

FLOORS

Nature-made or man-made? No knocks on this hardwood

BY MICHELLE ARNTZ
Special to the Record-Eagle

A field trip down the flooring aisles of any home improvement store can inspire the homeowner with the multitude of choices. Laminate flooring offers the look of wood, ceramic tile or marble, according to Justin Hakly, flooring specialist at Traverse City's Home Depot, and are available in many colors and patterns.

The floor products are generally guaranteed from 15 to 30 years and are easy to care for.

"But you still have to maintain whatever you get," Hakly said. "Dust-mopping, vacuuming, and washing with a good laminate floor cleaner will extend the life of the floor."

Another way to keep the floor looking like new is to use throw rugs on high traffic areas and to take off your shoes.

"In this area, there is a lot of sand," Hakly said. "Sand is a natural abrasive that can wear down the protective layer of any floor."

Laminates allow the floor to expand and contract with the house as it settles, as the humidity and seasons change, eliminating the chance of buckling.

The floor product snaps together and can be installed by most homeowners.

Traverse City homeowner Jeff Kilgore installed a Pergo floor in about eight hours.

"It would have been easier if I would have read the instructions or watched the video tape that came with the floor, but you know how that goes," Kilgore said.

Having installed the floor almost a year ago and with the addition of his young Labrador retriever since then, he is happy with the durability of the laminate floor.

Even without doing his homework, it took him and a friend around eight hours to complete the 300-square foot job.

"After completing three rows, it's just repetition," Kilgore said, add that doing it himself saved him around \$1,100.

According to Hakly, 50 percent of consumers do it themselves. He suggested letting the floor sit in the house for three days before installation so that the product can adjust to the home's humidity. He also advises customers to buy 10 percent more than measured.

"This allows for mistakes and adjustments for things like heating vents and corners. You also want to begin installation at the longest wall of the room," Hakly said, adding that the installer also needs to make sure the present floor is level.

Starting around \$1.98 a square foot, Home Depot stocks Pergo, Dupont and



Photo/Michelle Arntz

Justin Hakly, flooring specialist at Traverse City's Home Depot, shows the many types of laminate floor samples.

Shaw Industries products. Some floors come with one-quarter inch padding attached. Another plus is that if a customer wants to use the Pergo in a different location or even a different home, the floor can be lifted up and laid down again.

While laminate flooring is a popular and economical option, hardwood floors are always in demand. Wood can be refinished over and over and can last the lifetime of the home.

Hakly warned that the summer months are not the best time of year to install hardwood.

"When installed in the higher humidity months, the wood is swollen. It will shrink up in the winter as it adjusts to the change in humidity. This is why gaps in the floor might appear," he said. "I tell people who do want to go with a natural wood floor (during the summer) to buy a good dehumidifier and to let the wood rest in the house before beginning installation."

Hakly finds that while laminates are the current trend in floor covering, carpets are as popular as ever, especially in bedrooms.

"People like the warmth and softness of carpet in those rooms," he said, adding that carpet fibers are twisted in such a way that improves the quality of modern stain-

resistant carpet. Shag carpeting, a popular choice during the 1970s, is back in demand.

"Carpet is the sponge of the earth. Everything settles into the carpet. I recommend that new padding be installed when carpet is replaced," he said. "Throw rugs are helpful in high traffic areas. Take off your shoes, but don't go barefoot. The natural oils from feet or lotions that are used can mat a carpet down."

Carpets should be vacuumed often, the direction that you sweep should change every time you sweep, and a professionally cleaner should be used.

"To honor a guarantee, manufacturers often will want proof that you have hired a professional every year to 18 months," Hakly said.

Enjoying increased popularity with homeowners are bamboo and cork products. Bamboo, a very durable material, is cut, glued and nailed down, just like a regular oak floor.

Cork is soft underfoot, acts as a noise barrier and holds heat well, but is not as durable as other products.

"I wouldn't recommend it for a very young, active family with pets," Hakly said. "But again, you must maintain whatever you buy to get the most out of it."

Michelle Arntz is a local freelance writer.

BY DAVID BRADLEY
The Associated Press

For years, foresters have sought a fast growing, environmentally responsible hardwood with the dual tangibles of good looks for the home and sustainable growth.

They seem to have found the answer in Brazil.

The hardwood that the industry is so soft on is a plantation-raised eucalyptus hybrid reported to be harder than oak, maple, cherry and mahogany. It grows to maturity in roughly one-third the time of comparable woods and after harvest continues to regenerate itself from the stumps and roots of the previous generation of trees.

According to U.S. forest products company Weyerhaeuser, lyptus, as this hybrid is called, fills multiple roles for homeowners from flooring to banisters to cabinetry.

"Everyone gets excited when they first see it," said Pete Gargano of Weyerhaeuser.

He likens lyptus' natural color to cherry but with wood grain similar to mahogany. The wood can be stained for a lighter or darker appearance.

"It fills a lot of homeowner needs throughout the house plus it's renewable.

There's a lot of pluses to this wood," Gargano said.

Not the least of which is wood that grows and regrows on the same plot of land. The trees are ready for harvest in 14 to 16 years in the warm Brazilian climate, a far faster pace than comparable species, which can take 50 to 70 years in colder climes.

The plantations are not standing row after standing row of hybrid eucalyptus either. The timber is grown alongside indigenous Brazilian woods that are not cut down. Fully one-third of plantation land remains native plants. This forest management practice maintains a natural balance to local ecosystems, says Ian Firth of Weyerhaeuser building materials.

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Traverse City

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