



Jerry Epperson

They don't make Rolexes like they used to

I am not proud of this, but in the early days of going to Asia to visit at furniture factories, I used to stop in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, at Rolex Michelle's and purchase watches that may have been knock-offs. Either that or they were sold at very low margins. I maybe could see how they could make them for \$25, but how they made them with diamonds for \$35 just amazed me.

A lot has happened since the 1980s, but knock-offs are still with us, nowhere more evident than in the furniture industry. I guess that there are mattress knock-offs, but who can tell?

While the industry certainly is full of quality pieces and manufacturing, there is still a lot of furniture produced just to get to a low price.

Today, in wood furniture design, some of the styling and scale decisions are dictated by the logistics of how to maximize the container. After all, 85% of all wood residential furniture is imported, so freight and containers play a big role. Even in some of the better-known names, the engineering has to consider this important element.

We used to blame bad imported furniture on rubberwood. These days, thanks to so many products besides furniture coming over from Asia, it is price-efficient to buy our brand names in lumber — oak, cherry, etc. — in North America and ship it to Asia in containers that otherwise would have gone West empty.

So much of the engineering and specifications have gotten so detailed that defects

we used to expect have lessened. Remember when different pieces of wood or veneer would finish differently or the cases had to be shimmed together to stand straight and true? And I hear today's glues hold better than the old horse-based glues and are certainly more appreciated by those of the equine persuasion.

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The packaging has gotten so much better, too. Of course, since it is all traveling so far, that is necessary. Many things you buy today are world travelers.

Over the years, we have indeed seen an improvement in tolerances and manufacturing efficiencies, but generally, speaking as an old fuddy duddy, I still see a lot of things that just are made to get to a low price.

When in New York City in June, coming back from inner at Gallagher's, I learned that knock-off watches are still available. After serious negotiating and walking away at least twice, they now cost about \$60. Sadly, on the chronometers, the hands are painted on. Nothing is made as well as it used to be. **11**