Retailers’ Guide to Selling Hardwood Flooring

4th edition
Solid vs. engineered

There are two types of hardwood floors: solid and engineered. Both are comprised of 100% real wood. Both are offered with a factory finish or can be finished on the jobsite. And both can be refinished. But that’s where the similarities end.

Solid wood

When a manufacturer talks about solid flooring, he is referring to a ¾-inch thick piece of solid wood. Although solid floors are available with a factory finish, they can also be finished on the job site. They can also be installed on or above grade, but not on a slab. The wood is generally nailed to a plywood subfloor.

One thing to keep in mind: Solid floors may not perform well in areas of high humidity or areas with significant temperature changes. Because solid flooring is a ¾-inch-thick section of a tree, it responds to water and moisture as it would in nature. If the air is hot and humid, the floor will soak up that moisture, causing it to swell.

When the air dries out, the floor will shrink, leaving gaps in between the boards. The wider the boards, the bigger the gaps and the more likely it will "cup," so most solid wood floors are either 2½ inches or ¾ inches wide. For this reason, solid flooring is most common in areas with low humidity such as the Northeast and Midwest.

One reason people like solid hardwood floors is because they are traditional and can be sanded many times. If they are finished on the job site, they are relatively easy to sand and refinish. And it is possible to achieve a "true square edge" profile with a "sand and finish" floor.

On the downside, if a solid wood floor is finished on site, it can be difficult to show your customer a "true color" sample. In addition, installation can take a long time as each layer of finish must dry before the next coat is applied.

Engineered wood

Engineered wood contains a range of various wood products manufactured by binding the strands, particles, fibers or veneers of wood together to form composite materials. It is used in a variety of applications, from home construction to commercial building to industrial production.

To better understand this concept, let’s look at the basics. A tree uses its roots to take water from the ground and deliver it to the leaves using straw-like cells to move the water up the trunk. These cells get plumper when they are full of water and shrink when they are dry. Just as these cells change with moisture in a tree, they will also change with moisture within a floor. By stacking veneers with these cells facing in opposing directions, no one layer can grow or shrink too much in any direction.

Because engineered floors can handle a certain amount of moisture from the subfloor, they can be installed anywhere in the house; on, above or below grade, on concrete or plywood subfloors with glue or nails or even by floating.

Most engineered floors are finished at the factory, so they generally have aluminum oxide in the finish. Aluminum oxide is the hardest manmade crystal in the world and therefore adds years to the finish warranty.

As for sanding and refinishing, an engineered floor can be sanded about twice depending on the thickness of the wearlayer. The aluminum oxide, however, makes it very difficult to actually sand off the finish.
Top 10 questions consumers ask when selling

(Source: National Wood Flooring Association)

1. Which type of wood floor is right for me, solid or engineered?

That depends on where your customer wants the floor installed. Both solid and engineered wood floors are made using real wood, so both are environmentally friendly.

Solid wood flooring is exactly what the name implies: a solid piece of wood from top to bottom. The thickness of solid wood flooring can vary, but generally ranges from ¾-inch to ¾-inch. Solid wood can be used in any room that is above grade (above ground). One of the many benefits of solid wood flooring is that it can be sanded and refinished many times. Solid wood floors are ideal in family/living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms, and even kitchens and powder rooms. About the only place you can’t use solid wood flooring is in the basement, but there’s a solution for that area, too.

Engineered wood floors are real wood floors that are manufactured using multiple layers of wood veneers. The layers that you can’t see can be of the same or different species. The grain of each layer runs in perpendicular directions, which creates exceptional dimensional stability. This means the wood will expand and contract less than solid wood flooring during fluctuations in humidity and temperature. The top layer of engineered wood consists of high-quality wood. Engineered floors can be nailed or stapled to a wood subfloor, or glued down to a wood subfloor or concrete slab. This makes

2. Which wood species is right for me?

Choosing the right species of wood flooring is strictly a matter of style, budget and personal preference. More than 50 domestic and imported species of wood are available to achieve a unique look.

Dark woods such as Urbanfloor’s Brahms, generally make a room seem more stately and refined.

Deep woods such as Walnut or Mahogany generally make a room seem more stately and refined.

Medium woods, including Hickory and Oak, create a warm and cozy feel for any space.

Light woods, such as ash or maple, usually make a room appear more open and airy.

Exotic species can offer even more color options. Bubinga, which originates in Africa, can appear pink, red or reddish brown with purple streaks or veins. Australian Cypress ranges from cream-colored sapwood to honey-gold heartwood, with dark brown knots and holes throughout. Santos Mahogany, which originates in South America, is dark, reddish brown. Grown in Mexico, Purpleheart has a brown heartwood that will age to a deep purple or purplish brown. Burmese Teak from Asia varies from a yellowish brown to a dark, golden brown. For a unique look, Wenge, which originates in Africa, will age to a very

3. Is a factory-finished floor or a site-finished floor best for me?

Each method has its own benefits and advantages, and making the right choice will depend on the level of customization your customer wants to achieve, along with her personal style preference.

A jobsite finish is applied on site, in the room where the flooring is being installed. With a jobsite-finished floor, the customer can choose the right type of finish to be applied, which will impact maintenance as well as the stain (if any) and sheen of the final product. In other words, a jobsite-finished wood floor offers unlimited possibilities for customization.

However, because the floors will be sanded and finished in your customer’s home, she should expect noise, dust and some disruption. In the past few years, many dust containment systems have been developed to help control dust and debris. She will also need to allow time for the finish to dry on site, during which time she will not be able to walk on the floor.

With factory-finished wood floors, the finish is applied in the manufacturing facility, long before it reaches your customer’s home. While many options are available with factory-finished floors, she will not be able to achieve the same level of customization as she can with jobsite-finished wood floors. A major benefit of factory-finished floors, however, is that there is minimal dust and noise during
buying wood flooring

the installation process. She also will be able to walk on the floor immediately after installation.

4. My room is 400 square feet, but we’re being told to order 450 square feet of flooring. Is this really necessary?

Yes. As a general rule, your customer should plan to order 10% more flooring than what is needed for the installation. Much of the material will be cut to fit the exact space, and once the boards are cut they likely cannot be used elsewhere because the end tongue or groove will have been removed. Once that happens, that board can no longer adjoin with another board, so there is some waste involved.

Your customer may need to order slightly more or less depending on the room. For example, if you need to work around stairs, a bay window, a fireplace and a closet, she may need to have more than 10% overage, but if the room is square with no interruptions, less than 10% may work.

5. I've seen different finish sheens on wood floors; some are shiny and some are not. How do I choose the one that’s right for me?

It really is a matter of preference. If your customer installs a site-finished floor, she can choose any sheen she likes. Satin finishes offer the most shine and will reflect the most light. This finish also is sometimes referred to as “glossy.” Semi-gloss finishes offer some shine and will reflect some light. Matte finishes offer the least shine and will reflect the least light. This finish is also sometimes referred to as “flat.” Generally, the less sheen, the less she will notice small scratches and other wear that is normal with wood floors. If she chooses to install a factory-finished floor, she will be limited to the sheen available for the material she selects. All sheens will offer the same protection for her floor, so it truly is a matter of which look is preferred.

6. I’m concerned about pets scratching my floors. Is there anything I can do to prevent this?

There are several things your customer can do.

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A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: MANNINGTON

Sophisticated European looks with an American twist

When searching for something that will lend warmth and elegance to a room, there’s nothing like real hardwood flooring. Today, wider, longer planks are in vogue—reminiscent of what was popular centuries ago throughout Europe. Simple yet sophisticated, these floors can be found everywhere from stately castles and grand manor homes to cozy cottages and fashionable city flats.

Now this popular look is available stateside with the debut of Mannington’s Maison Collection. Featuring 7-inch wide planks that are up to 7 feet long and a hearty ¾-inch thickness, they capture one of the hottest trends going—American style with European influences.

Mannington’s expertise in style and design led to the creation of this distinctive product. “The Maison Collection utilizes a unique hand-applied staining process that creates tremendous yet subtle variation from plank to plank and showcases a sophisticated color line,” said Joe Amato, Mannington’s vice president of residential styling. “Maison features four species in nine fashionable colors, including muted browns and warm grays. The longer and wider planks create a dramatic backdrop for Maison’s remarkable character and color.”

The Maison Collection consists of four beautiful North American wood species. Provence Hickory is like a trip through the South of France via time-worn, sawn face hickory planks with knots, subtle scrapes and subtle chatter. Normandy Oak is crafted of one of the most beautiful domestic hardwoods—white oak. Its surface is lightly wire-brushed and antique stained through a proprietary process. Versailles Maple has smooth grain and subtle hand-worked edges and distressing. Bastille Walnut is rustic with rich graining and color depth that works well in both traditional and modern spaces.

In addition to beauty, Maison Collection products also have incredible durability and performance characteristics. “The entire collection is constructed of engineered hardwood,” said Dan Natkin, director of hardwood and laminate at Mannington. “We say that they’ve been ‘engineered for superior performance.’ The beauty of a sawn-faced product is that you get the look of a solid hardwood floor with the dimensional stability and installation flexibility of an engineered. It really is the best of both worlds.”

With Mannington’s Maison Collection, now it’s easy to transform your customer’s home into a castle—from the floor up.
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to minimize scratches from pets on her wood floors. One is to place scatter rugs at all doors to minimize the amount of dirt being tracked in, especially if the pet likes to dig. Your customer’s best defense, however, is to trim her pet’s nails regularly. If scratches do occur, as they may whether pets live in the home or not, keep in mind the scratches will most likely be on the floor surface only, and not in the wood.

7. How do I keep my floors looking new?
All hardwood floors should be cleaned regularly. Simply sweep, dust mop or vacuum the floors with the beater bar turned off to remove dirt and grit from between the floorboards.

Avoid using a wet mop on hardwood floors as it can dull the finish or even damage the wood over long periods of time. Place scatter rugs at all entrances, avoiding those with rubber backs, which can discolor wood floors. Special rug mats that will protect the floors from discoloration can be purchased from a wood flooring retailer. Scatter rugs will help keep outside dirt and other debris from scratching the floors. Scratches can also be prevented by placing floor protector pads on the bottoms of the legs of any furniture that come into direct contact with the floors.

When spills occur, they must be cleaned immediately with a dry or slightly damp cloth. Allowing spills to remain on wood floors could damage the finish and possibly the wood. Avoid walking on the floors with sports cleats or high heel shoes that are in disrepair. These can scratch the finish or even dent the floor.

Finally, when the floor begins to look a little dull, a recommended wood flooring cleaner should be used to renew the luster. Be sure to use the product as directed and verify it is compatible with that particular wood floor. Using the wrong type of cleaning product could damage the finish and possibly damage the wood, as well.

8. After I order my floors, how long will it take for them to be installed?
That depends. Site-finished floors will take longer to install than factory-finished floors because the finish needs to be applied and dry onsite.

Depending on the type of finish used, your customer can expect there will be multiple coats administered, and each coat will need to be sanded before the next coat is applied. The finish will need to dry thoroughly before the floor can be walked on. In addition, all wood flooring, whether jobsite-finished or factory-finished, will need to be delivered to the jobsite and allowed to acclimate for a period of time before the installation can begin. This can take several days depending on the material used. This is a very important part of the installation process because the wood must reach equilibrium moisture content (EMC) with the jobsite conditions to ensure a long lasting, high-quality installation.

9. I’ve seen instances where wood floors fade over time. Is there anything I can do to prevent this?
Wood floors are one of the few flooring options that become more beautiful with age. Like all natural materials that experience change over time, wood floors will undergo subtle color changes as they age. This is a natural process called “patina” that will add to the beauty and character of the floor.

Different species of wood flooring will experience color changes at different rates. In general, more common species, such as oak and hickory, will experience minimal color change over time. Less common species, such as American and Brazilian cherry, will show more variation over time.

These changes are natural but can be minimized with a little prevention.

Two factors influence color changes in wood floors: sun exposure and the finish that is applied. Over time, prolonged sun exposure will cause wood floors to change color. Think about how skin reacts when exposed to sunlight. Wood reacts in much the same way, but your customer can minimize this effect by periodically moving rugs and furniture to limit that exposure. In terms of finish, oil-modified options will amber over time, giving the floor a slightly yellow appearance. In contrast, water-based finishes generally will remain clear, minimizing long-term color changes.

10. Installation is so expensive. Why can’t I just do it myself?
Installing wood floors is a lot more complicated than painting a wall or replacing the hardware on kitchen cabinets.

First of all, your customer will spend several thousand dollars on material alone, so if she damages the floor it’s not as easy as buying another $30 gallon of paint or $200 of hardware and starting over again. Plus, wood flooring requires special tools that will likely have to be rented and that she will probably have little experience using.

More importantly, she will need to make sure the room you are working in is flat, that the subfloor material will work for wood flooring, and there are no moisture issues that will damage the wood long term. Testing for moisture requires special tools as well, and the subfloor and flooring must be tested to ensure a successful installation.

In addition, your installer will need to know how to center the room, how much space should be left for expansion gaps, how to work around obstructions like closets, fireplaces, bay windows, staircases and cabinets. If he makes cutting mistakes you may end up running short on material and not have enough to finish the job.

In some cases, you may not be able to exactly match the lot, much like running short of paint that sometimes results in a slight color difference when mixing a new gallon. The bottom line is that installing wood floors is not recommended as a DIY project. In the long run, your customer will save money and time by using a professional.
Quality at the forefront with an eye toward environment

More than 30 years ago, we understood that wood is a natural material that requires a unique approach. Since then, every day, every hour, every minute, Mercier devotes itself to offering and providing high quality products while always respecting the environment.

Our hardwood floors are eco-intelligent and safe. Because we think about your customers’ health, the Mercier Generation GreenGuard certified finish made of 100% pure soybean oil is the healthiest choice for them. Concerned about the environment and our forests, Mercier wood flooring and its 200 employees are committed to reducing our environmental impact. We have the lowest losses in the industry with 2% to 3% versus 5% for our competitors. Because customers do the choosing, Mercier offers more than 3,000 possibilities.

Whether it’s a product from our Design+ Program, Exotic or Nature collections, Mercier lets the consumer create a unique and authentic look that makes a perfect match for their home’s decor. For a flawless transition, Mercier moldings are manufactured in our factory to ensure a perfect fit and impeccable color scheme.

Because there are always unforgettable moments, Mercier provides the peace of mind for many years to come. We offer the best guarantee in the industry. Besides our 35-year residential guarantee, we are the only company to offer a 5-year commercial guarantee. Plus, the Mercier Generation GreenGuard certified finish is not only the most durable on the market, but it is also the clearest and the smoothest.

With 30 years of experience, a completely vertically integrated, hyper-sophisticated technology and a team completely dedicated to reaching perfection, we believe Mercier offers the best products in the industry.

Because of our multiple control points—from receipt of wooden logs to slat finishing, the artificial integrated viewing system for ultra to the precise control of the dimensions and grading of slats according to grading parameters and the color viewing system—Mercier is able to provide integral quality at each step of its production.

trendspotting

UV coatings offer fast, durable finish

M e. Fast, New. That’s how JC Meyers, co-owner and manager of coatings specialist Uveeco, describes today’s consumers, many of whom demand instant gratification when it comes to tasks like redoing their hardwood floors.

“Ask your clients, ‘Do you want to wait several days to get your floors re-done?’” he said. “They don’t.”

Fortunately for Meyers and his dad, Jim, his company offers a UV finish that enables consumers to refurbish their floors without having to move out of the house. Uveeco’s UV water-based process dries in about an hour and then is instantly cured when exposed to UV light.

UV-curable coatings for wood products are not new; they were first developed more than 30 years ago to replace nitrocellulose lacquers and amino-alkyd coatings. However, today, a wide variety of wood products including prefinished flooring, moldings, panels, doors, cabinetry, window trim and parquet flooring are being finished with UV-curable fillers, stains, sealers and topcoats (both clear and pigmented).

“We believe that field-applied UV coatings are here to stay and have a huge potential,” said JC Meyers, contending UV-cured coatings achieve greater durability than conventional solvent-based materials.

Michael Martin, president and CEO of the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA), said UV finishes have been around for several years and are now gaining in popularity. “While the technology has existed at the factory level for some time, it is now just being introduced as a jobsite finish option. The benefit is that the finish is applied and cures almost instantly, eliminating any wait time for being able to use the floor. This is a big plus for busy families, or especially with commercial buildings like retail stores that lose business when they have to shut their doors.”

Rick Holden, COO of mid-Atlantic distributor Derr Flooring, said UV finishes are “still the dominant finish in our region.”

In Southern California, floor finishes that are low in VOCs, such as UV coatings, which do not contain solvents, matter to consumers, according to Ian Newton, general manager of Flooring 101, who is also the hardwood chairman for the National Floorcovering Alliance (NFA). “Most of what we sell is aluminum oxide UV-cured floors. This gives the customer a low-maintenance, durable floor that can be prefinished in infinite stains and is very cost effective to manufacture. This makes wood floors an exceptional value in floor covering.”

Floating floors for

Flooting floor technology has been around for several years, primarily in laminate, but now hardwood floors have gained traction.

The floating floor is neither nailed nor glued to the subfloor, but floated above it. “This type of installation is ideal over existing flooring material, such as vinyl, ceramic or laminates which can be difficult to remove,” said Michael Martin, president and CEO of the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA).

Among the companies with floating hardwood floors are Armstrong and Multilcal. Armstrong’s Turlington Lock&Fold engineered hardwood, for example, can be floated in different ways depending on the construction. With Lock&Fold technology, users lock the pieces into place providing a secure fit and is ideal for the DIYer, Armstrong explained. Multilcal’s floating collection, Austin Springs, is a 5G “loc-to-fit” system. “This was the company’s first floating floor,” said Brian Greenwell, vice president of sales and marketing, Multilcal.

Austin Springs’ 3⁄8-inch engineered product comes in 3⁄4- and 5-inch widths and is offered in more than a dozen SKUs.

Flooring retailers believe the floating hardwood floor has its place in the market. “The labor is cheaper and it can be sold as a DIY product,” said Eric Mon-
Metallic, darker finishes gain acceptance

Gray tones and metallic finishes are adding a new and distinctive dimension to the hardwood flooring market.

Gray, because of its neutrality, can be mixed with a variety of colors and pairs well with other neutrals like white and black.

"I’m seeing a definite trend toward grays and darker metallic colors both in hard and soft surface; it certainly makes our displays more interesting," said Ian Newton, general manager at Flooring 101, Ventura County, Calif.

Kährs calls its Shine Collection (eight offerings in a variety of ash, beech and oak) the “most audacious” introduction to date. The finish is made of aluminum par silicate, a naturally occurring inorganic salt that is also used in crayons and makeup. "Black, silver and black copper are, without a doubt, the real showstoppers of the collection," said Shane Smartt, marketing manager, Kährs International. "We’re going to see this product stick around for some time." Eric Mondragon, hard surface buyer, flooring division, RC Willey Home Furnishings, added that tones are strong in the new home construction market.

Beverly Dietez, flooring/furniture sales associate at Functional Designs, Reno, Nev., added, "Gray/whitewash finishes seem to be very big with designers at the moment."

Mullican’s Oak Driftwood line features a "washed gray" engineered floor in a 6-inch profile and came to market with two solid gray selections—Muirfield Oak Granite and Maple Graphite. "It’s a hot seller for us," said marketing coordinator Tressa Samdal.

Taking advantage of the reclaimed wood effect, Shaw now offers more than a dozen gray-colored hardwood floors, while Lauzon’s newest collection—Gray Impressions—combines "the rich grains of traditional species with the deep and subtle character of gray. It’s today’s trendy chic that will quickly become tomorrow’s classic.”

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: DUCHEATEAU

Old-world European traditions in wood combined with modern engineering

Founded in 2006 in San Diego, DuChateau Floors is a manufacturer of wide-plank hardwood flooring that offers the look, feel and longevity of old-world European surfaces crafted centuries ago. Traditional styling methods perfected in Holland, combined with today’s state-of-the-art technology, keep the company firmly at the forefront of the design industry.

In developing new wood flooring styles, the company’s master craftsman, Anthonius Goddijn, experiments with traditional processing methods that challenge and manipulate the structure inside the wood to produce natural reactions. Some of these processes include smoking, liming, carbonization, distressing, hand scraping and brushing to achieve unique flooring styles and textures that highlight the natural changing grain patterns of the wood. These processes differ from common methods used today that rely on stains or colored lacquers to achieve certain looks.

Through the company’s R&D facilities, modern techniques have been developed to offer a broad product assortment and make European-style floors available to the mass market.

In the European tradition, DuChateau is one of the first to bring hard-wax oil floors to the U.S. market. This all-natural, ultra-low VOC finish offers excellent durability and renewability while allowing the wood to breathe. The unique lustrous finish maximizes the wood’s natural character and beauty, and as it has been tested with time, a hard-wax oil finished floor will last for generation after generation.

DuChateau’s core values are to make use of environmentally friendly methods and renewable forest resources to offer products that are consistently of the highest quality. As a proponent of environmentally friendly harvesting methods, DuChateau wood floors are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. The company is also a member of the U.S. Green Building Council with all floors contributing to LEED credits.

Recent honors include the prestigious Interior Design Best of Year Award in the hard flooring category for the company’s Heritage Timber Edition and inclusion on the Inc. 5000 List of Fastest Growing Companies.

Since its inception, DuChateau Floors has been at the forefront of innovation in the hardwood flooring industry and is proud to be sold internationally and used by some of the most well-respected brands, including Whole Foods, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale’s and Ritz Carlton.

For more information, visit the company’s website at duchateau.com.
What is it that makes one salesperson more successful than another? Assuming you offer a competitive price, convenient delivery and accommodating scheduling, what is it that convinces a consumer to buy from you as opposed to your competition?

Studies show salespeople are extremely influential in the decision to buy, especially on big-ticket items such as wood flooring. The more you know about wood flooring and the accompanying sales process, the better equipped you will be to influence potential buyers.

The National Wood Flooring Association Certified Professionals (NWFACP) offers a certified sales counselor program to help retail salespeople gain expert knowledge in wood flooring sales. Certification with NWFACP includes a written exam that tests wood flooring knowledge. To be eligible, you need either three years of wood flooring sales experience or completion of an NWFA-recognized sales school (such as Certified Floorcovering Installers).

The written exam covers eight areas of wood flooring knowledge, including wood flooring properties, characteristics and types, selling the right product for the job, subfloors, installation techniques, problem identification, troubleshooting, trends and maintenance. The test is administered online and presented in a true/false and multiple-choice format. Test results are displayed immediately once submitted.

When certification is achieved, continuing education is required to maintain certified sales counselor status. A minimum of three continuing education units is required annually. Credits can be received for attending NWFA education programs, approved NWFA member education programs, NWFA’s annual Wood Flooring Expo, NWFACP Inspector School and NWFACP Commercial Inspector School.

Becoming an NWFACP certified sales counselor validates your wood flooring knowledge and sales expertise. Your certification will help you guide your customers through each stage of their wood flooring purchases by selecting the right species, flooring type, installation method and finish to meet each individual consumer’s lifestyle.

Certification benefits also include: use of the NWFACP logo on all promotional materials; full access to resources to help advertise certified status; an NWFA website listing for consumers seeking certified wood flooring professionals; use of the social network on the NWFA website to communicate with other Certified Professionals; a prominent listing in NWFA’s annual Resource Book; a certification plaque and pin to display for customers; credibility with customers, industry professionals and appearances in court, and the potential to grow your career into other areas of the wood flooring industry.

If you are in the business of selling wood floors, you need to use every advantage possible to attract customers and close deals — NWFACP certification can give you that edge. To find out more about the benefits of certification, visit nwfa.org or contact NWFACP at 866.418.5408 in the USA and Canada, or 636.728.1922 local and international.

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: ANDERSON

A reputation for quality, durability, and style and design leadership

With its creation in 1946 as a small, family-owned business, Anderson has become one of the nation’s most respected hardwood manufacturers thanks to the company’s reputation for craftsmanship, unmatched quality and innovative design. Anderson’s engineered flooring with Cross-Locked Engineered plies is noted for its durability and versatility. Company founder L.W. Anderson developed the 5-ply engineered construction, which is still used today as an industry standard.

Since its inception, Anderson has been committed to manufacturing top-quality, American-made hardwood. In fact, all the company’s hardwood products sold in the United States are domestically made. Equally significant is Anderson’s commitment to sustainability, illustrated by third-party certifications from the nation’s leading environmental organizations. All domestically sourced products have earned the coveted Cradle-to-Cradle Silver Certification from McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry (MBDC), a third-party product and design firm. Anderson products have also earned GreenGuard Children & Schools certification, which recognizes companies that develop products meeting or exceeding stringent requirements for low chemical emissions, and designation in the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) Responsible Procurement Program as “From U.S. Renewing Forests.”

In addition to the company’s reputation for quality, durability and environmental responsibility, Anderson has long been noted for its style and design leadership. A favorite manufacturer of interior designers and an American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) Industry Partner, Anderson personnel travel the world to research the latest trends in color, furniture and textiles. Anderson’s R&D team members regularly consult with design influencers for product feedback and hold a Designer Visions Summit to exchange ideas and inspirational concepts.

Part of the beauty of Anderson hardwood is in the rustic hand scraping, pebbling, wire brushing and other industry-leading textures the company offers. Many products are crafted by skilled artisans and no two boards are the same. Anderson hardwoods are truly custom floors.

Unique to the Anderson story is the fact that most of the company’s hand craftsmanship is performed within the Anderson Prison Work Program. Located in state correctional institutions in South Carolina and Tennessee, the voluntary work program is centered on rehabilitating the lives of prisoners by teaching a trade and the value of hard work. Prisoners are paid a prevailing wage, which is divided among the state and victims, with the remainder going to the prisoners’ families. The highly successful program has proven to reduce the rate of repeat offenders.
Look to NWFA's NOFMA certification for quality assurance.

For more than 100 years, NOFMA Certification has provided a mark of distinction for wood flooring. NWFA's NOFMA certification provides an assurance that the wood flooring you are buying meets or exceeds the standards for grade, configuration, moisture content, and average board length. Certified mills are inspected a minimum of twice per year to ensure grading standards are being met.

Look to the following NWFA/NOFMA certified manufacturers who have pledged to uphold the NWFA/NOFMA certification when you need to assure an architect, designer, or consumer that a particular product meets industry accepted standards.

 customization

Specialty design elements

With advances in the industry over the past few decades, customizing your wood floor is easier and more affordable than ever before. You can create a one-of-a-kind look with simple upgrades such as borders, medallions, hand-distressing, painted floors, mixed media and exotic wood species.

Borders
Borders create a frame effect in a particular room or space and usually contrast from the main area. For example, a family room with a simple installation of strip white oak, which is a medium-colored wood, might include a border outlining the room in a contrasting species, like Brazilian cherry.

Medallions
Medallions are usually installed in the main field of the floor, typically in areas such as foyers. They can incorporate multiple wood species and other mixed media, such as stone, metal and leather. Factory-finished medallions can be routed into existing floors with minimal disruption.

Exotic woods
Exotic woods are available in a variety of colors and can add an entirely new look to any room. Here are some examples: Bubinga from Africa adds a pinkish-red hue to any décor; Purpleheart from Mexico will age to a deep purple or purplish brown; and Wenge from Africa will age to a very deep brown, almost black, color creating a sleek floor.

hardwood 101: selling

Product education is key to customer service

BY BRIAN GREENWELL
Vice president, sales and marketing, Mullican Flooring

As the hardwood flooring industry continues to expand its product offerings, customers report being confused by the many options available. Problems that arise because of these concerns can be easily fixed if the retailer is knowledgeable about the products, the manufacturers and the installation process.

The first questions retailers should ask the customer should include where in the home the customer intends to install the flooring and what type of subfloor will be installed. Retailers should also know whether the customer intends to use a professional installer or do the installation on her own.

The answers to these questions often dictate whether the customer will be purchasing a solid or an engineered product. While some homeowners may be able to choose either, many will find they are limited to one product line or the other, and this helps narrow the focus.

Another important factor for retailers and customers to consider is wood species. Often, customers focus on a wood species for its aesthetic features rather than its functional features. Just as each species has a distinct grain pattern, different species also have varying degrees of hardness. Spaces that are expected to see a lot of abuse should be floor with a species that boasts a high Janka rating.

The remaining decisions to be made by customers when purchasing flooring tend to be purely visual and rather subjective. Each manufacturer offers a variety of colors, textures and treatments for each of its product lines. Add in the variation of lengths, widths and thicknesses of the flooring available, and the customer can become overwhelmed by the abundance of choices.

In this area, one way retailers can be most helpful to the customer is to offer a broad array of flooring samples. Customers like to see and touch the various options and compare them side-by-side. Brochures filled with information about specific manufacturers, product offerings and sustainable practices in the industry have proven to be effective tools to educate retail staff and consumers about the options available.
its create unique looks

Mixed media
A one-of-a-kind floor can be created by mixing wood with other materials such as stone, tile, slate, marble, granite, brass, copper, stainless steel, nickel and leather. Highlighting a marble foyer with wood makes a dramatic entryway.

Painted floors
A little paint can transform an ordinary wood floor into something unique. For example, a painted border can transform a wood floor into a work of art reflecting personal style, such as country, formal or even patterns like free-flowing vines.

Hand-distressing
Hand-distressing wood floors offers a special and antiqued appearance. Hand-scraping is the most common distressing technique. Using tools such as chisels, planes, wire brushes, awls, ice picks and grinders, the installer will work with the wood to achieve a worn and distressed look.

Stains
Light-colored stains add a contemporary look. A warm, medium-toned color is more traditional. Dark stains can give floors a formal setting.

Source: National Wood Flooring Association

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: HALLMARK FLOORS

A history of growth: From product to logistics

In 1998, company founder Tony Pan began importing hardwood flooring to the United States. Seven years later, he introduced the Hallmark Hardwoods brand with his first distributor and today, the company's products are handled by 11 distributors in the U.S. with two more slated to be added in 2014.

Hallmark has carefully controlled its growth and placed high levels of inventory on both the West and East coasts to provide the best possible service to its customers. Additionally, Hallmark allows its distributors to pull pallets at container pricing. This gives them access to local materials based on ongoing needs, shortening lead times, greater turns on inventory and high service levels for the dealer network.

From humble beginnings to a nationally recognized brand, Hallmark Floors has focused on providing quality, value-oriented products and service. Starting with its 5-inch Heirloom hand-scraped and 5-inch Hacienda smooth surface collections, Hallmark has focused on American walnut, maple and hickory. These species are considered by many to be the new American exotics, and this focus fits an underserved segment of the market. These two collections feature a 4 mm sawn face that provides the same usable wear layer as a 3/4-inch solid, combined with the greater dimensional stability of an engineered structure. This gives our retailers the ability to install above, on and below grade with the option of glue down, nail down or floating installations for greater versatility.

Hallmark Floors has since expanded into traditional sawn face exotics in the 5-inch, smooth finish Exotic Collection and added a 7 1/4-inch French oak to the Alta Vista Collection, which is marked by subtle aging and utilizes NuOil finish, a revolutionary highbred, two-stage oil finishing system. French oak has become another highly desirable species and is perceived by the buying public as an exotic offering. Completing the existing offerings is rotary cut birch in the 6-inch Silverado Collection with a light handscrape, followed by the 7-inch Chaparral Collection with a heavy scrape, with rotary cut American walnut, hickory and maple.

At Surfaces 2014, Hallmark Floors will introduce four new wood collections to bring the total number of wood offerings to 10. World-class quality continue to fuel the rapid growth of this dynamic company.

To learn more about the PLUS Hallmark can add to your business, visit hallmarkfloors.com or call 909.947.7736.
alternative hardwood

What to look for in bamboo flooring

There are many misconceptions about bamboo flooring and a plethora of choices on the market. There are different ages of bamboo maturity and subsequent different hardness ratings, different factory finishes and different manufacturing processes, making for a very confusing selection process. Many customers end up disappointed when they purchase a bamboo floor that is not high quality and scratches very easily—sometimes before installation is even complete.

So, what qualities should you look for? Most bamboo flooring is made from bamboo pieces glued together in alternating layers and milled into flooring pieces. Ideally, the bamboo should be at least four years of age in maturity, so that it achieves a hardness rating of at least 1,400 on a Janka scale (harder than most oaks); some flooring is made from only 2- to 3-year-old bamboo, making it much softer. Some customers have even blogged about how they can easily sink their fingernails into the flooring.

The moisture content (MC) should be 8% or less and consistent throughout the boards. Consistency and even kiln drying is the key. There should be minimal color variation so installers don’t have to worry about drastic color patterning. The glues and finishes should be high quality, contain at least one layer of a high-quality aluminum oxide for increased scratch resistance and durability, and have low to no VOCs or formaldehyde. Some flooring has only one or two layers of polyurethane, while others have five to six coats. Look for flooring that passes the strict CARB standards that California has set for indoor air quality.

Stranded bamboo is more of a newcomer to bamboo flooring choices but is substantially stronger than traditional bamboo flooring. Made by compressing and binding together strips and pieces of bamboo, stranded bamboo is about twice as strong as regular bamboo flooring, with hardness ratings up to 3,000. There are different manufacturing processes used to make this type of flooring, so, again, there are different qualities to look for when making a purchase. MC is very important for this material and should, again, be consistent throughout the batch and at 8% standard. Most moisture meters aren’t set for bamboo, not to mention stranded bamboo, so you will need to get one that can be set for these types of material to get an accurate reading. The same qualities looked for in regular bamboo should also be reviewed for the stranded bamboo: Hardness, glues, finishes and MC are the big items to research.

As with any flooring, look for a good warranty in both the finish and structure. Look for the documentation showing FSC or another third-party certification to ensure Lacey Act or CARB compliance. The NWFA is working on a program to help standardize the qualities that are unique to bamboo flooring so in the future you will be able to look for NWFA-certified bamboo flooring.

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: MIRAGE

Our unique reflection of quality

We are often asked, “What makes Mirage floors different from other brands on the market?” It’s hard to give a short answer to this question, because the difference is in the many details we offer. For 30 years, we have been firmly committed to maintaining the quality of the products and services we offer our customers; that’s the Mirage difference.

North American-made products and know-how
One of the most important things about Mirage is we offer the highest-quality products currently available on the market—entirely designed and manufactured in Canada. The effort we have invested in research and development has resulted in durable, superior, incomparable hardwood flooring. The 20 awards for excellence Mirage has received year after year prove our unique quality and the know-how of our people.

State-of-the-art technology for 30 years
In 2013, Mirage is celebrating its 30th year of business and has grown into the most renowned North American hardwood flooring manufacturer with nearly 375 employees. Today, Mirage operates a manufacturing area equivalent to 15 football fields featuring state-of-the-art equipment needed to produce all three technologies (solid, engineered and glueless engineered). Mirage is the one-stop shop for quality hardwood flooring, providing dealers and consumers with the peace of mind only a wood specialist can deliver.

Partnering only with the best
We, of course, didn’t accomplish all of this alone; we owe our success to our network’s expertise, trust and partnership. To make sure Mirage is a brand consumers can trust for the finest in hardwood flooring, we have joined with suppliers, distributors, and dealers who share the same passion for wood and demand high standards of quality.

The little things that make a big difference
The quality of Mirage products differentiates us from the others but, moreover, it’s the consistent quality that sets Mirage apart. No less than 312 quality checks are performed at various stages of the manufacturing process, from the receipt of raw material to the delivery of the final product. Anyone can make a quality product here and there, but we produce quality ALL the time and for every single board that goes into a box. That’s the Mirage difference.
installation

Nail down, glue down or floating?

When most people think about installing wood floors, they typically envision a hammer, nails and a lot of back-breaking work. There are, however, several options available, and choosing one will depend on the flooring used, whether it is installed above or below grade, and the subfloor material.

There are three methods used to install wood floors: nail down, glue down and floating.

Nail down
Nailing down wood floors is the most common installation method. The process involves nailing the flooring directly to a wood subfloor. Typically, the flooring is blind nailed through the tongue so the nails are not visible after installation. This method works for solid and engineered floors, but only on wood subfloors.

Nailing schedules are critical to ensure quality installations. The National Wood Flooring Association recommends fasteners be spaced 8 to 10 inches for solid flooring, and 4 to 8 inches for engineered flooring. Using fewer fasteners could result in cracks or squeaks, while using more could result in split tongues.

Glue down
The glue down method involves using adhesives to adhere the flooring to the subfloor. Adhesives work by creating a bond between the subfloor and the wood flooring through a chemical reaction process. While all adhesives work by chemically changing from a viscous liquid to a solid, they differ in the carrying agents or catalysts that activate them.

There are three types of wood flooring adhesives available today: water-based, solvent-based and moisture-curing. Because each type has different application and performance characteristics, you will need to choose which to use based on application ease, product performance and VOC regulations. (For more on this subject, see adhesives story on page 38.)

Floating
Using this method, the flooring is neither nailed nor glued to the subfloor but floated above it. The flooring, usually engineered, is glued or clipped to itself, tongue to groove, and at end joints. This gives the floor stability without actually fastening it to the subfloor. This installation method is ideal over existing floors such as tile, which can be difficult to remove.

Before beginning a floating installation, make sure the subfloor is dry and level. Level any high or low spots. A moisture barrier underlayment will decrease any hollow sounding areas that could occur. Make sure the underlayment wraps up the wall to completely encapsulate the flooring. Then, when the last board is installed, trim off the excess.

The same principles apply to each method: follow manufacturer recommendations for installation, rack the wood to avoid “H” joint and stair-stepping, and allow enough expansion area.

hardwood 101: selling

What's selling in hardwood flooring?

BY MARA VILLANUEVA-HERAS
Vice president of marketing, Armstrong

You know the facts—hardwood was hit particularly hard by the recession, raw lumber prices continue to escalate and the industry continues to be challenged by capacity issues. Yet, for most folks, there is still great value in hardwood. The value, the beauty and the inherent quality of real wood floors is important to homeowners.

While many of these circumstances may be out of our control, our biggest opportunity is to focus on what we can control: converting shoppers entering the store into happy purchasers.

Buyers are becoming more comfortable spending again, and they want an attractive, quality product for their dollar. Hardwood is all that. It continues to be desired by homeowners as the ultimate complement to any design style and taste, and is the flooring of choice.

Unique and specialty visuals stimulate consumers’ interest; retailers offering dramatic visuals and differentiated products at competitive prices win sales. Designer-driven, high-performance products at good prices are appealing to consumers.

At retail, clearly call out the floor’s key attributes that drive value for your customers. Use engaging merchandising displays that are easy to navigate and support regional preferences. Emphasize the quality of the raw materials and the milling and finishing as part of the selling and trade-up story. Even if they just come in for a specific item, give people a chance to view all products in the category. Use the power of brands to highlight quality (and profitable) products. Great brands are tremendous assets to retailers—they help bring people into the store, and give them confidence they are making a smart buy from a brand they know and trust.

Retailers and their customers can feel good about purchasing domestic hardwood floors. Wood is extremely durable. It does not emit appreciable levels of VOCs. In using domestic species from reputable manufacturers you are assured of responsible practices from harvest to manufacturing and delivery.
ArmorMax offers new level of protection, durability

Mohawk's high quality hard surface flooring options are impressive for a variety of reasons. However, retailers and consumers alike have been particularly blown away by its exclusive ArmorMax finish with Scotchgard Protector Advanced Repel Technology, which takes protection to a new level.

"Research has shown that consumers are looking for and researching a hardwood floor that is beautiful, durable and easy to maintain," said Paj Thorn-Brooks, Mohawk's senior marketing director, hard surfaces. "Mohawk has answered this challenge with our exclusive ArmorMax plus Scotchgard technology."

Mohawk's ArmorMax finish works in tandem with Scotchgard Protector Advanced Repel Technology to provide the industry's most durable coating system and stain-resistant finish available today for hardwood floors. This advanced abrasion resistance is up to five times more wear resistant than other leading hardwood finishes. ArmorMax is offered with a 50-year warranty.

Scotchgard Protector Advanced Repel Technology offers hardwoods the best protection against spills, stains and soil buildup. Exclusive to Mohawk, Scotchgard helps floors stay cleaner and look newer longer. Scotchgard Protector Advanced Repel Technology gives new hardwood floors maximum protection by preventing most dirt and spills—even paint and permanent marker—from adhering. Scotchgard also prevents day-to-day grit and grime from bonding to the floor and building up, making cleaning easier and keeping the floor looking newer, longer.

Mohawk's exclusive hardwood finishing technology stood apart from the competition at the 2013 International Builders Show (IBS) in Las Vegas earlier this year. Here, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) awarded Best of Show Indoor Feature to Mohawk's ArmorMax, a significant achievement given the total lineup of more than 900 exhibitors in attendance.

To learn more, visit mohawkflooring.com or see your local sales representative.

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Installation

Eight things you need to know about adhesives

Adhesives were first used as an installation method in the wood flooring industry more than a half century ago. The process was simply a matter of spreading the molten asphalt onto the prepared subfloor, then embedding the wood flooring into the asphalt before it began to set. The work was difficult, messy and dangerous.

Things have changed a bit since then. Today's advanced technologies make adhesives an ideal installation method for most types of wood flooring. Determining when and how to use adhesives properly will be the difference between a quality installation that will last for years and one that will cause headaches for the customer. Here are eight things to know about adhesives:

1. Adhesives work by creating a bond between the subfloor and the wood flooring. While all adhesives work on the same principle of changing chemically from a viscose liquid to a solid, they differ in the carrier agents or catalysts that activate them based on the chemical properties of the adhesive.

2. There are three types of wood flooring adhesives on the market today: water-based, solvent-based and moisture-curing. Because each has different application and performance characteristics, do your research to find the product that will best fit your installation needs. Some considerations are ease of product use, product performance span and VOC regulations where the installation will occur.

3. All wood flooring adhesives require the same degree of jobsite preparation to ensure a successful installation. In fact, thorough jobsite preparation is crucial in the long-term performance of the floor and becomes even more critical if the installation will occur over concrete.

4. Make sure the wood is properly acclimated to the jobsite. While this takes place, turn your attention to the subfloor. Make sure it is flat. In addition, the subfloor should be cleaned thoroughly by removing anything that could negatively impact the bonding characteristics of the adhesive.

5. Be sure to use the adhesive specifically recommended by the flooring manufacturer. Different adhesives have different chemical properties, which impacts the spread rate, flash time and long-term performance. Certain types of wood work better with certain types of adhesives.

6. Be certain to use the trowel type specifically recommended by the adhesive manufacturer. Trowels have different teeth, different widths between the trowel teeth and different depths in the gaps between the trowel teeth. Both the size and shape of the trowel teeth and the notches between the teeth will influence the effectiveness of the adhesive as they determine the spread rate.

7. As a general rule, you only want to put down about as much adhesive as you can effectively work with in a 15 to 20 minute period of time. Any longer than that may cause the installation to fail as the bonding reaction may already have begun before the wood is installed over the adhesive.

8. Once the installation has been completed, the floor should remain untouched for at least 24 hours to allow the adhesive to cure properly. The absence of foot traffic during this process will greatly improve the long-term bonding performance of the adhesive.

Source: National Wood Flooring Association
When you need to prove sustainability, look for the NWFA ‘Verified from U.S. Renewing Forests’ logo.

The National Wood Flooring Association’s Responsible Procurement Program (RPP) is a joint initiative between leading environmental groups and industry manufacturers committed to producing and promoting wood floors that come only from environmentally and socially responsible sources, improving forest sustainability for future generations.

Through a third-party audit from Scientific Certification Services, (SCS), RPP manufacturer members verify that their products originated from a U.S. Renewing Forest, allowing manufacturers to illustrate their commitment to working toward higher levels of sustainability by growing its supply of FSC-certified materials over time.

LOOK TO THE MANUFACTURER MEMBERS OF THE NWFA RPP WHEN YOU NEED TO PROVE SUSTAINABILITY:

ANDERSON
MANNINGTON
MULICAN
Shaw

The RPP was conceived by the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) in conjunction with Scientific Certification Systems (SCS); Forest Stewardship Council U.S. (FSC), and the Rainforest Alliance TREES US Program.

WHY DOES NWFA MATTER TO YOU?

35 manufacturers recommend using NWFA Certified Professionals for installation and maintenance in their own guidelines.

See all wood flooring suppliers under one roof at the NWFA Wood Flooring Expo in Nashville, April 16-19, 2014 and St. Louis, April 28-May 1, 2015.

Attend NWFA’s Wood Flooring Basic training or workshops to advance your sales knowledge of wood flooring.

Send your customers to the NWFA consumer website, www.woodfloors.org, to support your sales efforts from an unbiased source.

NWFA membership gives you access to the most recent installation guidelines and resources and networking to help make your business successful.

www.nwfa.org | 800.422.4556