

Moldings can add look of elegance to a room

BY KT LEESON
Copley News Service

Installing molding in your home is a lot like topping off a simple black dress with an elegant string of pearls. "It's what dresses it up," said Susan Regan, executive vice president of the Hardwood Manufacturers Association. "Molding really does add richness." Available in 350 profiles and shapes, molding is multifunctional. It can embellish a dull fireplace mantel, add pizzazz to a plain wall or transition a style from one room to the next.

"The addition of molding makes a remarkable, aesthetic difference in a room in terms of its appeal and attractiveness," Regan said.

Regan, who has been with the HMA for nearly 20 years, knows a thing or two about molding, from the basic baseboard to the esoteric astragal (the strip covering the junction of a pair of doors). The HMA is a national, nonprofit trade association based in Pittsburgh. Their Web site (www.hardwoodinfo.com) is a comprehensive resource tool for finished products made of American hardwoods, including moldings, cabinetry, furniture and built-ins.

Do-it-yourselfers will find everything on the site from selection tips and a glossary of terms to diagrams of trim types and step-by-step instructions. But Regan warns that molding installation, unless it's a simple baseboard job, is not for the novice. "Installing molding in your home is an investment. The materials can be expensive, so you don't want them wasted by someone who isn't skilled enough to do the job right."

The HMA recommends solid hardwood (you can verify hardwood by checking to see if the grain pattern on the face of the product continues over the ends and sides). Next, decide on your style: traditional, contemporary, country or eclectic. Regan recommends looking through magazines and cutting out photos of styles that you find attractive and then discussing them with your installer or designer.

After narrowing your choices to two or three, it's a good idea to have samples of the wood stained with the colors you're considering.

Homeowner Frank Sabatini was astounded at the number of choices of molding out there.

"Molding comes in a billion more styles than I ever thought possible," Sabatini said, who recently decked out his living room with bamboo-brown hardwood flooring accentuated by a white semigloss floor trim.

"I feel that really dramatic floor moldings look better if they're balanced by molding above," Sabatini said. "Since I wasn't adding ceiling molding to the scheme, I ended up choosing a simple, medium-width cut with clean, classic lines for around the floor."

In addition to exploring the plethora of choices in molding, Sabatini also got a lesson in types of materials. "I learned that MDF (medium density fiberboard) molding is much more pliable, which makes it ideal for wavy floors."

Another advantage to MDF molding is that it comes preprimed, so it's ready to be painted.

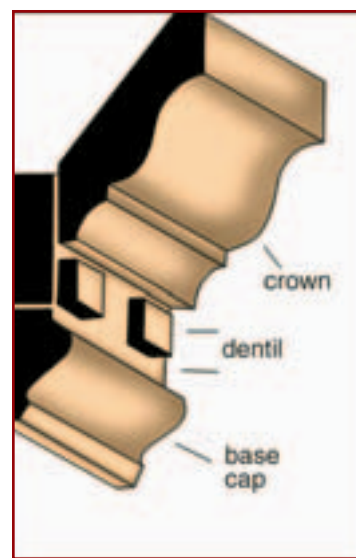
Budget-minded folks can get the look of a more expensive hardwood, such as cherry, by applying a stain on a less expensive

hardwood, such as poplar or basswood.

"When it comes to solid hardwoods, less expensive doesn't mean inferior," Regan said. "The cost is dependent largely on availability. Generally, the more plentiful a particular hardwood species and the more abundant the harvest, the lower the cost."

The HMA Web site features a pie chart of the various species and the percentage of total U.S. production (red and white oak are the most abundant at 52 percent and alder is the least at 3 percent).

Crown moldings are another area where money can be saved. Because they're installed well above eye-level, less expensive hardwoods can be used. Stacking standard profiles to create a Victorian look or other ornate style also saves on the pocketbook, as opposed to having the molding custom-designed and built.



Environmentally friendly materials for the DIYer

BY PAUL R. HUARD
Copley News Service

In a world gone "green" because of recycling and ecological awareness, there is something new underfoot — environmentally friendly flooring.

Manufacturers now offer do-it-yourselfers flooring made from recycled materials, sustainable forestry and even bark carefully skinned from a tree without killing it. Interface Inc., the world's largest manufacturer of commercial carpet tile, recently introduced a residential line of high-style floor coverings called InterfaceFLOR. Composed of changeable 19 1/2-square-inch tiles, InterfaceFLOR comes in two formats — Rug in a Box or a Room in a Box. The products are made from recycled or renewable materials.

"We see 'DIY' as both 'do-it-yourself' and 'design-it-yourself,'" said InterfaceFLOR President Greg Colando. "Commercial interior designers have used modular flooring for years. Now, this fun and functional design product puts regular people in the role of designer."

Available in an array of fashionable colors, patterns and unique textures, InterfaceFLOR allows homeowners to have creative control over the largest canvas in their homes, says Colando. From checkerboards to stripes to bordered rugs, InterfaceFLOR's multiple patterns can change the look of a room to fit any style, season or mood. With Rug in a Box and Room in a Box, InterfaceFLOR offers prepackaged complementary patterns and colors that can be used to create

endless designs.

For more information, visit www.interfaceflor.com, or call toll-free (866) 281-3567 for a catalog.

EcoTimber engineered flooring has all the benefits of laminated flooring, including superior stability and easy installation, and the look of solid wood. The San Rafael, Calif.-based company promotes forest conservation worldwide by selling sustainably harvested and reclaimed wood products. Some of the woods include cherry and hard maple.

In engineered flooring, a surface layer of high-quality hardwood is bonded to two wood sublayers. Cross-ply construction makes the product more stable than solid wood. The company says its wear layers are among the thickest on the market.

EcoTimber engineered flooring can be nailed down like solid flooring, glued directly to concrete or floated (gluing the planks to each other and not to the subfloor). Because they are prefinished, these products do not have to be sanded and finished on the job site, and are easy and inexpensive to install.

For more information, visit www.ecotimber.com.

But natural flooring doesn't always mean wood. Cork tiles and planks are one of the hottest design trends in flooring right now.

TORLYS, a Canadian company based in Mississauga, Ontario, recently introduced the Uniclic Cork flooring system. These prefinished cork planks and tiles simply click together over existing floors (no special subfloor is needed) using a patented joint system.

These joints are ultratight and the floor looks great when it's down.

Cork is environmentally friendly. It is harvested from the bark of the cork oak, grown primarily in Portugal. Bark is harvested every nine years from mature trees that can thrive for up to 200 years.

Today's cork flooring works with any decor. Dark natural tones enhance more formal settings, such as dining and living rooms. Lighter shades are great for the more casual look of a

family room or play area. The colors are achieved by baking the cork at varying temperatures.

Cork offers a unique look since no two tiles or planks look alike. It's quiet, resilient and offers superb insulation. It's also naturally fire retardant and hypoallergenic — its properties actually resist mold, mildew and bacteria, making it an excellent choice for people with allergies.

For more information, visit www.torlys.com.

HOME FACTS

Race to the finish

If properly maintained, hardwood floors can last a lifetime. To make sure the finish on your floor is still doing its job, test an area where the finish is likely to be most worn. Pour a tablespoon of water onto the floor.

- Does the water bead up so that you can wipe it up without a trace? If so, your floor's finish is fine.
- Does the water soak into the wood after a few minutes, darkening the floor only slightly? Don't panic, your floor's finish is only partially worn. Immediate refinishing probably isn't necessary, but keep a close eye on the floor.
- Does the water immediately soak into the wood leaving a dark spot? If so, your floor's finish is seriously worn and it's time to recoat or refinish.

SOURCE: Hardwood Manufacturers Association

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