

The goods on new wood flooring

By **LORI HALL STEELE**
Special to the Record-Eagle

For years, renters in Europe have snapped together floors — hardwoods and laminates — and when ready to move, they simply unsnapped the wood or tile and toted it to their new digs.

These snap-and-fit floors have hit stateside and are expected to be among flooring's biggest trends this year, along with softer berbers, more authentic stone-look ceramics and environmentally sensitive bamboo and cork.

"The new thing that's really going to hit is the glueless system," said Jennifer Smith, vice president at Tile Mart, which has nine locations in Michigan including one in Traverse City. "They snap and click together. It's so easy. Hey: Here's a floor."



Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley
Many homeowners like the texture of bamboo floor coverings.

The glueless systems are typically laminates that look like hardwoods — think Pergo and Witex — with a wood-core base and hard melamine. The tongue-and-groove systems snap together quickly and easily. They clean up like vinyl. The nail-free system also includes natural wood planks, parquet tiles and bamboo or cork. It eliminates gluing and creates a tightly fit floor that floats above the existing subsurface.

Besides its speed and convenience, these glueless floors can be unsnapped and removed almost as easily. This make replacing damaged pieces simple, and enables renters to redecorate and then take along their investment when they move.

One manufacturer has extended this snap technology to include wood-look laminate paneling systems for walls and ceilings. Another manufacturer, in Belgium, is selling water-tight snap systems for kitchen and bath. These laminate "hydrofloors" include a PVC plastic base and matched tight-fit edge moldings.

Despite the overall popularity of wood-look laminate flooring, northern Michigan tends to embrace traditional flooring. As in, solid wood.

"Hard surfaces are holding their own because people realize that wood is a permanent product," said Jason Harris, of T.C. Flooring in Traverse City. "Wood increases the value of your home, laminate doesn't. Wood floors that are 100 years old can be

refinished. Laminate has 20-year warranty at best and it's not refinishable."

Among uncommon woods, Brazilian cherry is the top seller at Traverse Rare Earth Hardwoods Inc. in Traverse City.

"People seem to like the exotic stuff," said Paula Babcock, spokeswoman for the firm. "You can go anywhere and get beech and oak."

The company sells an array of exotics, from zebrawood to Brazilian satinwood to coco bolo, an orange and black rosewood-type flooring.

One of the year's hottest underfoot trends is bamboo flooring. Bamboo has been around for thousands of years in woven-mat form, but today's bamboo is milled, engineered and finished to provide beauty and durability. Bamboo floors are harder than oak or maple. Because it is a form of

Ceramic and porcelain tiles are evolving, with designer surfacing that ranges from deep texturing and high-definition relief to hand-painted designs. Floor and wall tiles now come in an array of shapes that allow intricate and exotic designs, and spectacular metallic surfaces are all the rage.

Lori Hall Steele is a local freelance writer.

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Bamboo floor coverings are often sought after due to their durability like this sample from the Bamstar line at Traverse City Flooring.

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