

# THE HISTORY OF RATTAN

## **A Resilient Contender**

As one of nature's strongest materials, rattan has grown to be one of the most ideal resources for the production of indoor and outdoor furniture. This vine-like climbing palm primarily found in the dense tropical jungles of Southeast Asia, grows in a uniform diameter. The lightweight, nonporous structure of rattan is the ultimate material for outdoor products. The palm's natural resistance to humidity, temperature, and insects significantly lowers the required maintenance for rattan furniture, a vast advantage for those seeking easy upkeep out of their furniture.

## **Rattan vs. Wicker**

The strength and easy manipulation of the rattan stem has positioned it to be one of the most common materials applied in wickerwork. Because furniture designs commonly utilize both, the concepts of rattan and wicker are often misunderstood. Wicker is the technique of weaving materials together to create an overall product. Rattan, the stem of the climbing palm, is only one material that can be used to create wicker goods.

## **Rattan's Grand Entrance**

Used as a resource for crafting furniture since the early days of mankind, historical evidence also suggests that rattan was used for martial art weapons, basketry, bridges, crossbow strings, and fish traps. Even the fruits of rattan are applied in traditional Asian medicine native to the southeast.

Predominantly only seen in Asian cultures for centuries, rattan gained popularity in western culture around the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the height of Britain and Dutch colonization in southeast Asia. Families stationed in the tropics would bring back their rattan furniture to Europe where it immediately

gained popularity. Rattan furniture soon began making appearances inside the home as the cool European climate limited time spent outdoors. Directed by the new pool of consumers desiring rattan pieces for their homes, intricate Victorian elements were introduced by the turn of the century.

## **Emerging as New World Couture**

With enlarged British popularity by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rattan sailed on to North America aboard trade steamships crossing the Atlantic. Noted designers like Paul Frankl fashioned new relaxed and casual designs, favored by the Hollywood elite of the time when rattan hit the silver screen in the 1930's. Frankl is credited to bringing American rattan indoors from applying trendy clear beeswax and flexing it into innovative yet comfortable designs.

## **Prevailing Through Sanctions**

As rattan furniture became increasingly popular by the mid 1980's, sanctions were established from the countries exporting the bulk of raw rattan. When Indonesia recognized that they supplied roughly 90% of the world's rattan, they introduced an export ban on the raw vine to encourage the local manufacturing of rattan furniture.

Today rattan is still largely grown and manufactured in the Pacific jungles of Indonesia, the Philippines, and China. With little maintenance necessary for a lifetime of natural beauty has positioned rattan as a popular choice for consumers looking to bring a spice of tropical into their homes.