

## FWT4 International Study Trip 2020

This year's annual 4<sup>th</sup> year Furniture Wood Technology (FWT) study trip was a first for GMIT Letterfrack with a four-day visit to Porto, Portugal by students, and lecturers Kate Dunne and James Corbett. It took place between 13-16<sup>th</sup> January 2020. The first visit was to the Madeipocas sawmills operated by the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of the Poças family. This sawmill is steeped in tradition using the current directors' grandfather's workshop to process mostly Eucalyptus trees. Expansion and developments mean the company is also involved in building domestic and commercial units.



President of AIMMP, Vitor Poças, showing the students his family's 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Madeipocas sawmills

After an overnight stay in Porto, the second day of the trip started with a tour of the laminated board and veneer processing company called Laminar, which is in operation for over 60 years. Again Eucalyptus, a common tree found growing throughout Portugal, was the main raw material used. It was fascinating to see how the tree trunks are debarked and peeled to create the layers from which laminates were glued up and pressed.



Eucalyptus logs ready to be processed into laminated board at Laminar (14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)

This was followed by a visit to the prestigious chair design and manufacturing company X8 Solutions. Here the students got to see the manufacturing facilities used to manufacture these exquisite chairs that featured solid wood frames and beautiful upholstery. The attention to detail and expertise built up over the previous 60 years of operation was very evident.



GMIT Letterfrack FWT4 students visit X8 Solutions (14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)



X8 Solutions (14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)

Then the CFPIIMM (educational centre for the Portuguese wood and furniture industry) gave a tour of their facilities to the group. This centre prepares 15-18 year old teenagers interested in pursuing a career in the Portuguese wood and furniture industry, unemployed adults wishing to enter the industry, and offering Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to members of the industry.



CFPIIMM (educational centre for the Portuguese wood and furniture industry) gave a tour of their facilities to the group (14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)

The day was concluded with a very interesting tour of Strong Wood Flooring. Advanced automated solutions and high quality were all features of this company.



Herring bone patterned flooring by Strong Wood Flooring (14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)

On the final day of the trip, the group travelled to central Portugal to visit Carmo Wood that specialises in wood products for the agriculture, equestrian world, construction, tourism, leisure, security and telecommunications. This company had to rebuild following a devastating fire in 2017, and now operates a lean production system using a mix of traditional and modern production techniques including a robotic line.



Students visiting Carmo Woods (15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)

Lastly, the group had a very interesting tour of Ribadão Wood Boutique who specialise in wood flooring for export mainly to the USA. The students were delighted to see their automated spraying line in operation.



The final visit of the tour was to Ribadão Wood Boutique who specialise in wood flooring for export (15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2020)

A common theme throughout the week was the rich tradition of furniture and wood products manufacturing in the companies visited combined with advanced techniques and technology. All the companies visited are in existence for a least the last 40 years with the majority having 60 plus years of experience. A sustainable cradle to grave approach is applied by the industry with locally grown wood used where possible. The support and benefits of the Portuguese Association for Furniture and Wood Industry (AIMMP) for the industry was very evident in the companies toured. The CFPIMM also plays an invaluable role in training individuals for the industry to ensure they are efficient and competitive manufacturers.

GMIT Letterfrack is hugely appreciative of all the companies and their staff that afforded us such a warm welcome and a willingness to give up their valuable time to share their expertise and experiences. In Ireland, Bill Vernon of the Irish Furniture and Wood Manufacturing Network (IFWMN) worked tirelessly to establish links between GMIT Letterfrack and the AIMMP. President of AIMMP Vitor Poças was so generous with his time and hospitality. Gratitude is also extended to AIMMP consultant Carla Borges who organised the companies and travelled with us to visit the companies. The trip was a huge success with the students, and lecturers learning so much about the Portuguese furniture/wood products industry, and how it compares with the Irish Industry. Examples of topics the students are covering as part of their FWT programme such as lean operations, automation, manufacturing techniques, CAD/CAM and project management were seen first-hand.