

Bob Kamali of Kamali Leather Company asked his Chinese audience how many of them were there because they were interested to know generally about leather from South America regardless of price? Or were they there only for low price leather?



Low priced leather from South America

This presentation was one of a number of seminars which were held during the All China Leather Exhibition in Beijing in November. Bob Kamali is a partner in a three-generation family business which was established half a century ago and trades in wet-blue from Brazil and semi-finished and finished leather of only South American origin; some processed in the United States and some in South America.

During his 25 years of involvement in this business he has seen hides and leather in over 150 different tanneries and slaughterhouses all over South America. He lives in the USA and has spent a lot of time in South America.

Today Kamali Leather have offices in Brazil and Argentina and a presence in Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile. The main headquarters are in the United States and Kamali have agents and representatives throughout the world and are now looking for a presence in China.

After ascertaining how many were involved in shoe manufacturing, garments, bags and cases, or who was a trader in leather or a tanner, he went on to explain where South American leather ranks with other world markets. He also covered the types of wet-blue, semi-finished and finished leather from Argentina and Brazil, and how to deal with South America from China, and how to bring the cost of leather down.

Where does South America fit in the world hide market?

- A. Europe, \$2.50-3.50 ft², ideal for making top quality aniline leather
- B. North America, \$2.00-3.00 ft², ideal for top quality full grain leather
- C. Argentina, \$1.00-2.50 ft², for economical full grain leather
- D. Brazil, \$1.00-2.00 ft², for corrected and printed leather
- E. India, \$0.80-1.50 ft², for lining

Argentina and Brazil in more depth

Argentina

- A. Wet-blue which cannot be exported; sizes are 16-26 ft²
- B. Crust (semi-finished) is exported in large volumes; from 0.6/0.8mm up to 1.6/1.8mm thickness; primarily for upholstery and athletic leather for shoes
- C. Finished leather; not yet so advanced

Brazil

- A. Wet-blue; large volumes are being exported; principal countries Kamali export to are Italy and Hong Kong; sizes are large and from 18ft² up to 30 ft². Exports are (a) full substance, whole hides and (b) sides, from 1.6mm and up; from 2.0mm and up; from 2.4mm and up.
- B. Crust; exports are primarily in semi-chrome; in the heavy thicknesses up to



Above: Bob Kamali in Beijing.
Top: Kamali Leather at the recent Panamerican Leather Fair

2.2/2.4 mm

C. Finished; it is possible to export a variety of different types of leather from Brazil; presently Kamali are exporting large volumes for the garment industry, cases and ladies' footwear.

How to deal with South America

- a) directly with tanneries
- b) through agents
- c) through specialised leather merchants

How can you bring your prices down

Choose a business partner:

- a) understand the raw material of each region and its potential
- b) buy the speciality of each tannery
- c) give a lot of information to your tannery/supplier
- d) if possible show your end product to your supplier
- e) start slow. First a swatch and then a side and then a box and then 10,000 ft² and then a container
- f) give a projection to your tannery, so that they can anticipate some needs in advance to cut lead time
- g) give a blanket order when price is low and then gradually feed in the purchase order against the blanket order already negotiated
- h) when ordering specify three groups of information:

With tanning; types of hides; size and selection of the raw material

Retanning: temper, thickness, grain break and penetration etc

Finishing: sheen, grain, surface touch.

i) make sure someone who knows your needs sees and signs every skin. We do that for our clients' security and sign each skin for approval.

All of the above is necessary to help the tannery to make the right decisions on your behalf so as to leave no room for mistakes and that is how you can bring the price of your leather even lower from South America.

Conclusion

I hope the next time you are buying leather

you are able to pick the most suitable country and tannery and their speciality product. Provide them with enough information about your programme and the appropriate time in which to fill it. Give them the confidence to prepare the goods right up to the final steps and, finally, get the best possible price.

Remember absolute low price is not always what you should be looking for since there are many other factors that determine your final actual cost. Also do not forget 'the sweetness of a good cheap price is soon forgotten but the bitterness of wrong quality will be remembered for a long time.' ■

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