

What to Look for in a Hardwood Floor

When selecting [hardwood flooring](#) with a focus on design, or more specifically the look and feel you are trying to achieve, there are five areas you should focus on.

Color & Species

The most important decision to be made is usually the selection of a color or color range. The color, tone, and hue of your floor is dictated primarily by the specie of wood used to construct the floor and then by stains, if they are used. Stains have their advantages and disadvantages which should be considered carefully. Stains can imitate the look of expensive woods using a less expensive species, can achieve colors not found in nature, however, since stains only change the color of the surface of the wood their long term durability is less than natural finished products since deep scratches will show the raw wood.

Lengths & Widths

Nothing has more of an impact on the overall appearance of the floor more than the lengths, especially the average length, and the widths. Wide floors in Character grades are well suited to Colonial, Tuscan, Provincial, Country, and Shaker styles. Wide floors in Select grades are suited to Greek Revival, Victorian, Arts & Crafts, and Contemporary style projects where clean lines and consistent color are keys to pulling off the look.

Average lengths, especially in large rooms can make a significant impact in the feel of the room, most people find longer average lengths and random length floors to appear more 'authentic' than floors with shorter averages and only two or three different lengths, these floors tend to resemble laminate, tile, and other 'faux' wood products a look that conveys cheapness regardless of the actual quality, or lack thereof, of the product.

Lengths of 12 to 16 feet or more are not uncommon in premium products with average lengths that are 50 to 200 percent longer than commodity flooring products.

Surface Treatments

Well over 90% of the flooring sold in this country has a smooth face with about half of these floors sold as prefinished with the accompanying beveled or eased edges, the other half shipped as unfinished flooring with squared edges. Beyond smooth faced floors there is an array of options, including hand scraping, sculpting, distressing, wire-brushing, deeply grooved edges, and more. These options are typically intended to simulate the effects of time and wear or to approximate the most rustic of antique floors.

Finishes

The growth in prefinished flooring sales in our industry is undeniable and these floors are here to stay. Prefinished flooring offers convenience, is DIY friendly, and allows for a much faster install but the tradeoff for these advantages is flexibility in the final appearance (colors, gloss levels, etc.) and style with micro-beveled or eased edges required in all but the most accurately milled engineered floors.

Unfinished flooring and a competent installer on the other hand can turn a great floor into a fantastic work of art without the need for bevels and with a far more uniform appearance. The skilled craftsmen who practice this art can create for you a truly exceptional complement to any décor.

Construction

Hardwood floors come in two primary constructions, solid floors which are real wood, one piece thick and are typically $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick and engineered floors which consist of a plywood, MDF, or HDF substrate with a real wood wear layer adhered to the top of the substrate. Engineered floors minimize the natural movement of wood and can be used below, on, and above grade. Solid wood floors can be used on grade and above grade, new advances in adhesive technology even allow for direct glue down of solid wood floors to concrete slab on grade construction.

In either construction the primary focus should be on quality. Quality in a solid wood floor is usually easy to tell by looking at and holding the product and seeing how pieces fit together.

In engineered floors there are two things to should be closely looked at, the most important is the wear layer, and these veneers can be either sawn or sliced. Sawn veneers have a natural grain pattern and are indistinguishable from solid wood once installed. Sawn veneers should be a minimum of

3.2mm thick to allow for future refinishing. Premium engineered products are available with up to 6mm wear layers which equal the useable wood that a solid ¾" floor has. Rotary peeled engineered floors have extremely thin wear layers, usually 1mm or less, they cannot be refinished and because they are peeled not sawn their grain patterns are unnatural and stresses in the wood from the peeling process can cause grain to open and delaminate.

Conclusion

When shopping for wood floors it is important to note that much of the market is focused on commodity products and price points. While everyone likes saving money, especially on large projects, the savvy shopper arms herself with the questions to ask to ensure the beautiful floor she has found will last. The famous proverb "Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten" is a statement to live by when shopping for hardwoods, which, if properly selected and installed should last for centuries.

About the Author

Beth Burton is a National Wood Flooring Association Certified Sales Counselor and works as a Sales Consultant with (a href=http://www.canterburyflooring.com>Canterbury Wood Floors manufacturers of bespoke hardwood flooring. Beth works daily with the country's best designers and architects helping them achieve their visions in [wood flooring](#).

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