

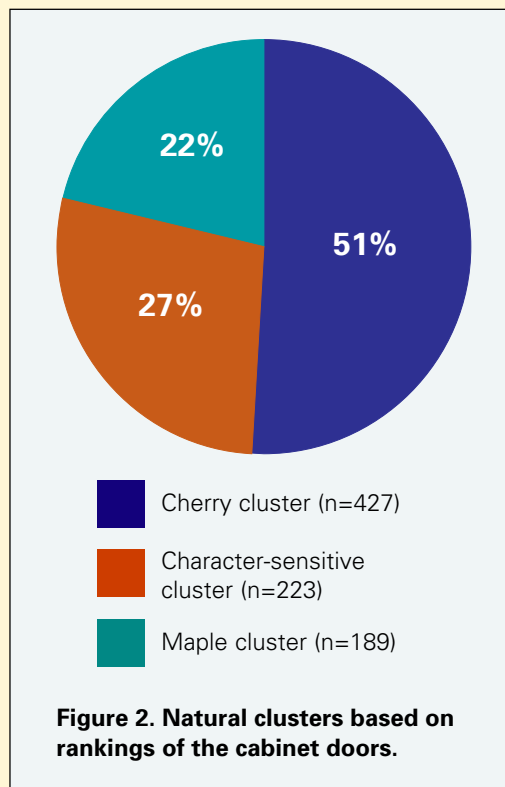
Consumer Perceptions of Character Marks on Cabinet Doors

What do consumers think of character-marked cabinet doors? If consumers do not object to character marks—naturally occurring features, such as knots, mineral streak, and grain variation—then manufacturers have the potential to increase the value of lower grade veneers.

People at the 1999 Southern Ideal Home Show in Raleigh, N.C., visited a booth and completed a questionnaire ranking, in order of preference, 12 cabinet doors that exhibited three different attributes. These included character marking (three levels), species (two types), and styles (two types). The doors were arranged in two rows, with six cherry doors in the top row and six maple doors in the

bottom row (Figure 1, next page). Across the rows, arched and rectangular styles were grouped so that only the character-mark levels (clear, light, and heavy) were randomly ordered among the doors. The cabinet doors were raised-panel doors. In addition, the character-marked wood was veneer on the raised panels, not part of the stiles or rails.

Visitors also provided demographic information. The sample had more people in the 40 to 49 and 50 to 59 age classes and in the \$50,000 to \$99,900 and greater than \$99,900 income ranges compared to the overall U.S. population. This reflects typical home show attendees and consumers of higher end furniture. The majority were females (61 percent), partially reflecting the fact that when couples visited the booth, the female often completed the questionnaire. The total number of respondents completing a usable questionnaire was 839 between April 16 and 18, 1999.



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Results

Statistical analysis indicated that the respondents could be divided into three natural clusters based on their rankings of the cabinet doors (Figure 2). Statistical tests were then performed on each of the three clusters to profile preferences for the attribute levels presented in the cabinet doors.



Figure 1. Cabinet doors evaluated at the Southern Ideal Home Show, Raleigh, N.C.

The results of the statistical analysis appear in Figure 3. The largest group, with 427 members, was termed the “Cherry Cluster” because members of this cluster strongly preferred the cherry doors, and the **species** attribute was by far the most important to their door rankings. This cluster also preferred arched-styled doors to rectangular-styled doors, although the **style** attribute was somewhat minor in importance. The **character** attribute was negligible in importance to this cluster, suggesting the presence of character had no effect on respondents’ evaluations.

The second largest group, with 223 members, was termed the “Character-Sensitive Cluster” because of the importance of the **character** attribute to their door rankings. This cluster demonstrated a strong preference for no character,

a strong dislike for heavy character, and was somewhat neutral toward light character. **Style** was also somewhat important to the evaluations, with the cluster exhibiting a preference for arched-styled doors. **Species** was less important, but significant to the evaluations, with members preferring cherry.

The smallest group, with 189 members, was termed the “Maple Cluster” because of its preference for maple. This was the only cluster demonstrating a preference for the maple doors. **Style** was also important to the Maple Cluster, with members preferring rectangular-styled doors. Similar to the Cherry Cluster, **character** was of negligible importance to the evaluations.

Figure 4 shows the relative importance of the attributes for each cluster. For example, **species** was clearly the most important attribute

to the Cherry Cluster. An examination of the **character** attribute shows the relative unimportance of this attribute to the Cherry and Maple Clusters compared to the Character-Sensitive Cluster.

No significant differences emerged between the three clusters based on income. However, there were differences based on age. The Character-Sensitive Cluster was proportionally higher in the 20 to 29 and 40 to 49 age groups and proportionally lower in the 50 to 59 and 60-plus age groups. There were also some differences between clusters based on gender. The Character-Sensitive Cluster contained significantly fewer males and significantly more females than the Cherry Cluster, but was not different from the Maple Cluster.



Cherry door series.



Maple door series.

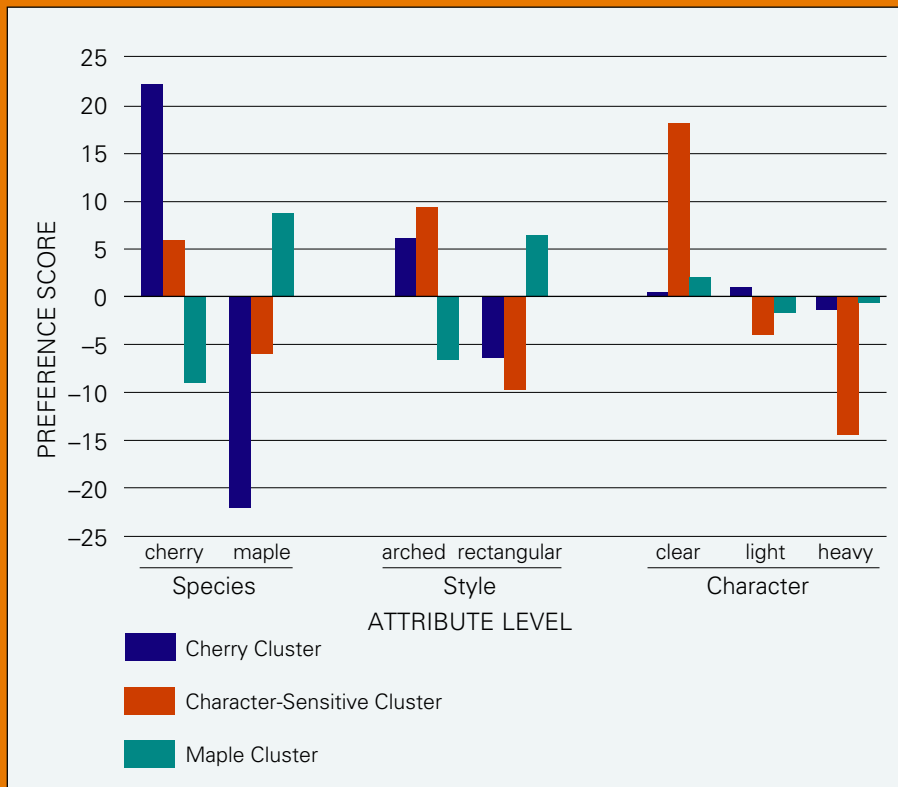


Figure 3. Preference scores for attribute levels by cluster.

Implications

The fact that the presence of character was quite unimportant to over 73 percent of the sample (the Cherry and Maple Clusters) suggests that opportunities exist for increased use of character marks for such consumers. If the existence of character is not a noticeable product feature to consumers, inclusion of more character could be achieved with little additional promotional effort. Instead, promotional themes could stress use of preferred species, with species and style “carrying” the character marks in the cabinet door product.

For 27 percent of the sample, the presence of character was the most important attribute for evaluating the cabinet doors. For this group, a strong preference was shown for no character marks in the cabinet doors

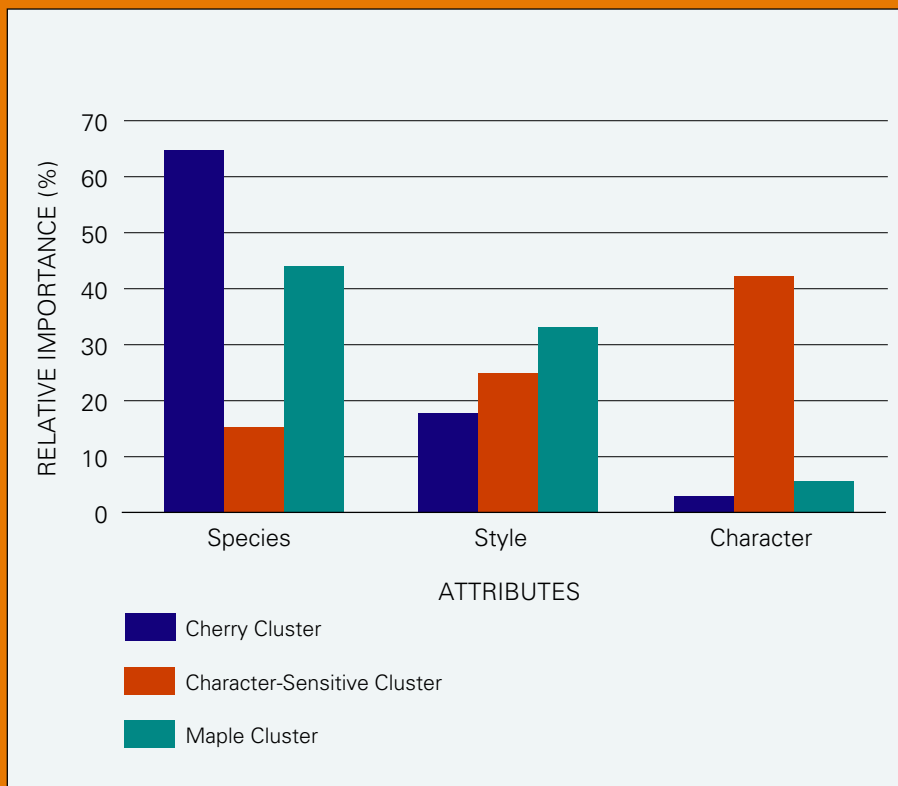


Figure 4. Relative importance of the attributes for each cluster.

made from clear veneer. However, there does seem to be an opportunity for use of light character, as the drop in preference from light to heavy character was large.

The Character-Sensitive Cluster had a higher proportion of 20- to 29-year-olds and 40- to 49-year-olds, and a lower proportion of 50- to 59- and 60-plus-year-olds than the other clusters. The Character-Sensitive Cluster also had a higher proportion of female respondents than the Cherry Cluster. This suggests that

women and younger people tended to be less receptive to the presence of character. They were somewhat indifferent to light character, as this level of character contributed only slightly negatively to the door evaluations. However, the large drop in preference from light to heavy character suggests more promotional efforts would be needed to encourage greater acceptance of character for this cluster if manufacturers decide to use character-marked doors.

Acknowledgments

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