Episode Book

EPISODE #6261

Importing Architectural Tiles into Israel

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SYNOPSIS

Sourcing tiles directly from overseas factories looks simple until international shipping meets local standards and customs rules. Direct importing into Israel involves navigating mandatory standards like SI 314, obtaining Import Legality Certificates, and establishing an official importer of record. The discussion covers the difference between European single-market shipping and cross-border trade, the limits of CE markings, landed cost calculations, and why contracting through an established importer often beats managing customs paperwork alone.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A tile can be affordable on a factory website and ruin a project schedule before anyone opens the crate. Hannah's prompt starts with gorgeous natural-stone mosaics outside a building site, packed in crates bearing a Chinese supplier's name. Looking up that company revealed a range far beyond the familiar local showroom.



Herman

The tempting part is that those materials have already made the journey. Somebody managed it. The crate is evidence that the route exists, but it doesn't tell you who did the importing.



Corn

Hannah's comparing smaller architectural projects in Israel with a factory-to-hotel conversion in Germany, where having something made in Poland or ordering from China feels routine. Here, the same idea seems to acquire customs, standards and several new professions. She wants access to that wider range, including custom craft work, without turning a small architecture practice into a shipping company.



Herman

Germany gives that practice a huge advantage before anyone negotiates. Buying from Poland or Spain usually means buying within the EU single market. No external customs frontier between the supplier and the German project.



Corn

The tiles cross the border more casually than I cross the kitchen.



Herman

Your kitchen crossing includes a rest stop. European sourcing still requires technical judgment, but much of the border machinery disappears.



Corn

China doesn't join the single market because the customer happens to be German, though. Some of that ease must be experience, established agents and knowing which supplier actually exports.



Herman

It is. Chinese goods entering Germany still face an external border. We should separate that from buying inside Europe. For Israel, two documents can make a particularly large difference. One proves preferential origin. The other records construction-product performance.



Herman

Genuine EU-origin goods may qualify for preferential duty under the EU–Israel association agreement, supported by an EUR.1 movement certificate or an appropriate invoice declaration. A European warehouse address doesn't establish European origin.



Corn

Chinese stone cannot become Italian by changing forklifts.



Herman

The Declaration of Performance, often called the DoP, serves a different purpose. It records declared performance under the relevant European construction-product framework. Request that and the technical data sheet while ordering. They're much easier to obtain while the supplier wants your payment.



Corn

Origin for the tariff, performance for the technical file. Neither tells us whether Israel accepts this particular product.



Herman

CE marking alone doesn't settle Israeli installation requirements. Also, a Chinese manufacturer can have European test documentation. We shouldn't assume a crate from Foshan has none, or that a crate from Castellón comes with every document we need.



Corn

You're already defending the paperwork from its own sales pitch.



Herman

Paperwork with the right product identity can be tremendously valuable. Paperwork vaguely describing something similar is expensive decoration.



Corn

Before we build the price, the old online guides need retiring. VAT is eighteen percent, following the rise from seventeen in January two thousand twenty-five. The personal-import exemption went from seventy-five dollars up to a hundred and fifty, then back.



Herman

It's back at seventy-five dollars. Parliament revoked the higher threshold in February, and the systems subsequently reverted. For a commercial pallet, though, those shopping thresholds are almost beside the point. The business import route matters far more.



Corn

Before we get into the customs paperwork, let's hear from Desmond.

D

Desmond

This is Desmond's Money Tip. Save the last inch of wax in every candle jar, and never burn it. Over a year that is maybe four candles not bought, which is a saving of roughly eleven pounds, and over a lifetime, if you are very disciplined, a little over seven hundred. I keep nine such jars in the cupboard above the boiler, and I have not had a candlelit evening

D

Desmond (continued)

since two thousand and nineteen.

D

Desmond

It is not much. Money rarely is. But it is yours, and nobody can take it off you except the boiler.



Corn

I'd consider the jars. Herman would require a fire assessment. Back to the pallet, somebody has to put a business name against it before it sails.



Herman

The importer of record needs to be established explicitly. For this commercial route, a registered Israeli business imports against its importer file, normally working with a customs agent. The architect doesn't automatically become the importer by selecting the material. It might be the contractor, the client business or a specialist importer.



Corn

Whoever it is needs to know they've accepted the job. A contractor signing a tile schedule hasn't necessarily agreed to become an international stone merchant.



Herman

Commercial goods shouldn't be disguised as personal shopping. That can bring fines and confiscation. More immediately, it gives every professional involved the wrong instructions. Corn, if you were commissioning this, would you want the architect holding that responsibility?



Corn

Only if procurement were separately contracted and paid. Otherwise the architect gets a design fee and inherits a warehouse dispute. I'd rather have one importer answerable for clearance, with the architect answerable for specifying the right material.



Herman

That also makes the landed quote more intelligible. Factories commonly quote ex-works or FOB. Ex-works leaves collection and much of the onward machinery to the buyer. FOB normally puts the goods aboard the vessel at the named departure port. Neither means delivered and cleared at your Israeli site.



Corn

The word delivery is doing unpaid overtime.



Herman

A forwarder arranges transport, consolidation, insurance options and handling. A customs broker handles classification, the declaration, taxes and release. One company may coordinate both services, but those are different jobs. A seller can arrange a delivered quotation, even a duty-paid arrangement, if it has the capability. The contract must say who imports and what charges remain excluded.



Corn

I'd want a quote that survives contact with the actual product. Natural stone, ceramic and terrazzo aren't interchangeable merely because the website puts them under tiles.



Herman

Natural-stone mosaic articles fall within customs heading sixty-eight point zero two, with the exact subheading depending on the article. I wouldn't give a duty percentage without that classification. Preferential origin may reduce a duty that applies, but it doesn't remove VAT or the standards question.



Herman

Also, the value used to test a personal-shopping exemption isn't necessarily the taxable base once tax applies. Don't calculate a commercial landed bill by multiplying the website price by the VAT rate and stopping there.



Corn

Customs has noticed the boat.



Herman

Freight, insurance, duty where applicable, handling, brokerage and domestic delivery all belong in the cost model. VAT can also be a cash-flow issue rather than the final economic cost for an eligible VAT-registered business claiming input tax. That depends on the importer and its records.



Corn

The part I'd lose sleep over is approval. Freight can be quoted. Discovering after shipment that the tile isn't acceptable sounds rather harder to negotiate.



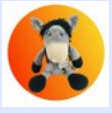
Herman

Ceramic and porcelain tiles fall under mandatory Israeli Standard SI three hundred fourteen. Terrazzo has SI six. Natural-stone cladding systems involve SI twenty-three seventy-eight and its relevant parts. The mosaics in the prompt are natural stone, so we mustn't casually certify them as ceramic.



Corn

Even their bureaucracy deserves the correct geology.



Herman

The import compliance document commonly discussed here is the Import Legality Certificate, Chukyut Yevu. The product file can require technical specifications, manufacturer declarations, quality-control reports and existing certificates. Model identity matters. Approval for one product doesn't automatically cover the manufacturer's entire catalogue.



Corn

That's the point at which choosing six finishes stops being a harmless design preference.



Herman

Samples may need laboratory testing. Some products or importer circumstances can require more extensive scrutiny, potentially including a factory inspection. The applicable route needs settling before shipping. A recognised laboratory may instead establish that a particular standard doesn't apply, but that also needs documentation.



Herman

You're about to say the showroom markup suddenly looks less offensive, aren't you?



Corn

Less mysterious. I'm withholding affection.



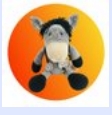
Herman

I'll accept that. For ceramic tiles, abrasion performance, defects and slip resistance matter. Abrasion classes run from zero to five, with zero intended for walls rather than floors. Residential floor selections commonly sit in the middle-to-upper part of that range.



Corn

Slipperiness needs the room attached to it, too. A beautiful sample held vertically at a desk tells us very little about somebody leaving a shower.



Herman

R ratings commonly run from R nine through R thirteen. The guidance discusses R ten as a minimum for bathrooms and balconies, but the relevant test, use and installation requirements still need checking for the actual specification. One printed R rating shouldn't substitute for that work.



Corn

You were one breath away from specifying our entire bathroom.



Herman

Only the floor. Your ceiling attachment remains outside my brief.



Corn

Good. Its importer is unavailable.



Herman

Manufacturer identification, production batch and packaging details are worth checking against the certificate. Abrasion information may live in the catalogue rather than on the box. We need the test report tied to what arrives, not a handsome PDF belonging to a different series.



Corn

Then the pallet lands at Ashdod, and three documents describe three slightly different quantities.



Herman

Invoice, packing list and bill of lading mismatches can delay release. Valuation disputes, inspections and administrative holds add more possibilities. Storage and demurrage accrue while people correct the file. If a product fails and can't be made compliant, return or destruction can become the outcome.



Corn

Imported twice. Installed nowhere.



Herman

Courier fast or collective clearance exists for eligible shipments up to a thousand dollars with no import conditions attached. That last phrase matters. A standards-controlled product doesn't become condition-free because it fits inside the courier's van.



Corn

There is that reform with the remarkably confident name, What's Good for Europe is Good for Israel. Does it actually shorten this?



Herman

It may, for covered goods and accepted European compliance routes. The law firm RNC describes avoiding duplicate local certification in specified circumstances. I can't confirm the tile coverage or the operative route for this order. CE marking by itself is not permission to proceed. I'd have the broker and laboratory establish the current route before the deposit.



Corn

The slogan clears faster than the tiles.



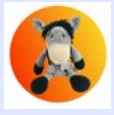
Herman

The reform could matter enormously. Until the exact product qualifies, it shouldn't appear as a saving in the budget.



Corn

That budget also needs time. Nobody wants to discover at the port that their bargain flooring has become the critical path for opening a hotel.



Herman

Schedule risk can exceed the material saving. Corn, would you still pursue it for one small apartment if the tile were something you simply couldn't find here?



Corn

Yes, but I'd change the route rather than pretend the apartment had become a hotel. I'd take the specification to a specialist importer first. Ask whether they already handle that manufacturer, whether the model is approved, or whether they'd add it to an existing shipment. I want more choices, not a personal relationship with port storage.



Herman

Consolidation solves part of that. Dense materials shipped as scattered parcels can have dreadful freight economics. A pallet consolidates handling and documentation. A specialist importer can also bring an existing broker relationship and product knowledge.



Corn

Provided consolidation doesn't get sold as approval. Six unapproved products on one pallet remain six questions.



Herman

Some transport costs combine. Product obligations don't necessarily combine with them. Existing approvals must match the actual models and route. An importer who already brings in that exact series offers something more useful than a forwarder merely willing to collect boxes.



Herman

There isn't a universal square-metre threshold where direct import suddenly wins. The approval cost, handling, shipment size, local alternative and replacement risk all affect the crossover.



Corn

I'd calculate it from the other end. How much extra am I willing to spend to get this design? Divide the fixed procurement cost across the usable area, including spare stock, then compare the premium with the value to the project. A feature wall can justify a premium that a utility floor can't.



Herman

That is especially important because access is the objective here. A higher landed price doesn't automatically mean a bad decision. It may buy a finish that makes the space. The honest comparison is with the best available alternative, not the cheapest anonymous tile.



Corn

You can stop trying to rescue my taste from my wallet now.



Herman

Your taste is usually very comfortable spending somebody else's procurement allowance.



Corn

Only after it has read the exclusions.



Herman

The importer margin can purchase predictability, replacement stock and someone local to resolve a defect. It can also be excessive. Comparing a direct-import estimate with a specialist quote reveals which, but only if both cover the same responsibilities.



Corn

This is why the German partner's casual suggestion contains hidden experience. She may already know the workshop, the carrier and what happens when something arrives wrong. We hear one sentence and mistake the relationship for effortless shopping.



Herman

Within Europe, purchasing is easier, but established suppliers make it easier again. For sourcing geography, Castellón in Spain and Sassuolo in Italy are major ceramic clusters. Their strength includes coordinated ranges, trims and technical files, not merely attractive central tiles.



Corn

The little edge piece finally gets its moment.



Herman

Germany is a useful reference for fixings, sealants, profiles and engineered products with strong documentation. The Netherlands and Belgium have substantial panel and board distribution. Czech suppliers can offer competitive EU-manufactured alternatives. None of those country labels replaces checking the particular product and exporter.



Corn

Poland fits the same practical question. Can this workshop manufacture the specified thing, document it and deliver consistently? Buying from a country isn't a specification.



Herman

Nor is buying through Europe proof of EU origin. Request the origin evidence and DoP at order time where applicable. For custom products, check what documentation actually exists rather than assuming every workshop generates the same file as an industrial manufacturer.



Corn

Hannah's Marrakech example from Grand Designs is useful here. Custom tiles made to the designers' own pattern, with shipping still leaving the price around ordinary local options. I believe that experience without making it a price promise for the next bathroom.



Herman

Labour, process, order size and destination can change the comparison completely. Handmade work also brings a sampling cycle before the import cycle. A drawing needs to become an agreed sample, then a production specification.



Corn

Handmade variation has to mean something more precise than whatever happens arriving.



Herman

Agreed tolerances for dimensions, thickness, colour variation, surface finish and acceptable defects help. So does defining what counts as a rejected piece. I'm not saying eliminate the craft character… no, the point is to identify which variation you deliberately bought.



Corn

I'd want the installer seeing the sample early. A subtly irregular tile might be the whole attraction, but if the proposed joint or substrate can't accommodate it, the design has only moved the argument downstream.



Herman

Custom work can justify fixed sourcing costs at smaller volumes because the design value is greater. It doesn't make those costs disappear. A unique order may actually require more coordination and testing than a standard series.



Corn

Higher willingness to pay, not magically cheaper compliance.



Herman

Would you commission the whole production run after one beautiful sample, Corn?



Corn

No. I'd approve a representative group, the layout and the expected range of variation. Then settle how production is checked before dispatch. A single perfect tile can conceal a remarkably adventurous batch.



Herman

Production changes can also affect whether earlier tests remain representative. A custom ceramic formulation or glaze isn't just a new picture on an unchanged product. The importer and laboratory need to understand what changed.



Corn

Craft sourcing therefore has several routes. A local specialist can commission it. An export agent can manage the workshop relationship. Or the project can buy directly and employ the forwarder, broker and inspection separately. The last route provides control but consumes the most attention.



Herman

An agent's fee can be worthwhile if the workshop has no export desk. We shouldn't confuse dealing directly with the maker with doing every task ourselves. The maker might be excellent at making and dreadful at preparing an invoice customs can use.



Corn

I'd rather pay someone to translate the order once than translate a dispute after firing.



Herman

The company on the crate may already provide that coordination, although looking at an enormous catalogue does tempt you to picture the factory...



Hilbert

Above the noodle shop. That's where mine was. While you were discussing abrasion I messaged the account manager about ordering one pallet of plain stone mosaics, with one red tile inside each crate. I want to know whether they can ship those under one model description. He has referred the question to Mr Pavel Neri at the municipal procurement office. I had the office address saved. They bought my sample panel this morning for a drainage exhibition.



Corn

A red tile makes the exhibition more accusatory.



Hilbert

It was white when I sold it. The factory account has three staff above a noodle shop. Production goes to a workshop that also makes garden gnomes. The samples were excellent. Herman, you were careful about matching the certificate to the model, but the name outside the crate still needn't be the manufacturer. My account manager sells for several workshops. The actual maker was on the inner label. Corn, bring your level down a little. The last sentence clipped. Mr Neri has now asked whether the red tiles mark anything.



Herman

A trading company can aggregate factories, yes. We can't identify the company in Hannah's photograph from that alone. I let the factory shorthand run too far. A colour change may also matter to the technical file, depending on the material and process.



Hilbert

I told him they mark tiles. The export agent quoted forty pounds more than the trading company for the pallet. I hadn't expected that. I am typing with the side of a claw because this phone was not built for an anteater. Would the certificate let me import the red pieces without putting their position on the public invoice?



Corn

The position sounds more like a private packing plan than a customs description. The broker still needs the product identified accurately. Your installer would need the plan too, unless you're intending to discover the red ones after laying.



Hilbert

The installer can have a copy.



Herman

The opening I see is a specialist offering small architects a documented special-order service, including the actual maker, approved model and replacement route. If accepted European compliance removes duplicate testing for the relevant tiles, that service could become much easier to offer. For now, I'd use the importer for access and reserve direct importing for projects able to carry the coordination.



Corn

Thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop for producing and keeping the sound in order.



Herman

If you enjoyed this one, try episode forty-one ninety-three, How to Source Custom Furniture from China (Without Getting Burned); episode twenty-five ninety-eight, Why Israeli Walls Fail at Sound; and episode fifty-two seventy-five, Reading a Supplier in twenty Minutes. This has been My Weird Prompts, the human-AI collaboration podcast.



Corn

You can find more episodes at my weird prompts dot com. The beautiful crate outside a building site shows what's possible. Getting the same material into your specification still means finding the people behind it.



Herman

See you tomorrow.

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