



At Showtime at High Point in June, JBS Couros wanted its customers to see what its leathers look like on finished pieces of furniture. IMAGE: JBS COUROS

## Consistent quality

Not everything about being the biggest tanning group in the world is easy, JBS Couros states, but it is pleased to be able to offer furniture companies consistency in the quality of its finished upholstery leathers.

As the biggest producer of leather in the world, it is only natural for JBS Couros to have its own extensive research and development team. And it is only natural for the R&D team to spend time thinking carefully about the furniture market as the group has an estimated 250,000 hides going into furniture every month, roughly one-third of everything it is processing at the moment at its 16 wet-end and finishing tanneries in Brazil (it has others overseas). The main focus of this research effort is specifically on what types of finished leather consumers in the US want on their sofas and armchairs and making sure the leather JBS Couros produces is in keeping with the trends.

At the Showtime materials exhibition in High Point, North Carolina, in June, JBS Couros installed around 25 pieces of furniture at its showroom to let visitors "truly see the performance of our leather" when used directly on a finished product, and to let them appreciate "the leather's beauty and the quality". In the build-up to the event, the company highlighted Solana and Hercules as two of the articles that it hoped would attract furniture buyers' attention. Both undergo a special retanning process to give them a particularly attractive touch, developed as a result of this ongoing R&D work to understand and fulfil US market requirements. "We have been able to meet the requirements of all our

customers, large and small," says the JBS Couros sales manager for the furniture segment, Max Lapegna. "Our decision to give people a more sensory experience at this edition of the show is part of our strategy to innovate and build a closer relationship with the buyers who visit us here each year."

For some time, JBS Couros has run its own leather warehouse in Hickory, North Carolina, to be closer to its customers, better understand the market and offer tailored solutions to its furniture partners. The facility, opened in 2015, is located in one of North America's largest furniture-producing regions and holds an inventory of 25,000 hides, from more than 200 different stock keep units, for immediate delivery.

JBS Couros is taking a broad approach to serving the furniture market, which Max Lapegna believes is the right way to go. The collection he had on display at Showtime comprised leathers made from Brazilian, Uruguayan, European and North American hides, reflecting the access the company has to different raw materials. The hides are processed to wet blue at the company's own beamhouse facilities in South America and the US. Some of these are finished in its Brazilian tanneries, including those at Itumbiara in Goiás and Cascavel in Ceará, but others go for finishing at its facilities in Italy and Vietnam.



"The idea behind this set-up is to allow us to deliver leather quickly and efficiently to furniture manufacturers in China, who then ship the finished furniture to the US market," Mr Lapegna explains. "I'm not complaining, but it's not always easy being the biggest producer of leather in the world. It's a competitive market and smaller manufacturers are able to move faster than us. But what we can offer is consistency, reliability and innovation, and that's important too. Our Brazilian hides all have the same characteristics; they all come from the same slaughterhouses, located in specific regions, giving very standardised raw material. Cutters at our customers know exactly what to expect from our leathers, where the defects are, where the brand marks will be. All of this helps them when they are cutting leather; for them, consistency means efficiency."

He explains that JBS Couros thought long and hard about its move to Asia to set up a tannery in Vietnam. An Italian group was selling a tannery in China and JBS considered buying it. "We all agreed we had to be there," Max Lapegna says, "but Vietnam was the best choice."

In addition, the collection at Showtime included a small number of articles produced in Italy by Conceria Priante, the flamboyant, Arzignano-based tannery that JBS acquired in 2015. Some of these leathers are presented to its furniture clients as 'US leather made in Italy', which means US hides from JBS's own slaughterhouse and tannery in the US, shipped to Italy for processing by the Priante team and transported back to the US for use in high-end, US-made



Hercules leather from JBS Couros's furniture range. IMAGE: JBS COUROS

furniture collections in a fully traceable process. Max Lapegna explains: "There is one furniture maker here, whom I don't want to name, that has made it clear to us that the only leather they want on the furniture throughout their 18 retail stores is this 'US leather made in Italy'. It's a good idea." ©

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