success. The study suggests national branding initiatives, such as "Seated by South Africa" or "Comfort from South Africa," to highlight quality, sustainability, and design excellence.

## Expanding into new markets

The study categorises export opportunities into tiers, helping businesses prioritise their efforts. Tier 1 markets, including the United States, Germany, the UK, Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands offer immediate opportunities with high trade potential. As well as select African countries, present medium- to long-term growth potential. African markets are also a key focus. The report identifies Zambia, Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique as strong opportunities, highlighting regional trade agreements and growing consumer demand for locally manufactured furniture.

While SAFI is still in the process of developing a comprehensive export strategy – drawing on recommendations while refining the approach to align with industry needs – the focus remains on expanding South Africa's furniture footprint in global markets. Currently, SAFI is engaging with key local organisations such as Western Cape Destination Marketing Investment & Trade Promotion Agency (WESGRO), DTIC, Trade & Investment KwaZulu-Natal (TIKZN), Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) and the Gauteng Growth and Development Agency (GGDA) to secure support in identifying buyers in priority markets. Additionally, outreach efforts extend to embassies, chambers of commerce, and trade attachés in target countries to further strengthen buyer connections.

At the same time, SAFI is conducting extensive research into EU compliance regulations to help the industry meet export requirements. Manufacturers looking to take the next step can access SAFI's growing network, market intelligence, and industry partnerships to navigate the complexities of international trade. □



# Bringing buyers to you: A smart approach to export success

*SAFI is bringing global buyers to SA, creating direct opportunities for manufacturers to secure exports.*

For SA furniture manufacturers, securing international buyers is a key priority. While trade shows and expos remain valuable platforms, SAFI is exploring additional, more direct and cost-effective ways to connect local manufacturers with global buyers. One such approach is to bring international buyers to SA, allowing them to visit factories, meet manufacturers and see their products first-hand – a practical and cost-effective alternative to relying solely on trade fairs.

## The international buyer outreach programme

SAFI is actively working to identify and attract international retail buyers to South Africa, aiming to create direct opportunities for them to connect with local manufacturers. While this initiative is still in development, efforts are underway to establish relationships with potential buyers in key global markets. The goal is to facilitate an inward-bound trade mission (IBM), where selected buyers can visit production facilities, engage with manufacturers, and experience firsthand the craftsmanship and quality that define South African furniture. By providing this immersive experience, SAFI hopes to strengthen business relationships and enhance export opportunities for the local industry.

SAFI is actively engaging with key organisations such as DTIC, TIKZN, and other industry stakeholders who have pledged their support for this initiative. While a formal project steering committee (PSC) has not yet been established, ongoing discussions aim to secure collaborative backing. To support these efforts, SAFI is expanding its manufacturer database and strengthening industry partnerships to facilitate meaningful connections. Manufacturers may be asked to contribute a nominal meeting fee to encourage commitment, while SAFI will also explore potential funding support through DTIC's inward trade mission programme. Although progress is gradual, these steps are essential in building a sustainable and effective export initiative. □



# Gearing up for exports to Germany

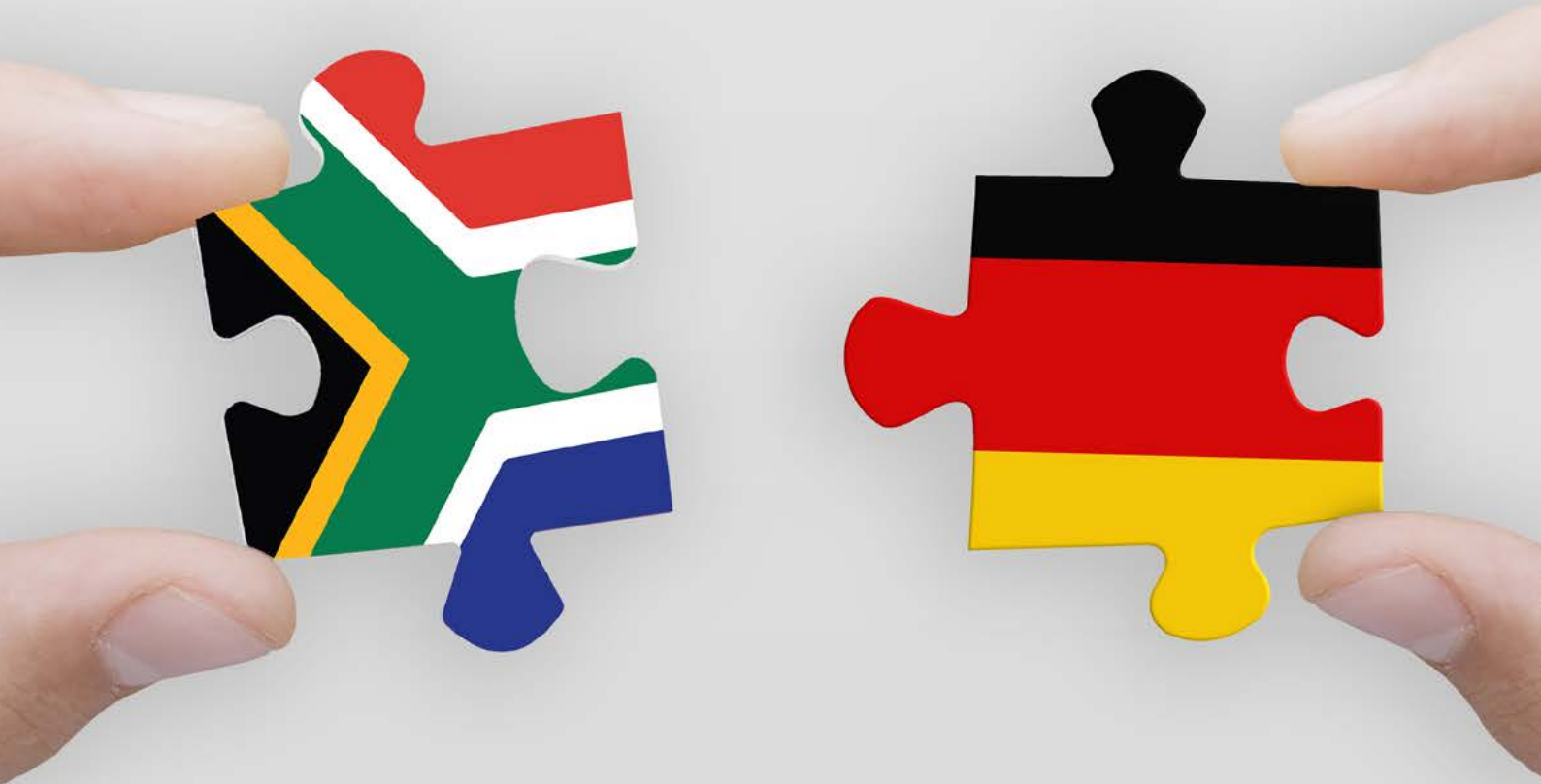
*SAFI is connecting local furniture manufacturers with German buyers, creating new export opportunities and strengthening trade partnerships.*

SA furniture manufacturers have a new opportunity to expand into the German market, following discussions between SAFI and the German Chamber of Commerce on 6 February 2025. A key focus was the interest of Easy Container Import (ECI), a subsidiary of MCA Furniture Ltd., in sourcing high-quality SA furniture.

ECI is a well-established European trading partner with 2,500 customers and a strong demand for premium furniture. They are seeking reliable SA manufacturers who can supply case furniture, tables, chairs, benches and bar furniture that meet EU standards. SAFI has provided a preliminary list of potential suppliers, marking an important step in establishing trade partnerships.

Exporting to Europe requires compliance with EU regulations, particularly the EUDR and REACH regulations. These rules affect wood sourcing, chemical treatments and environmental impact, making compliance essential for market entry. SAFI is working with the local FSC to support manufacturers in meeting EUDR requirements. A sustainability consultant may also be brought in to assist businesses with regulatory challenges, particularly around chemical testing and wood supply chain traceability.

ECI is looking for long-term sourcing partnerships with manufacturers who can meet EU quality and regulatory standards. Interested companies should contact SAFI to explore this opportunity. □





# Help navigating global markets

Exporting unlocks growth by expanding markets, boosting revenue, and reducing reliance on local demand. It strengthens brand credibility, fosters innovation, and enhances resilience against economic shifts. However, export readiness is essential. Without knowledge of trade regulations, VAT compliance and international logistics, businesses risk costly mistakes and shipment delays. Proper preparation ensures smooth transactions and long-term success.

Freight Training, a local training company, offers expert-led courses on international trade, focusing on compliance, risk management, and regulations. Recently, they presented at SAFI's export workshop, highlighting common challenges SA companies face, particularly around exchange control and VAT regulations.

SAFI is planning a tailored workshop with Freight Training for 20 members, covering export VAT, exchange control, and trade regulations. At R1,500 per participant, this investment helps businesses avoid financial risks and improve competitiveness. "We encourage members to join this invaluable training," says SAFI CEO, Greg Boule.

Freight Training will be offering two other private workshops focused on key areas of export success, including:

## Exchange control & VAT for exports (25th & 26th March)

- Exchange control regulations for exports and merchandising
- UCR System, BoP reporting, and VAT compliance
- Zero-rated exports, indirect export restrictions, and documentary compliance

## Commercial terms & ICC's Incoterms® 2020 (13th & 14th May)

- Understanding trade contracts, Incoterms® Rules, and correct applications
- VAT implications, marine insurance, and customs valuation
- Practical case studies of common pitfalls in international trade □



# Building skills, building futures

*Bridging the skills gap is essential for the future of SA's furniture industry. SAFI and key stakeholders are driving initiatives to upskill artisans, certify talent and secure industry growth.*

Skills development is the backbone of a thriving furniture manufacturing industry. In SA, where unemployment is high and skilled artisans are in short supply, investing in training and qualifications is critical for long-term growth. To remain competitive, manufacturers must bridge the skills gap, adapt to evolving technologies and ensure that artisans, upholsterers and designers receive the necessary training to excel.

At the recent Strategic Planning Meeting under the Furniture Industry Master Plan (FIMP), key stakeholders – including SAFI, industry bodies and government representatives – came together to outline an actionable plan for addressing critical skills shortages. The Final Skills Audit Report highlighted urgent gaps in occupations such as upholstery, cabinetmaking, carpentry, and computer numerical control (CNC) machine operation, emphasising the need for targeted training initiatives.

The meeting underscored the urgent need for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to certify skilled, but unqualified artisans and self-taught professionals, strengthening the industry's workforce. However, training capacity remains a challenge, as many Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET) colleges lack the resources for artisan training, exacerbating the skills shortage.

While large manufacturers embrace automation, small and medium enterprises (SMMEs) continue to drive employment for trained artisans, highlighting the need for investment in skilled trades. Financial barriers continue to slow progress, and although the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FP&M SETA) is very supportive, limited funding for SMMEs makes training less accessible.

Addressing these challenges requires stronger collaboration between industry, training institutions, and policymakers to align qualifications with industry needs. Expanding training opportunities and securing funding solutions will help ensure the SA furniture sector remain competitive and sustainable.

## The roadmap for 2025 – 2027 will focus on:

- Strengthening partnerships with TVET colleges and industry stakeholders to align training with industry needs.
- Launching a pilot RPL certification that will formalise skills for upholsterers, carpenters and machine operators.
- Securing funding from the FP&M SETA and private partners, that will support new occupational qualifications.
- Establishing SMME training incubators, nurturing innovation and long-term industry sustainability.

By strengthening training facilities, increasing access to funding, and aligning education with industry demands, SA's furniture sector can equip the next generation of artisans, create sustainable jobs, and drive economic growth. Stay engaged with SAFI as we roll out these initiatives – because when we build skills, we build the future.□



# Expanding the reach: A step towards industry unity

*Expanding Bargaining Council reach and strengthening compliance are key steps toward a more unified and competitive industry.*

In a pivotal meeting held late last year, key developments in Bargaining Council registration were discussed, marking a significant step toward industry cohesion. The Western Cape Bargaining Council has officially expanded its scope to include the Eastern Cape, while the KZN Bargaining Council is set to extend its reach to the Midlands and Marburg areas. These expansions will help create a more unified regulatory environment, ensuring fair wages, improved working conditions and overall industry stability.

SAFI has taken proactive measures to strengthen industry compliance by engaging with 350 retailers, urging them to source products exclusively from registered manufacturers. Encouragingly, major retail groups such as Pepkor Lifestyle (formerly JD Group), Lewis Group and Shoprite responded positively, with Pepkor Lifestyle already implementing systems to ensure compliance. This shift will not only reinforce ethical business practices, but also provide registered manufacturers with better market access and growth opportunities.

The DTIC has suggested that SAFI seek legal advice to explore whether Bargaining Council registration could become a prerequisite for government tenders. If implemented, this measure could provide significant advantages for compliant manufacturers, encouraging a more structured and competitive industry landscape.

These developments have the potential to boost local furniture manufacturing, ensuring a level playing field and driving greater investment in skills, infrastructure, and job creation. A more unified industry will ultimately strengthen SA's furniture sector, making it more resilient and globally competitive. □



# SAFI's game-changing Catalogue Initiative: unlocking new opportunities

*A digital platform to connect SA furniture manufacturers with local and international buyers.*

The SAFI Catalogue Initiative is set to become a powerful tool for SA furniture manufacturers, providing a centralised, digital showcase for locally produced furniture. Designed to connect manufacturers with corporate buyers, government procurement officials and international resellers, the catalogue aims to increase market visibility, streamline the sales process, and create new revenue streams for the industry.

## How it works

The catalogue will showcase a curated selection of South African-manufactured furniture, providing buyers with a structured and user-friendly platform to browse, compare, and source products. Manufacturers will have the opportunity to feature their products after proof of concept (POC) and will pay for listings, with a limit on the number of entries. SAFI will oversee the vetting process to ensure quality and consistency, while manufacturers can suggest retail pricing. However, appointed agents will handle sales directly with buyers, negotiating final pricing and working in close collaboration with manufacturers to facilitate successful transactions.

## Key features include:

- Detailed product listings, including specifications, finishes, warranties and lead times
- A SAFI product ID system, ensuring easy referencing for government tenders and procurement processes
- Downloadable specification sheets, streamlining the buying and tendering process
- A dealer locator, helping buyers connect with accredited sales agents





## Cost and funding

The catalogue will operate on a dual-revenue model:

- Manufacturers will pay a listing fee to showcase their products
- Resellers and agents will subscribe for access to a curated selection of furniture

Revenue generated from the catalogue will be reinvested into key industry initiatives, including:

- Inbound buyer missions, bringing international retailers to SA to meet manufacturers
- Marketing and trade promotion, positioning SA furniture in global markets
- Industry development programmes

## Why participate?

For manufacturers, participating in the catalogue presents an opportunity to connect with corporate, government, and international buyers without the high costs of international trade shows. As part of a three-month pilot to prove the concept, SAFI will track engagement and provide analytics to assess its effectiveness. By offering a structured and professional platform, this initiative aims to help local manufacturers enhance their visibility, expand their market reach, and strengthen their export potential in a competitive global landscape.

## Soft and hard launch timeline

The soft launch of the SAFI Catalogue Initiative takes place soon, running for three months as an exclusive phase where a selected group of manufacturers will be onboarded, fine-tuning the platform before opening it up to a wider audience. This period will allow SAFI to optimise the system, gather feedback, and ensure that the catalogue is fully functional and effective.

In mid-2025, the hard launch will officially rollout, inviting the entire SA furniture industry to take part. This will be a key milestone, expanding access to a larger pool of manufacturers and ensuring that more businesses can benefit from this highly targeted and structured sales channel.

Manufacturers interested in being part of this initiative are encouraged to contact SAFI for more details on how to list their products and take advantage of this exciting opportunity. □



# SAFI's smarter, sleeker digital home is taking shape

*SAFI's website is being redesigned with Brandhub's expertise, creating a more user-friendly and visually refined platform.*

Exciting changes are underway as SAFI's website undergoes a complete transformation, setting the stage for a smarter, more intuitive and visually refined digital experience. With a strong focus on usability and functionality, the redesigned website is being developed in collaboration with Brandhub, a leading branding and digital solutions agency.

The new website marks a significant milestone in SAFI's commitment to providing a centralised online resource for the local furniture industry. Designed to enhance navigation, streamline content and offer a more engaging user journey, the platform will ensure that members can easily access key industry updates, opportunities and business resources.

At the heart of this transformation is Brandhub's expertise, led by Leon van Schalkwyk, who has generously taken on this project *pro bono*. His dedication to supporting the SA furniture industry has played a crucial role in shaping a platform that is not only aesthetically appealing, but also highly functional and aligned with industry needs.

The redesign process has focused on refining the visual identity, content strategy and overall user experience. So far, key developments include a brand ID document to maintain a consistent and professional look, a comprehensive wireframe to enhance navigation, and refreshed content to ensure clarity, engagement and relevance to industry members.

"A strong digital presence is key to supporting our members," says Tracy Symons, SAFI's marketing relationship manager. "Leon and the Brandhub team have done an outstanding job in bringing this vision to life, ensuring that the website evolves into a true industry resource."

SAFI encourages members to stay tuned for updates and prepare to explore the new website – a modern, dynamic and powerful tool designed to elevate the SA furniture industry through communication and collaboration. □





# SAFI welcomes Adhesion: a fresh approach to marketing and PR

SAFI is pleased to announce a smooth and successful transition to Adhesion and The Line as our new digital marketing and PR partners. With a fresh perspective, creativity and strategic expertise, the team has quickly aligned with SAFI's goals, bringing a dynamic and results-driven approach to our marketing efforts.

## A structured and strategic approach

Adhesion has introduced a well-organised and proactive content strategy, ensuring that SAFI's messaging remains consistent, impactful and relevant to our audience. Key improvements include:

- **Monthly content calendars** presented in advance, allowing for structured and timely social media communication
- **A dedicated design team** creating engaging graphics to enhance our brand presence
- **Streamlined social media monitoring**, integrating clear objectives and engagement targets with our PR efforts
- **Enhanced user engagement**, with measurable improvements in audience interaction across digital platforms

## A refreshed visual identity

As part of their commitment to elevating SAFI's presence, Adhesion has gone above and beyond by providing additional creative support at no charge. This includes developing new logo and branding suggestions, as well as introducing a refreshed SAFI colour palette that enhances our visual identity and strengthens brand recognition.

## Impactful PR efforts already underway

The Line has also hit the ground running with a strong start in PR, ensuring that SAFI's voice is heard in key industry discussions. The first published article, focusing on the challenges of imports and the importance of supporting local furniture manufacturing, has already gained traction. The article can be viewed at:

- [SA Building Review](#)
- [To Build](#)

Looking ahead, press releases and newsletter schedules for the year have been finalised, ensuring consistent and high-impact messaging. A target audience framework has been developed in collaboration with Adhesion to further refine our outreach.

If you have any interesting content that you feel is relevant to SAFI and its members, please send it through to [ant@theline.co.za](mailto:ant@theline.co.za) and [sinead@adhesion.co.za](mailto:sinead@adhesion.co.za). □



# RA Woodcraft: Exporting local craftsmanship while uplifting local talent

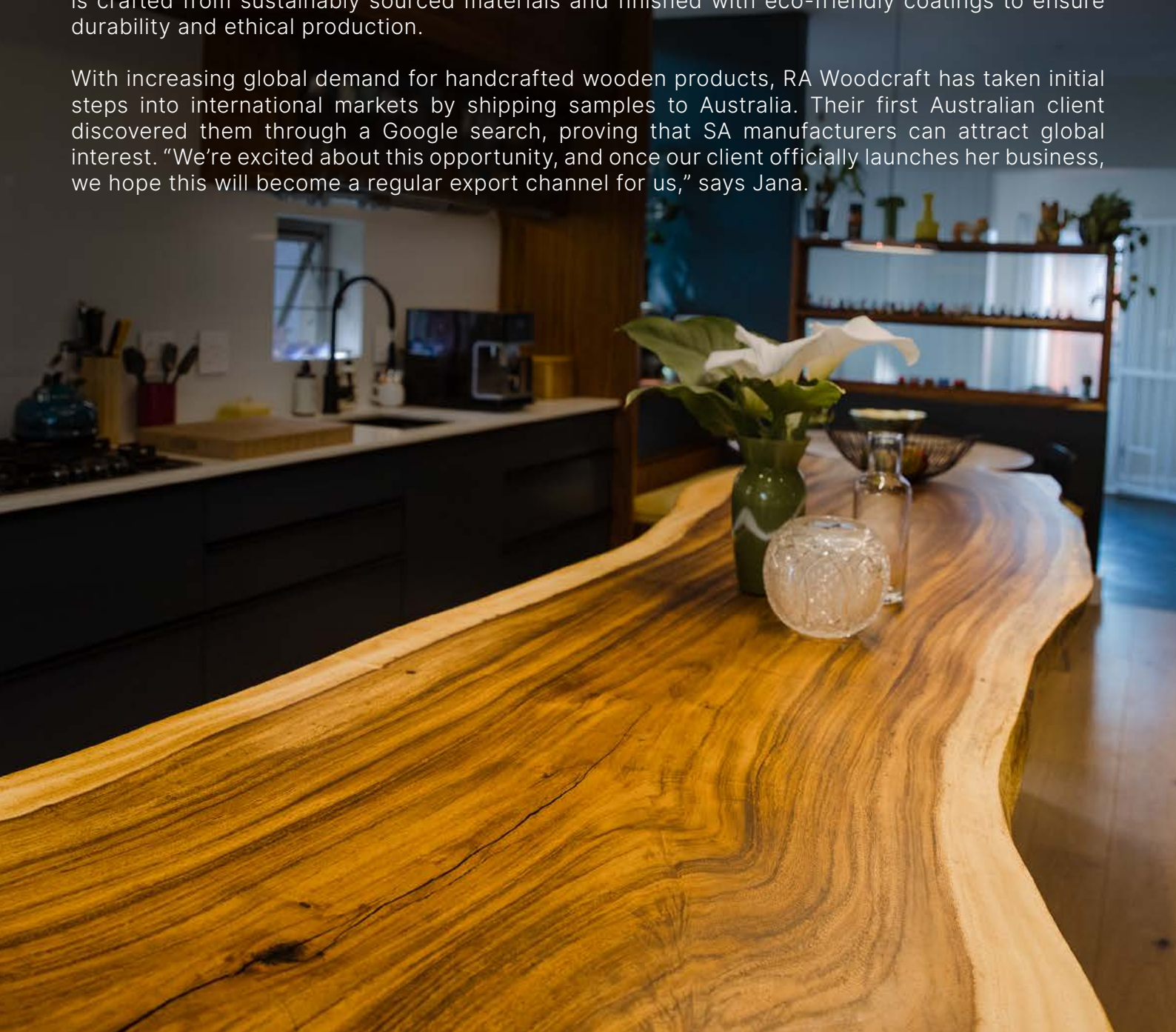
In the heart of South Africa's woodworking industry, RA Woodcraft is setting new benchmarks for excellence, sustainability, and craftsmanship. Founded by Rudolf Zuidema, a SA Skills Gold Medallist and World Skills Finalist in Joinery and Woodmachining, the company blends traditional skill with modern precision to produce high-quality furniture and joinery. Alongside his wife and RA Woodcraft Director, Jana Zuidema, the husband-and-wife team is dedicated to crafting world-class pieces, developing artisans, and expanding South Africa's presence in global markets.

"At RA Woodcraft, we believe craftsmanship isn't just about making furniture – it's about preserving a legacy of skill and sharing it with the world," says Rudolf.

## Local excellence with global aspirations

RA Woodcraft is widely respected among architects, interior designers, and discerning clients for its bespoke joinery, built-in cabinetry, and precision wood machining services. Every piece is crafted from sustainably sourced materials and finished with eco-friendly coatings to ensure durability and ethical production.

With increasing global demand for handcrafted wooden products, RA Woodcraft has taken initial steps into international markets by shipping samples to Australia. Their first Australian client discovered them through a Google search, proving that SA manufacturers can attract global interest. "We're excited about this opportunity, and once our client officially launches her business, we hope this will become a regular export channel for us," says Jana.







## Passion for skills development

For Rudolf and Jana, success is about more than business growth – it's about sharing knowledge and creating opportunities. With SA facing a shortage of skilled joiners and wood machinists, they are committed to ensuring that artisan craftsmanship continues to thrive.

Their dedication is evident in RA Woodcraft's partnership with Sihlalo, a skills development programme focused on empowering women through woodworking. While Sihlalo recently gained accreditation as an official woodwork training centre, its small workshop limited hands-on learning opportunities. By partnering with RA Woodcraft, trainees now have access to a fully operational joinery facility, advanced tools, and real-world production environments.

"It's about more than just technical skills," says Rudolf. "We want artisans to understand production management, business operations, and the realities of working in the industry."

## Commitment to sustainability

Sustainability is at the heart of RA Woodcraft's philosophy. The company carefully sources its materials and ensures that its finishing and hardware partners, such as OSMO from Germany and BLUM from Austria, are committed to environmental responsibility.

"We believe sustainability is about more than materials – it's about building furniture that lasts a lifetime, reducing waste, and ensuring our products don't end up in landfills," says Jana. The company donates solid wood sawdust to a local mushroom grower and supports Greenpop, a non-profit focused on reforestation.

## Industry collaboration and growth

As a member of SAFI, RA Woodcraft has benefited from industry collaboration, gaining insights, connections, and export readiness support. "It's one thing to create high-quality furniture, but knowing how to navigate global markets is just as important," says Jana.

RA Woodcraft's journey proves that SA craftsmanship has a rightful place on the global stage. By mentoring artisans and producing world-class furniture, Rudolf and Jana are building more than furniture – they are building a legacy. □

# CONTACT US



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