

NEWSPAPER

A SUPPLEMENT TO

# floorcoveringnews

## Retailers' guide to selling laminate flooring

fifth edition



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history

# Tracing laminates' roots

Laminate flooring represents the most significant flooring entry into the U.S. market in the past 30 years. The product we know today was originally developed as another possible use of high-pressure melamine laminate. This occurred in Sweden in the early '80s. A product was created with a base of several layers of paper impregnated with special resins, which were pressed together under high pressure into a highly wear-resistant composite material. The decorative paper determined the design. The finished laminate was then glued onto a carrier and cut into sections with extremely exact dimensions.

Decorative laminate was a product that was widely used on kitchen countertops, tables or wall paneling, but not for floors. This clearly created an opportunity, but a flooring application brought new technical challenges. The initial concern to be solved was the wear factor: Floors suffer much more normal abuse than furniture or countertops. A laminate floor clearly had to be more durable.

So, a reinforced laminate approximately

10 times stronger than countertops was created and the first flooring was sold. As research grew, the relative strength increased dramatically to at least 20 times that of countertops.

Three important attributes—durability, design and installation ease—now assured the popularity of laminate flooring in Europe. Following the early success in Scandinavia, other northern European countries, primarily Germany and the Benelux countries, began to market laminate flooring. Distribution then spread quickly throughout the rest of Europe and continues today. Standards in Europe are continually being created and have the force of law.

Laminate flooring crossed the Atlantic to North America in the mid '90s and was brought quickly to the market. The results surpassed even those experienced in Europe. The North American consumer discovered she could have a product of beauty with incredible wear and



Since arriving in North America in the mid-1990s, the design and construction of laminate flooring has changed dramatically. Shown here is one of the early standards, an Oak look 3 strip in a 6mm thickness.

unmatched stain resistance. Kitchens quickly became the primary room for laminate floors.

The retailer enjoyed unexpected ease of stocking and servicing. Dye lots, found in ceramic or textile, are non-existent in laminate flooring. This retailer benefit also assured the consumer of exact match in tone and color, even if additional matching flooring was purchased and installed a year later.

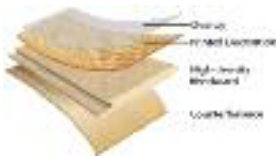
Soon, U.S. and Canadian manufacturing operations began to produce the product, as North America took to this new category in unparalleled numbers.

selling points

## Seven traits to emphasize

Compared with other types of flooring, laminate offers a number of distinct advantages. Salespeople can use the following selling points in their presentations to consumers. Of course, understanding their lifestyle needs is an important first step.

**1. Laminate flooring is durable.** Protected by a tough external layer and resin coating, laminate is just as strong or stronger, scratch-resistant and longer-lasting than any hardwood, vinyl or carpet.



**2. Laminate flooring is easy to install.** Not only are most laminate sections smaller, designed to interlock and easier to work with, but laminate can also be installed over most non-textile existing floors. In this “floating floor” method of installation, laminate is

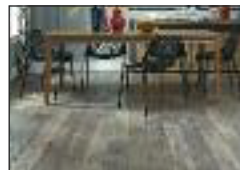


laid or “floated” over the existing floor without being glued to the surface. This saves considerable time and installation cost. Additionally, the introduction of glueless laminates further revolutionized ease of installation in the flooring industry. Today, nearly 100% of residential laminate flooring is glueless.

**3. Laminate equals value.** Not only is laminate generally less expensive to start with, but its durability and longevity provides a strong value proposition.



**4. Laminate flooring offers a variety of styles.** Originally, most laminate floors replicated only the most in-demand wood floors. As laminate grew in popularity, however, other looks were introduced, including highly realistic stone and marble. Designs are limited only by the imaginations of the producers.



**5. Laminate flooring is stain, fade and moisture resistant.** Most laminate flooring manufacturers offer extensive warranty protection against stains, fading and moisture damage. Nearly all other types of flooring cannot offer this triple protection.



**6. Laminate flooring is easy to clean and maintain.** Laminate’s wear- and moisture-resistant surface coating make spills and other messes easy to deal with.



**7. Laminate flooring is environmentally friendly.** Since it is made from paper, laminate’s manufacture does not involve the harvesting of old-growth hardwoods as does that of wood flooring. Laminate also contains no elements that affect indoor air quality. And many components of laminate are made with recycled content. Finally, when a laminate floor does need replacing, it can be destroyed with no danger to the environment.



# The four core components of a quality laminate floor

**H**ow can laminate flooring resemble hardwood, ceramic and stone so closely? The answer lies in the process by which laminate is made.

Most laminate floors consist of four components that are bonded together:

1. The top layer is a durable wear layer, providing protection and stain resistance. Many wear layers contain aluminum oxide, as well as melamine resin that creates exceptional durability.

2. A decorative layer or print film is adhered on top of the core board giving the floor its hardwood or tile look. This is a printed high-definition photo-reproduction of a wood grain, natural stone or ceramic tile pattern.

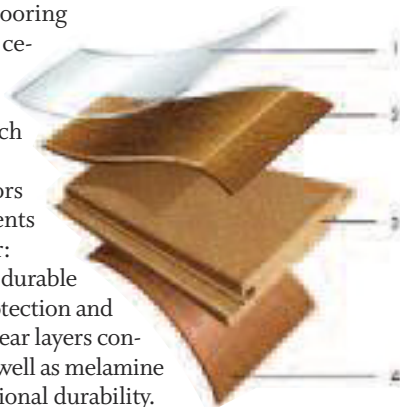
3. The next layer is a core board, generally made from high-density fiberboard or particle board, which may also contain melamine plastic resins that help improve the moisture resistance of the core.

4. The bottom layer, or backing, is a melamine plastic layer that lends dimensional stability to the planks and also helps guard against moisture from the subfloor.

All layers are then combined through some type of pressure treatment process.

## The process

Generally, it begins with the assembly of the four layers of raw materials in large sheets. This



Most laminate flooring consists of four layers: a melamine plastic layer for dimensional stability, a core board that helps improve moisture resistance of the core, a print film that gives the floor its look and a durable wear layer for protection and stain resistance. All layers are then combined using a high- or direct-pressure process.

typically takes place on a production line, where each layer is stacked on top of each other.

Once the four layers have been stacked, they are ready for pressing. The stacks are pressed at high temperatures reaching 400 degrees, with up to 600 pounds per square inch of pressure for 20 to 30 seconds.

If the laminate is designed to have a textured surface, the press has specialized plates that imprint the textured pattern onto the sheets, creating more natural looking visuals.

After a cooling process, the boards are cut into planks and then moved on to be profiled. Multiple profiling saws create the tongue-and-groove edges on the sides of the planks that enable the floor to lock together. The finished planks then go through a quality inspection and are checked for color, texture, finish, size and correct interlocking capabilities.

## OVERVIEW

### All you need to know about selling laminate

This is *Floor Covering News'* fifth Retailers' Guide to Selling Laminate Flooring. This supplement aims to help both the experienced and rookie salesperson better understand the category, which, in turn, can provide the foundation for helping the customer select the proper laminate floor for her lifestyle. Put simply, advances in manufacturing, printing and installation technology, new selling systems and more means today's laminate flooring industry is nothing like it was when the category was introduced to North America in 1994.

This guide is designed to give readers a better overall understanding of laminate flooring, encompassing everything from product to merchandising to the latest trends to the proper ways to install and maintain

them. That's in addition to successful selling strategies from those who know.

With the help of our sponsors, each page is filled with information designed to help dealers develop a profitable laminate flooring business and teach salespeople how to ensure their customers not only get the right laminate floor for their needs, but one that will stand up to their family's lifestyle. The booklet also elaborates on the features and benefits of owning a laminate floor and shows salespeople how they can position it versus other flooring products.

Once you become familiar with all the features and benefits of laminate flooring you'll be able to convey to your customers why it may just be the right choice for their homes. The negative image of this classic product is no longer; take the time to learn why.

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“A common misconception with laminate flooring is that thicker equals better. But this is simply not true. With Inhaus floors, once installed, there’s no technical difference between a 7mm and a 12mm thick floor. It’s the exceptional quality of our high density coreboard that makes all the difference.”

**Derek Welbourn**  
CEO, Inhaus

## state of the industry

# U.S. production, influx of European imports

Estimates provided by some of the category's leading players showed the volume of laminate flooring sold in America in 2015 fell somewhere between 3% to 5%, a drop-off mainly due to the large-scale pullback in non-CARB 2-compliant Chinese imports sold

through Lumber Liquidators. At the same time, however, revenue estimates attributed to North American Laminate Flooring Association (NALFA) companies representing major U.S. and European manufacturers and marketers were reportedly up double digits

for the year, thereby potentially offsetting the negative impact of the overall decline in volume shipped.

Anecdotally speaking, that put total estimated 2015 U.S. laminate flooring sales in the vicinity of \$1.137 billion—up just 1.1% compared to 2014—with volume estimated to have fallen from 1.066 to 1.034 billion square feet. (Although some of the more generous estimates put that number even higher at about 1.3 billion square feet.) While some of the calculations vary widely, many industry executives are in agreement that the fallout from the oft-referenced “60 Minutes” exposé on laminate flooring imports from Lumber Liquidators had the single-biggest impact on sales activity and shipments during the year.

“It was an interesting year for laminate flooring,” said Dan Natkin, senior director, residential products, Mannington. “I use the word ‘interesting’ because with all the news about Lumber Liquidators there were some pretty major market shifts going on. We saw a dramatic decline in board shipments, particularly from China, although we believe production overall increased for the year. So when you look at the numbers, you definitely have some offsets in there.”

Jeff Francis, laminate category manager

## laminate 101: merchandising

### Can laminate sell itself?

BY KATIE RAYMOND

Senior channel marketing manager, Armstrong Flooring

Successful salespeople know this: Selling flooring isn't the objective, it is the result. Customers are in the store to buy. What determines whether they buy from you? Trust. Whatever their motivation for wanting or needing a floor, if they believe they can trust you for good information and fair prices, and trust the brands you offer to meet their quality expectations, you'll make the sale.

Today's laminates offer great visuals customers will love with new performance and installation enhancements. They trust you to help them through the selection process and recommend products to meet their lifestyle needs and know which brands are safe and reliable.

Much of our work to help retailers communicate these messages—and increase laminate sales and profitability—is done around merchandising, including professional retail store layout and promoting offerings through strategically placed displays.

Displays do more than simply present goods; they help increase sales while visually telling the story. The display should speak to the consumer: What does the laminate category bring to the consumer? It should pinpoint specific attributes. Laminate is durable and scratch resistant, so it's a good flooring choice for consumers with kids or pets. It's easy to install. It's easy to clean. It's competitively priced,

and its visuals are among the most realistic in the flooring industry.

Displays should feature large-format samples so a consumer can envision how the product will look installed. It should showcase unique designs that are only possible in laminate. Some products can offer a mixture of

species and colors in a reclaimed hardwood look with minimal repeat; this would be virtually impossible to achieve in real wood.

Knowing where to place displays can be just as important as knowledge about the product itself. Many retailers believe placing laminate displays near wood displays—and vinyl plank—is best so customers can

easily compare visuals across these hard surface categories.

However, we've found that the No. 1 way to sell laminate is to install it on the showroom floor. Retailers know when a customer sees the product in action, a lot of the selling is done. Also, many laminates are now approved for use on the walls—a great design application of which retailers should make consumers aware. Display laminate on showroom walls to enhance the story and create an additional sales opportunity.

Lastly, use the power of brands to distinguish quality products. Trusted brands are tremendous assets to retailers; they help bring people into the store and close the sale.



Displays do more than simply present goods; they help increase sales while visually telling the story. Shown is Armstrong's waterfall merchandiser.



Despite the onslaught of competition from other hard surface categories, laminate flooring is holding its own. Pictured is Architectural Remnants from Armstrong.

## drive consumption

for Shaw Hard Surfaces, agreed. “Obviously the confidence in sourced laminates changed the percentage of domestic demand in 2015,” he said. “We believe most domestic producers were up over the prior year.”

NALFA also tracked a sizeable falloff in product coming out of Asia in the weeks and months following the national release of the “60 Minutes” report. “Importation from China dropped immediately, resulting in a 2015 category volume loss of 3% to 5%,” said Bill Dearing, NALFA’s executive director. “This was essentially a purge of bad product and it should be applauded.”

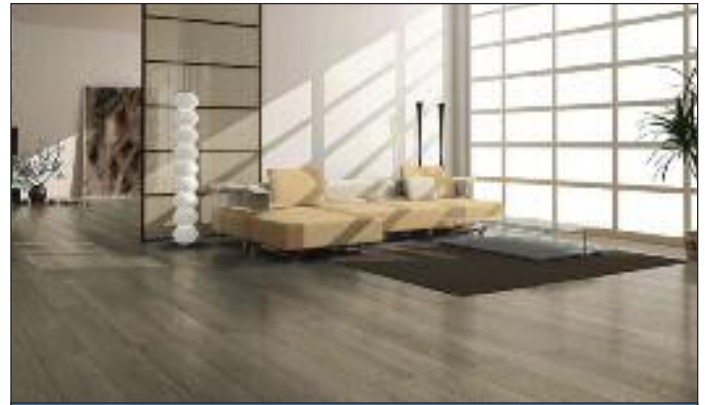
To understand the significance of this development and the subsequent effect on overall category sales requires an examination of the relationship of not only total laminate industry volume to revenues but also the sales of those companies that voluntarily report to NALFA. By Dearing’s count, NALFA-member companies actually ended 2015 up double digits in terms of volume and sales. This occurrence, he said, means that “the correct bad elements” were removed from the market.

Other industry observers attest to this shifting dynamic, although some admit that the direct impact might be difficult to quantify precisely. “What you have seen is a switch from offending product from China to U.S. and European-produced goods by many retailers fearing a backlash,” Travis Bass, executive

vice president of sales and marketing at Swiss Krono, explained. This “smaller overall market,” he believes, has come to represent a “larger opportunity” for U.S. producers.

While many industry participants with a clear vested interest in the viability and health of the U.S. laminate flooring category were no doubt concerned when the critical CBS network report first aired, some looked to turn an unfortunate development into a rare opportunity to reframe the message. “Certainly we didn’t like to see negative attention brought to our category; however, it has made all players involved focus on the quality of their laminate flooring products,” said Derek Welbourn, CEO of Inhaus. “We believe, in the long-term, that it will ensure that everyone will be held to a higher standard. Anything that elevates the overall quality of the industry is a positive.”

And that’s precisely the point that NALFA—which first began developing standards for the laminate industry nearly 20 years ago—is looking to drive home in today’s media-saturated world. One of its core tenets, Dearing said, is to inform the supply chain of the value of NALFA’s standards so they may then assist



The U.S. laminate market is experiencing an influx of product from Europe and America. Shown is Natural Prestige from Inhaus.

the consumer or end user in understanding that most laminate floors not only meet stringent product performance guidelines but, more important, adhere to current government regulations regarding indoor air quality.

While the laminate industry seemed to band together in mounting a unified defense against misperceptions about the category in the wake of the “60 Minutes” exposé, manufacturers also seized the opportunity to educate the trade and end users alike about the advantages of laminate and the strengths of their respective brands in particular. Not only did this demonstrate the resilience of the category in the face of competition from other floating floor products, but it also proved competition within the laminate flooring itself is still quite fierce.

“Overall, consumer demand for the category is still pretty strong,” Mannington’s Natkin said.

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: QUICK-STEP

## Using virtual technology to help consumers make educated decisions

Today’s consumers spend a tremendous amount of time researching online before, during and after their visit to a retail store. To that end, it is so critical for flooring manufacturers and, by extension, their retail partners to provide digital tools that help customers confidently move to the next step in their purchasing journey.

Quick-Step places special emphasis on digitally equipping its retail partners for success.

To that end, Quick-Step offers Style My Floor, a free digital app for use on hand-held iPhones, iPads and Android systems. Style My Floor lets consumers realistically see on their device, in real time, what a particular Quick-Step floor will look like installed in any room of their choice.

Using augmented reality, Style My Floor displays a virtual Quick-Step floor within the space allowing the user to visualize what the ex-

isting room will look like with the new floor installed. Style My Floor shows high-quality, high-resolution visuals of each Quick-Step product.

With a single tap, the consumer can easily view the entire product line. By letting the customer envision what her room will look like before making a purchase, Style My Floor takes away the guesswork usually involved in the process of selecting a new floor.

The features of the Style My Floor app don’t end there. With the system users can also take photos, share images, find a flooring retailer and receive up to five free product samples of Quick-Step flooring.

Quick-Step’s Style My Floor app makes selecting the right floor easy, fun and hassle-free for the consumer while supporting the in-store

sales efforts of its Quick-Step partners.

Retailers can download the free Get your Style My Floor app at <https://us.quick-step.com/StyleMyFloor>



Quick-Step’s innovative Style My Floor app helps customers envision their flooring projects.

## selling

# Specialty retailers leverage advantages

By Ken Ryan

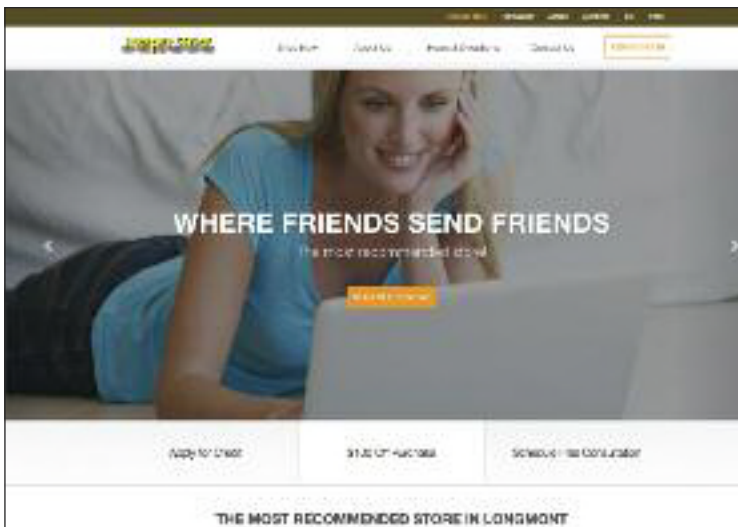
**S**am Chesher, owner of Carpet Wise, a Flooring America dealer in Longmont, Colo., knows about big box competition better than most. A Lumber Liquidators sits a mere 200 feet from his store. A Home Depot and a Lowe's is one mile away.

Chesher, who has operated his business in Longmont for nearly a quarter-century, finds that the proximity of the big boxes actually helps his business because it gives him and his staff the opportunity to differentiate themselves through product knowledge and customer service that the box stores either cannot or won't do.

Chesher is not alone among independent flooring dealers who are fighting the big boxes for the same laminate customer. Despite the fact more laminate flooring is being sold at home centers than ever before, there are steps specialty dealers can take to compete against the big boxes.

**1. Train, train, train.** The importance of proper and continuous training of your retail sales force cannot be overstated. Sales pros need to effectively communicate to their customers the difference between the 99-cent laminate flooring being pushed by Lumber Liquidators vs. the 12mm laminate you are stocking at a significantly higher price point.

"Make sure you have a story to tell," Chesher said. "If you don't have a story, all you have is a price negotiation, and that is a death spiral. You must train your staff be-



Longmont, Colo.-based CarpetWise lists its long history and affiliation with Flooring America among its competitive advantages over the big boxes.

cause if you do not, you are going to get your lunch handed to you."

**2. Add value every time.** For DIYers who want to install the laminate flooring themselves, offer to come to their home and do a free measurement. Some retailers use RFMS Measure, a flooring estimation software that handles estimating and layout of laminate and other flooring surfaces for projects of all sizes. With precise measurements, the customer isn't left with excess flooring or doesn't under order. Retailers say customers will remember that you provided your time and expertise to assist them—at no charge. It may help the next time they are in the market for product.

**3. Mark up accessories.** Mark up your laminate accessories 100%. This way, if you end up making little or no profit on your laminate sale, you can make some of it up in underlayment, transition strips, metal heat vents, etc. You are writing the order anyway, so might as well accessorize the purchase, according to dealers.

**4. Stock the best sell-**

While the big boxes promote low prices and bulk inventory, specialty dealers focus on upper-end goods and personalized customer service.

ers. By working with strong, reputed suppliers, retailers can stock the right kind of inventory that will help them maintain their margins. Said one dealer, "It's important to bring in the best sellers like Mannington and Armstrong. I don't try to chase what the home centers do—if you do you are dead in the water. We pick very good products to stock."

Also, remember not every customer is your customer. If someone walks into your store quoting a ridiculously low price from a big box store hoping you will match it, simply congratulate the customer and send her off. That's not your customer.

**5. Upselling.** It's OK to have a loss leader in your laminate line, just as long as it doesn't

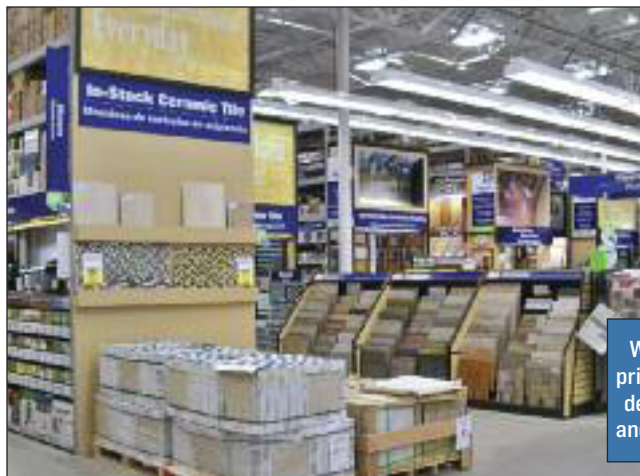
make up more than 5% of your overall sales. Smart specialty dealers have some product the big boxes have for the same price, but by moving up the customer even slightly, she will get a better product and you turn at least some profit.

Your best seller should retail for \$3.99 and higher, retailers said. You upsell the customer by how you present the product; show it on the floor and help the customer visualize it.

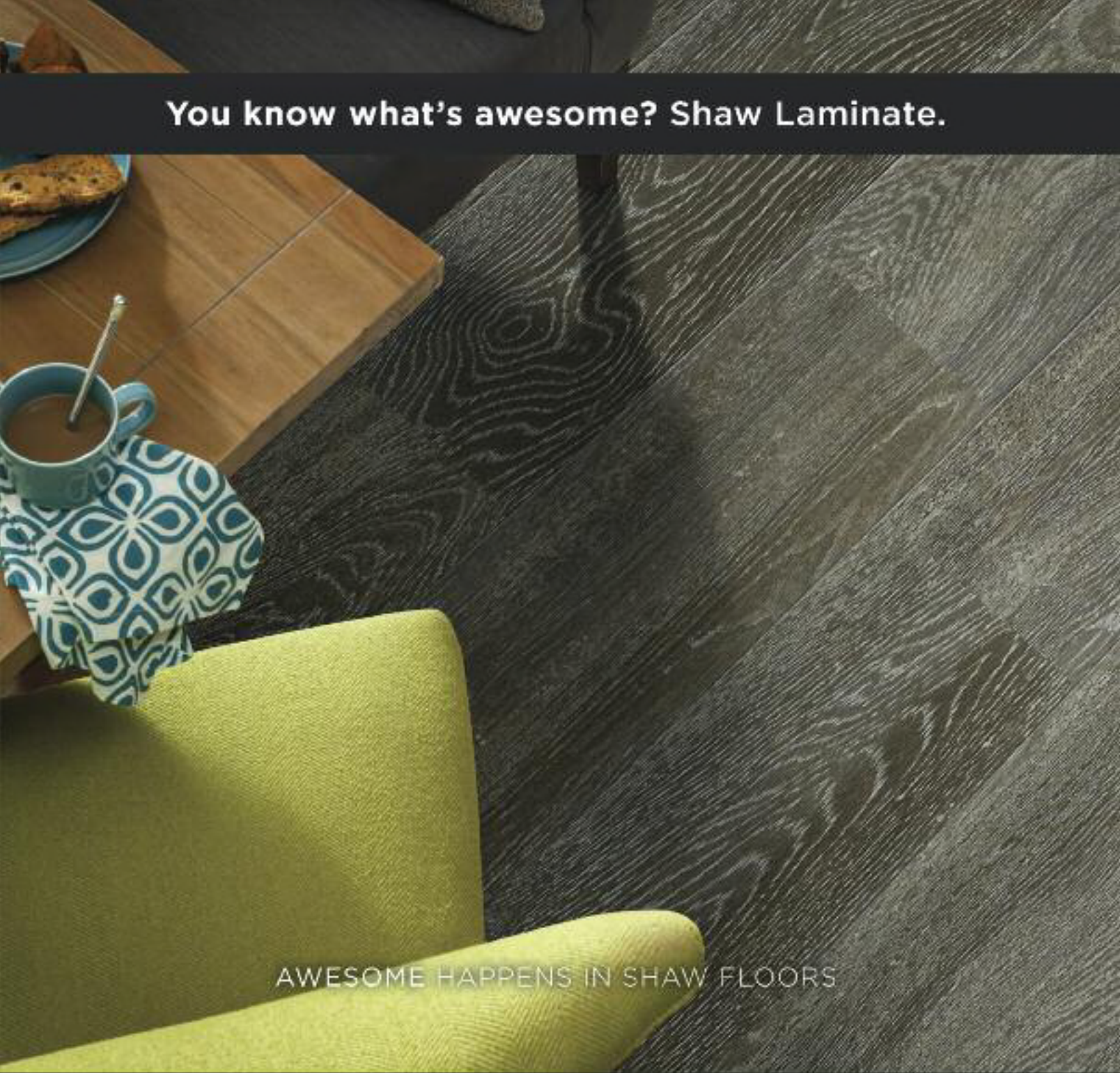
Another key, according to retailers: Cater to the high-end customer. Yes, they can be a pain in the butt—they need handholding and coddling; they need samples and color swatches. Service them. By providing the expert service on which independent dealers pride themselves, you can win the higher-end clientele, and it can be significant.

Know this: Only 20% of flooring consumers are driven by price; 55% buy because of the durability and ease of maintenance of the product.

**6. Merchandising.** Have plenty of options on the floor, displaying mid and high-end products. Keep the low-end laminate on cards or in books, not in a display rack. In other words, downplay it. Have some fun with the customer; tell stories; demonstrate by placing two laminate displays side-by-side, one with a thick underlayment and the other with a thinner, cheaper underlayment. Drop a golf ball on each to show the customer the sound-deadening qualities of the better underlayment.







You know what's awesome? Shaw Laminate.

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**Consumers today expect variety and products to match their busy lifestyles.** Shaw's extensive laminate assortment is perfect for those who desire a realistic hardwood visual and texture but need an easy-to-maintain floor at a value price. Not only is laminate beautiful and affordable, it's extremely durable - making it the perfect floor for kids and pets. **How's that for awesome?**

## laminates 101: selling

# Help customers decide between wood, laminate

BY BARBARA JUNE

Director of marketing, Swiss Krono

There comes a time in the product selection process where it comes down to hardwood vs. laminate. How do you help them make the right choice? Following are key selling points when helping customers decide between wood and laminate.

**Durability:** People often make a fuss about how long hardwood flooring lasts. However, they have to be refinished every few years depending on the amount of traffic or destructive tendencies of young children. Most laminate flooring is resistant to

wear, fading and staining. After 20 years or more, it will look as good as it did the day it was installed.

**Care:** Hardwoods and laminate require similar routine care to maintain their appearance. This entails regular vacuuming, sweeping and clean up any spills and you're done. However, hardwood is more

susceptible to scratching—as anyone with a dog or small children can attest.

Additionally, some unfinished hardwood floors are prone to staining from certain spills such as red wine, for example.

**Environment:** While both hardwoods and laminates use trees, laminate's use of pine trees harvested using ecological forest thinning operations and the absence of harmful chemicals give laminates a significant advantage in the green department.

**Installation:** Few installation jobs will cause consumers to evacuate their homes more than installing and/or refinishing hardwood floors. The dust, curing time and lingering smell are unpleasant at best, potentially hazardous at worst. Laminates can be professionally installed quickly and easily without nails or glue, and all the finishing is done at the factory as opposed to the customer's house.

**Cost:** Laminates last longer, install easier, are more eco-friendly and, with their embossed grain or handscraped finishes, are difficult to distinguish from hardwood. Plus, laminate floors are typically less expensive than hardwoods.

Ultimately, the hardwood vs. laminate debate boils down to whether the quality and beauty of modern laminate flooring matches not only the natural visual characteristics of hardwood flooring, but also how the two products stand up to everyday wear and tear. For many, laminate flooring will be the perfect choice.



Shown is exotic butcher block from American Concepts' Saranac collection.

## selling

# Features, benefits help

As an increasing amount of flooring options have become available in recent years, many consumers started to shy away from the laminate category. However, much like luxury vinyl tile (LVT), exotic hardwoods and cork, among others, technological advancements and realistic visuals have given laminate a boost, creating a comeback for the category.

A number of retailers throughout the United States have been successful with laminate over the last few years, citing wood looks as a top reason. “[Laminate] gets a bad rap, but the newer products are much, much better than they were 10 to 15 years ago,” said Adam Nonn, president of Nonn's Design Showplace, with three locations in Wisconsin. “Overall, I think laminate is picking up. A lot of people don't like the word ‘laminate,’ but when you see it installed it's a different story.”

As LVT poses more of a threat to the popularity of laminate, the old-school category kicked things up a notch, helping it catch the attention of consumers. “With the explosion of the newer looks of wood grain LVT at a much higher price point, you now have higher-end visuals of laminate with an equal or lower price point making laminate an equal or better alternative. In a strange way, LVT has helped the laminate category.”

For many customers in the market for wood flooring, they end up finding it is not the right choice; laminate provides a perfect alternative, especially because it can mimic the appearance of real wood. Similar to other types of flooring, it is crucial for retail sales staff to know more about a consumer's lifestyle when finding the right type of product for her needs.

“Factors may be cost, if she has pets and is concerned about their nails or paws, or if she wears high heels often, which will show marks

on hardwood,” Nonn said.

Knowledge of the advantages and proper application of laminate is key to increasing sales. Therefore, a significant contributing factor to retailers' success with laminate is employee training. If your staff is equipped with extensive knowledge about laminate, they are better prepared to sell consumers on products within the category. “We have about 400 people coming to one of our showrooms for training,” Nonn said. “We pick the cream of the crop, train them, show them what



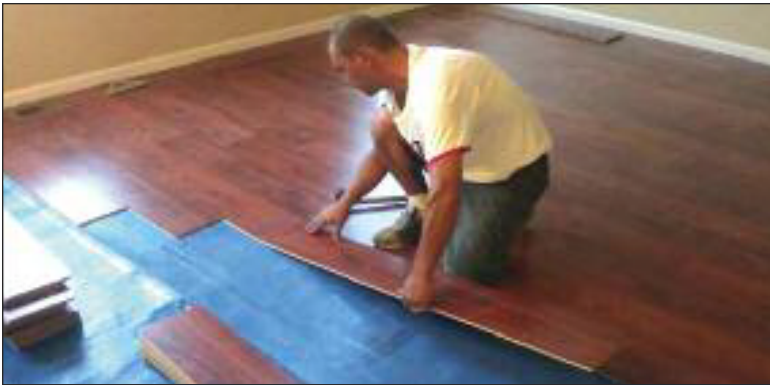
Selling high-end laminate products featuring wider planks and wood looks helps boost margins for dealers. Photo courtesy of Shaw Floors.

a laminate installation looks like, etc. Training is a big step in letting consumers know the benefits of laminate.”

Elaine Carlson, vice president of Century Tile & Supply in Chicago, also puts an emphasis on training. “We have spent nine months putting every employee through an extensive, full-day wood and laminate training session,” she said. “These workshops concentrated on selling features and benefits [of laminate] and gave them ammunition to sell against low-price shopping.”

For retailers who have not experienced success with laminate, there are several steps to take for improving sales. Experts say the task at hand for specialty retailers is to evaluate how they have historically done business in the traditional retail landscape and make the necessary changes in their sales approach to maximize success in today's market.

## dealers close the sale



Flooring retailers can profit from the installation of laminate flooring, which is best done by trained professionals.

Following are four points to focus on when developing strategies to build your laminate flooring business.

**1. Customer service.** Experts advise providing personalized service throughout the entire sales process along with style and design assistance, and product knowledge. This is a key point of distinction between specialty retailers and big-box, warehouse-style outlets. It's common knowledge that many consumers still value customer service over price point when making purchases for their homes. They also value someone making the shopping process as painless and hassle-free as possible.

**2. Selection.** Offering a wide variety of laminate products is another important factor when trying to increase sales. Competing channels generally carry a smaller number of products, observers say. This creates an opportunity for specialty retailers to offer a greater number of laminate products and samples to actually see, touch and feel when perusing product displays in a well-organized showroom.

**3. Installation.** Laminate has become particularly popular with DIY shoppers, namely because almost all laminate products feature click installation. "A lot of laminate is cash-and-carry and people can install it themselves," Nonn said. "With engineered and solid wood, you need some background, which isn't the case with laminate. Many DIYers are requesting it." At the same time, experts urge retailers to keep in mind that a portion

of the market would never consider a DIY flooring project. The logic being: These consumers trust and rely upon specialty retailers they perceive to be experts in the total flooring purchase to handle the critical component of successful installation.

**4. Price.** Perhaps the most important tip for specialty retailers is to avoid getting caught up in selling laminate flooring strictly based on price. Focusing on price over other attributes, such as realistic visuals and exceptional durability, will ultimately translate to reduced profits. The best-selling laminate products are those that offer a strong value proposition. In this context, "value" does not imply cheap, but translates to offering consumers a quality product at an affordable price.

"We have tried not to get into the price war game," Carlson said. "While we do have a selection of lower-priced laminates, we try hard via marketing, displays and training to feature and promote higher-end visuals. With the new technologies available today that create great surface textures and edge treatments, the quality of laminate being sold is traditionally medium high end to high end."

Carlson's point expands on the idea that the non-price features of a product are becoming more important as the economy stabilizes. "If specialty retailers get caught up in the game of selling solely on price, then profits suffer. Money is made by the consistent selling of the features and benefits found in a solid product line."

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: ETERNITY



Eternity laminate offering includes trendy styles and colors, including mixed-width/length products.

## Building a solid reputation via word of mouth, experience

Anyone in retail will tell you that today's flooring consumer is looking for three things in a laminate floor: durability, style and value. Although there are many options such as carpet, tile and hardwood to consider, laminate has emerged the winner for many homeowners. Once thought of as an entry-level option, laminate flooring has stepped up a few notches. New technology and innovative design have put laminate in a position to rival more luxurious options such as solid wood. In fact, it is almost impossible to spot the difference between hardwood and laminate.

As a leading manufacturer of resilient floors, Eternity has kept an eye on this ever-changing market. From humble beginnings, this brand has established itself in the industry by staying ahead of trends, offering various selections and producing high-quality products. You won't see the Eternity name plastered on a billboard or hear it on television commercials. Eternity's prevalence has come about almost exclusively by word of mouth. Among the primary attributes consumers cite are: ease of installation, superior product performance and advanced features such as water-resistant edges.

Within the 16 laminate collections currently available, almost all of which are AC4 rated, there is something for everyone—no matter what style consumers are looking for. There is a floor for every budget in the Eternity line-up, beginning with the basic Classic and V-Groove lines which include rich and contemporary shades compared to the basic colors typically available with other brands. There are also the tried and true collections like Cabana, Exotic and Frontier, to name a few, which remain popular choices simply for features like pressed edges, smooth textures or wire-brushed finishes. Rounding out the laminate lines are the newly offered Barnwood, Boulevard, Manhattan and Timeless collections featuring wide and random length planks as well as unique colors and finishes.



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## selling

# Optimizing sales through strategic positioning

Laminate flooring remains a viable option for flooring retailers who can position the product category as a suitable choice for high traffic areas, for its ease of cleaning and maintenance, for offering a range of colors and designs that mimic stone and hardwood flooring, and for being easy to install and relatively affordable.

FCNews spoke with several retailers about their proven selling strategies. Following are their recommendations on how to best present laminate to the customer.

### Laminate vs. hardwood

There are consumers who walk into a retail showroom interested in purchasing hardwood flooring. But that doesn't mean they cannot be persuaded to look elsewhere. "When we talk about the difference of laminate and hardwood flooring it is typically someone looking for hardwood who didn't realize how expensive some of these hardwood products can be," said Chris Green, owner of Great Southeast Flooring America in Melbourne, Fla. "Meanwhile, their budget is telling them they should be in the laminate category. That's where we can tell them they can be in laminate and still get the same desired affect."

A laminate floor with a walnut visual may fetch \$3.99 a square foot—compared with \$7 or \$8 a square foot for a real hardwood walnut. Oftentimes, the customer cannot tell the difference between the laminate and hardwood, a testament to the technology advancements in laminate. It's also important to point out that laminate flooring is appropriate for nearly every space in the home, including damp areas like bathrooms and basements, where solid hardwood is not recommended.

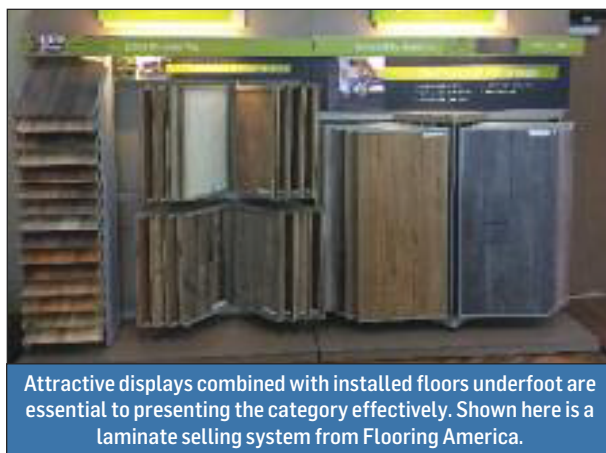
### Laminate vs. resilient

The popularity of LVT has hurt the laminate category to some degree. And while LVT has proven to be an amazing success story in the market, laminate has its advantages as well, retailers said. For one thing, laminate is greener than vinyl because the materials that go into laminate are primarily made of wood byproducts—96% of a laminate floor is made from

wood and wood fibers. These sources are renewable, unlike other flooring products that tend to have high petro-chemical content.

### Laminate vs. carpet

Before getting into the difference between the products, dealers may want to ask this question: "When do you plan on selling your home?" This is important because a well-manufactured laminate floor will hold its value longer than carpet. A quality carpet may last



Attractive displays combined with installed floors underfoot are essential to presenting the category effectively. Shown here is a laminate selling system from Flooring America.

10 years in a high-traffic household while a top laminate floor can last up to 30 years. Laminate is also easier to install than carpet and thus saves on labor costs.

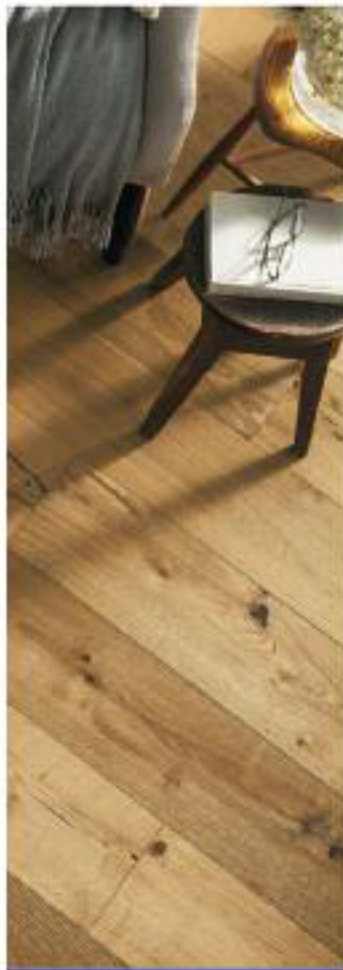
Furthermore, laminate's stain- and moisture-resistant surface coating makes spills and other messes easy to handle, which is another selling advantage over most carpet. There is also the advantage of superior indoor air quality: laminate flooring, does not trap dirt, dust or allergens, for example.

### Laminate vs. ceramic

Similar to hardwood, customers at the high end will often desire ceramic or porcelain tile because of its durability and high-end look. But laminate has some distinct selling advantages over tile, retailers say: comfort underfoot, cleaning (laminate does not require grout, which facilitates cleaning and maintenance), and most importantly, the installation cost of laminate is a big difference. Not only are the laminate flooring sections smaller, designed to interlock and easier to work with, but laminate floors can also be floated. This saves considerable time and installation cost.



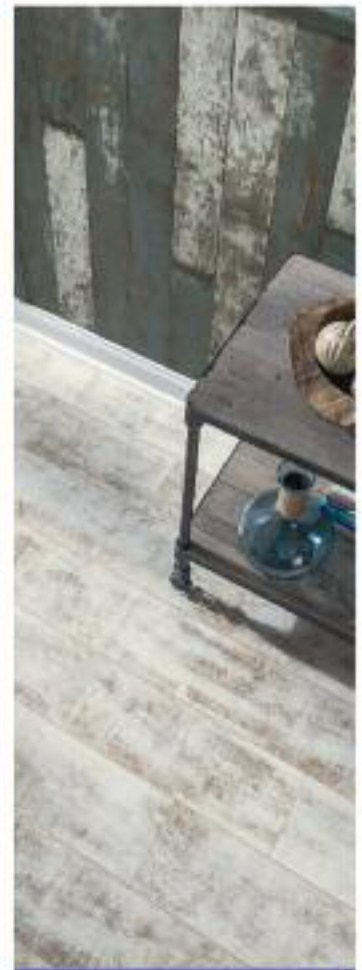
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## selling

# Building a higher comfort level by sharpening

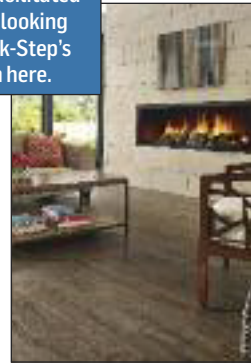
BY BILL DEARING/President, North American Laminate Flooring Association

Laminate flooring offers many designs and performance values, arguably more than any other flooring product. With that, the female consumer needs an expert to demonstrate the value-to-dollar options of quality

laminate flooring as well as help her visualize how that laminate flooring will look in her home—and she looks to a retail salesperson to be that expert.

Here are some tips to keep in mind the

Selling laminate flooring is facilitated when you have a distinctive looking product to sell, such as Quick-Step's Envique collection, shown here.



next time a potential customer walks into your store.

One easy rule to remember is a potential customer never enters a store just to browse. You are not selling magazines or shoes. She is gathering information for a major purchase. By understanding that customer's perspective and guiding her with your knowledge, she could make the purchase that day—an event that is very much in your control. As consumers ourselves, we recognize a person's time is valuable, and making a decision on the initial visit is very beneficial for her. Ninety percent of major consumer purchases have been researched prior to entering the store, and this pre-knowledge might be flawed. Thus, it is vital to have the needed information on hand once face-to-face.

Every person entering your store wants beautiful flooring that meets her quality expectations. After pre-qualifying her family's lifestyle wishes and needs, you can guide your customer to the desired design, product performance category, ease of maintenance details, and value for dollar by presenting quality laminate flooring as her No. 1 option. Quality laminate flooring has the proven attributes to fit each of these categories. However, you need the knowledge to quickly guide her to choices that match her expectations. You are not assisting as much as you are guiding.

**1. Performance:** The way to assure performance to expectations is to present NALFA-certified products. Why? NALFA-certified flooring and accessories must pass a series of independent tests. There is simply no other method that comes close to measuring the performance necessary for NALFA certification. We can assist you when you visit [nalfa.com](http://nalfa.com). Start by clicking on our Member Companies and their Certified Brands. You will discover many of their extensive and exclusive brands are already displayed within your store. Follow by clicking on our NALFA certification requirements. These cover performance as measured by ANSI approved methodology. This is a free resource to help increase your professional knowledge of lam-

## laminate 101: selling

# Overcoming common objections

BY JEFF FRANCIS

Laminate category manager, Shaw

Over the years laminate flooring has improved considerably. However, preconceived notions from old, inferior products, coupled with negative publicity questioning the category's safety, has at times made today's consumer leery of purchasing the product. Today's laminate is more sophisticated and visually stunning than ever. Here are five reasons consumers do not purchase laminate and your opportunity for education.

**1. "I don't like the sound."** When this concern is brought up by a potential consumer, it's important to show the coreboard thickness of premium laminate products. Not only do consumers equate product thickness with general quality, thicker products tend to help with noise reduction. Also, choosing the correct underlayment is critical. The saying "You get what you pay for" couldn't be more relevant than with laminate underlayment. Nothing can negate the "hollow" sound of laminate more than a good underlayment. Find ways to show the consumer a premium laminate coupled with a good underlayment to instill product confidence.

**2. "I'm concerned about installing laminate in high-moisture areas."** Just like with any wood-based product, laminate has limitations with moisture. However, through significant innovation and technological advancements, laminate continues to improve and address these concerns.

**3. "The products look fake and cheap."** Admittedly, most laminates once had an unnatural look. However, this is no longer a con-

cern. Today's laminate is so realistic through clarity of image and authentic texture it's almost impossible to tell the difference between premium laminate and hardwood. Make sure your doubting consumer sees just how far laminate has come visually. Consider laying a piece of premium laminate and a piece of hardwood on the ground side by side and ask the

consumer to pick out the laminate. She just might walk away with a completely different appreciation for laminate.

**4. "Isn't laminate dangerous for my family?"** Laminate products that are either produced in the United States or supplied by responsible brands that

meet NALFA (North American Laminate Flooring Association) regulations and are CARB 2 compliant are safe for installation. It's more important than ever before for retailers, as a homeowner's trusted advisor, to understand the variety of product certifications available for flooring including what each certification tests for, how that information is tested and how frequently those tests occur. It's incumbent on manufacturers to ensure their products are verified, clearly labeled and that ongoing education and training is provided to help retailers properly communicate to customers what those third-party certifications mean.

**5. "I've heard laminate is poor quality and will fall apart."** This is simply not true. Premium laminate is made in state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities from raw materials and components that rival the quality of any other hard surface flooring product. The manufacturing process is extremely technical and demands attention to quality controls.



Grand Summit laminate from Shaw Floors is manufactured using tight quality controls.

## your expertise

inate flooring.

**2. Cost for design:** The initial decision to potentially purchase is how the product looks, not its cost. Beautiful designs are linked directly with price because they are developed by the manufacturer's marketing department as individual patterns.

Here's a tip to help a client understand laminate flooring differences by using a completely different product category:

Everyone understands that automobile pricing is linked to brand, performance and design, and we only accept the guidance of the dealer's salesperson when trust is earned, and that must be done quickly. (You also must quickly gain trust.) Car prices range from cheap and economical to mid-range to luxury. No one expects a cheap car to perform the same as a more expensive car; therefore, we, as consumers, evaluate by comparing the appearance and features that will work close to our budget. Remember: If the purchase does not perform to expectations, the buyer blames the brand or the dealer but never the category.

Mannington's Treeline Oak features rich graining and vast color variation from plank to plank.

In laminate flooring, you are the expert. It is your professional responsibility to explain the actual value to cost, which includes the design of the floor, the supplier's reputation and their product guarantees.

Showing the floor's simple and performances of the floor's assembly features support the "wow" factor of the design. Talk about cleaning and the quality of NALFA certified underlayment (either attached or floating). NALFA certification acts as the independent assurance for your client.

**3. Design:** You know some cheap products contain only one or two planks of designs within a package. You can help your customer understand the implication of shoddy design methods by pointing out that when installed, this floor will certainly not meet her design expectations and, additionally, might not perform.

**4. Don't argue—guide:** Professionally explain that value to cost offers the greatest opportunity to fulfill your customer's expectations and make financial sense. Pro-



fessional, friendly guidance reinforced with expert knowledge gives you the best opportunity to close a sale and provide your customer with confidence in her buying decision—that is the No. 1 unseen element that creates word-of-mouth advertising and repeat purchase opportunities for you.

At the end of the day, the consumer will be persuaded most by her immediate impression of the retail sales associate. So it's critical to establish a strong rapport quickly.

For more information on becoming a NALFA certified sales expert or on NALFA certified products, contact the association at 202.785.9500 or email [information@nalfa.com](mailto:information@nalfa.com).

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: MOHAWK

## Mohawk laminate billed as the go-to product for busy consumers

Thanks to Mohawk's impressive innovations in this flooring category, laminate is quickly becoming a go-to product for today's consumer.

With the most authentic looks in laminate, Mohawk also prides itself on being the first to market with the hottest styles, latest trends and most sophisticated features. Our meticulous attention to detail during the development of each product's décor and surface structure results in a level of realism, richness of color and intricacy of design that competitors' products lack.

In addition to being affordable, Mohawk laminate has one of the lowest claim rates. It is tough, durable and able to be used instantly without acclimation. Laminate flooring can be installed on any level of the home and in any seasonal climate. It is fade, dent and scuff resistant.

Laminate installation is immensely easier with Uniclic, the tightest locking system in the industry that can be installed via direct tap or drop-and-lock. Although others have tried to duplicate it, there's only one Uniclic technology. Our revolutionary, glueless locking system simplifies laminate installation, reduces installation time and strives for complete customer satisfaction with a lifetime locking sys-



Mohawk strives to stay ahead of the hottest styles and latest trends in laminate flooring. Pictured is Celebration Pearl.

tem warranty.

Mohawk laminate also features GenuEdge Technology, a revolutionary innovation that delivers the most realistic hardwood edge visual ever seen in the industry. Adding the GenuEdge treatment to our already authentic surface designs achieves a level of realism unmatched in laminate flooring today.

And when it comes to manufacturing, Mohawk is one of the few companies that makes laminate coreboard in compliance with California Air Resources Board (CARB) Phase 2 strict certification for formaldehyde emissions. Each laminate flooring has earned FloorScore certification for indoor air quality standards as well as the North American Laminate Flooring Association (NALFA) certification for demanding per-

formance standards.

Tammy Perez, Mohawk's director of hard surface brand, summarizes the benefits of laminate flooring: "Mohawk laminates are beautiful and easy to install. This is a product in which we experience virtually zero claims and ultimately ensures that homes sell for more money. That's a win-win situation for everyone involved: retailers and proud homeowners."

## merchandising

# User-friendly displays ease the shopping experience

By Nadia Ramlakhan

The techniques retailers use to display products can oftentimes make or break a sale, especially when it comes to laminate. That's why it's so important to make an immediate and positive impact on the consumer at the point of sale.

"The whole objective is to simplify [the process]," said Eric Mondragon, hard surface buyer for the flooring division of RC Willey Home Furnishings with multiple locations throughout Utah, Nevada, California and Idaho. "It can get very confusing with the amount of choices customers have today. We have to narrow down the best products from quality [manufacturers] and make the shopping experience easier for customers."

Most retailers recommend having large samples on display in the showroom, giving potential buyers a better and more realistic idea of how certain looks play out in a larger space, whereas with smaller samples it can be a challenge to picture a product covering an entire floor. However, because larger samples are difficult to handle, it is also a good idea to keep smaller swatches available.

"Customers like large samples because they give them the ability to visualize what it's going to look like in their own homes," Mondragon said. "But because they are so large, customers aren't eager to take them home. It serves both purposes as far as visuals and keeping samples on the floor."

Surprisingly, retailers who sell large amounts of laminate don't position the category against hardwood. Instead, laminate usually makes up its own section on the floor within the hard surface area. One reason for this placement is consumers aren't shopping based on



At RC Willey Home Furnishings, custom display systems are used to showcase only the best products from each manufacturer.

the 3,500-square-foot showroom space, he uses one merchandising system throughout the store in which each manufacturer makes custom samples to fit. The displays hold 15 large sample boards 20 to 25 inches wide by 31 inches in length, with seven on each side and one in the center.

"Typically any time you have a supplier's full display unit out on the showroom, 80% of it doesn't get sold," he noted. "I take the 20% that I normally would sell and put those in my displays."

Each company has its own display (some have two) and makes a header to fit. After reviewing sales every few months, Mondragon and the manufacturer decide together which boards need to be replaced.

When a customer walks into America's Carpet Barn, she immediately sees laminates lined along the entire 35-foot-long, right-side wall. This approach was inspired by a trip to Las Vegas during which Rogers saw a similar set up from a carpet mill. Since this kind of display wasn't for sale, Rogers glues Velcro to the back of the boards and sticks them onto a carpeted wall. Using this method, customers can easily pull samples off the wall for a closer look.

Rogers encourages retailers to use actual product as opposed to manufacturer samples, which do not show end joints, he said. By snapping a few boards together, customers can actually see the product installed with seams. Since beginning to display its laminate products on the wall three years ago, Carpet Barn's category sales have increased three-fold. "When people walk in they see this wall of laminates and say, 'Wow! This is nice.' They spend a lot of time looking instead of quickly browsing through."

All of Rogers' bases are covered with a 10-foot wide section of laminate also installed on the floor. He has customers walk on his best sellers while examining their options and when they are done they can peruse through four 4 x 8 tables with four types of laminate installed on each. "This section is meant to be used as a workshop; customers can snap and un snap the boards. They love to feel it and look down at it because that's the way they're going to see it in their homes."

materials or product types; they are typically looking for a particular style or appearance. "Consumers come in to find a certain visual," Mondragon continued. "Then depending on their lifestyles we qualify them to a product we feel will fit their needs and give them options from there."

Ron Rogers, founder of America's Carpet Barn in Traverse City, Mich., believes "it's a generational thing" and that customers either want hardwood or laminate. "They are two totally different customers. The younger people want laminate; the older ones want hardwood."

For some retailers the merchandising process begins before they even choose suppliers. Eric Langan, owner of Carpetland USA in Davenport, Iowa, carefully decides which companies to work with so that when it comes to displays, he doesn't have to make the decisions. "We're selective with who we partner with. But once we make that decision, each manufacturer has a good variety of samples on their displays. They do most of the work for you."

Although manufacturer displays tend to offer a range of colors and sizes, other dealers take matters into their own hands and provide their own displays to complement them. Dawn Iversen, president and owner of Jerry's Floor Store in Fridley, Minn., has a system of her own generic displays that carry entry level or value-based products. "We'll fit a mixture of a couple styles of laminate, maybe a couple prefinished woods or a few tiles at a lower price point in there, and keep them primarily in the hard surface area."

Mondragon said his custom displays are what make his business successful. Since real estate is limited in



Tables make for great work spaces where customers can assemble glueless laminate boards.



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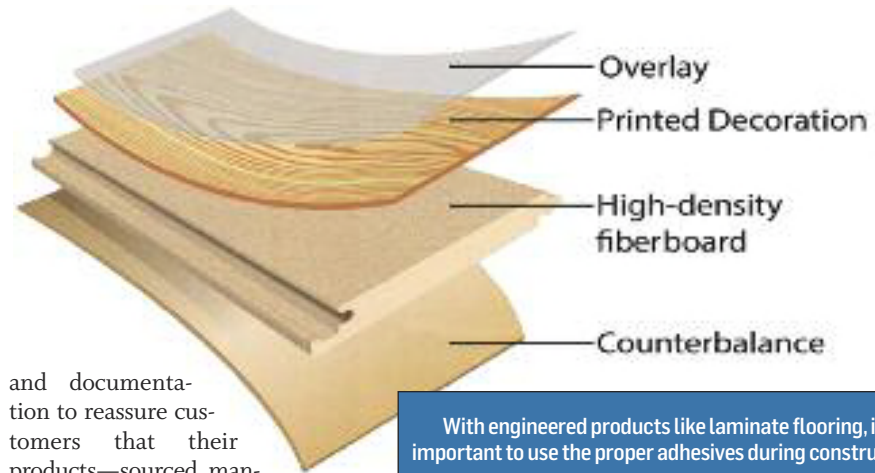
## environmental

# Industry stresses compliance to dispel myths,

By Ken Ryan

When the CBS program “60 Minutes” sent undercover investigators to three Chinese factories that produce laminate flooring for Lumber Liquidators, it exposed excessive levels of the carcinogen formaldehyde in the glue used to bind wood particles that make up the core of the laminated boards. In testing commissioned by the show, 30 of 31 boxes of the product labeled compliant with California Resources Board (CARB) were not, with some emitting as much as 13 times the CARB 2 limit. Then, in February 2016, a subsequent report from CBS showed the risk was much higher than initially reported.

It didn't take long for that scalding report to reverberate throughout the flooring industry; by the next morning, manufacturers, distributors and retailers responded with letters



With engineered products like laminate flooring, it's important to use the proper adhesives during construction.

and documentation to reassure customers that their products—sourced, manufactured, distributed or sold in the U.S.—comply with the leading environmental standards, including CARB 2.

The report raised serious concerns about products sourced from China and the controls manufacturers have in place to ensure these goods are in compliance. Several flooring

companies responded with press releases. FC-News submitted articles that detailed their own CARB 2 compliance.

For flooring retailers who face the challenge of a more skeptical customer base in the wake of the Lumber Liquidators report, pro-

## laminate 101: selling

# Extolling the category's tremendous value proposition

BY STEFANIE WONG  
Marketing coordinator, Inhaus

With the recent rise in home design culture, today's consumer is more informed and passionate about design trends than ever before. They walk into your store with a pretty solid idea of what they like and what looks good. That being said, there are still several misconceptions about the laminate category that they may not be aware of. As a salesperson you can reassure them that despite the current popularity of competing products, laminate flooring continues to offer some of the greatest value in the entire flooring industry. Here's why:

**Realistic looks:** A customer's main concern is “Will this enhance my home?” Utilizing the latest printing and finishing technologies, today's laminates are no longer the 3-strip floors of years past. With a virtually limitless selection of colors and designs combined with highly realistic embossed-in-register textures, the fashion-forward laminate flooring products available today are just as visually compelling as hardwood.

**High performance:** For those with a busy household and pets, laminate provides incredible scratch and wear resistance, does not fade in sunlight, and performs better than some wood or plastic products. Its

density and overall performance characteristics are also perfect for the customer who wants to host or has children in their home.

**Ease of installation:** As a floating floor system, laminate requires less subfloor preparation than other hard surface products. Its rigid high-density core means that minor subfloor defects won't be translated to the surface. With today's premium angle-fold locking system, installation can be quick and easy, allowing your customer to get back to their life immediately after installation has been completed.

**Low maintenance:** The recommended cleaning for laminate floors is to use a vacuum or dust mop/broom to remove loose debris, making it one of the lowest maintenance options. Then occasional damp mop (never wet mop) with a water-based solution to remove stubborn stains. Laminates maintain their look for years to come without the need for refinishing and can be repaired and replaced by the plank to remedy any damage.

**Bang for the buck:** In terms of value, you'd be hard pressed to offer a floor that delivers more than laminate. Offering authentic visuals, high

performance and high durability at a fraction of the cost of solid floors, engineered wood floors or plastic products, you can recommend laminate to your customers with confidence.



Laminate flooring offers authentic visuals, high performance and high durability at a fraction of the cost of competing products.

# misperceptions

U.S. companies that import laminate must ensure their supply partners adhere to CARB II regulations.



viding credible information will be key, as well as delivering reliable facts in a straightforward manner. This is true not only as it relates to formaldehyde in laminate and engineered wood products produced in China, but to other requirements for all product categories.

Many flooring industry executives see this Lumber Liquidators story as an opportunity for specialty retailers to leverage their expertise and win over customers. Right there with the dealers are the supplier partners helping retailers communicate the benefits of CARB 2-compliant flooring while allaying fears.

Ironically, specialty flooring dealers said their laminate sales have spiked since the original Lumber Liquidators report. Still, some remain skeptical as to whether consumers are paying attention. Others contend the megastore may have damaged the category for all participants in the laminate supply chain.

Eric Langan, owner and CEO of Carpetland USA, with nine locations in Iowa and Illinois, told *FCNews* the numerous accusations against Lumber Liquidators are severe. "It's my opinion that the vast majority of the U.S. population is unaware of what that company has done and is doing. I would imagine the mainstream public is generally unaware of the claims, accusations, penalties and fines Lumber Liquidators has incurred since March and look to buy from an alternate source.

At Carpet Wise Flooring America in Longmont, Colo., which is about 1,000 feet from a Lumber Liquidators store, laminate flooring sales have skyrocketed since the news first broke. "We have seen a 32% increase in this category, particularly high-end laminate," said Sam Chesner, owner. "After the '60 Minutes' story and the added competition in hard surface, one would have thought this category would decline. Laminate has been the most surprising category for us by far."

Nick Freadreacea, president of The Flooring Gallery in Louisville, Ky., said the most recent report has had an immediate impact in that consumers are asking questions about material bought from Lumber Liquidators, such as: "How quickly can you get their material out of our home and have something else installed."

## A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: SHAW FLOORS

### Innovations run the gamut from aesthetics to moisture resistance and easy installation

Despite the onslaught of flooring products available on market today, laminate is still a smart selection for the consumer. It is a perfect option for homeowners who want the look and feel of hardwood but have budgetary limitations or lifestyle concerns. At Shaw, we focus on training RSAs to match those consumer lifestyle requirements to the correct flooring option. We want to make sure whatever flooring type is selected, the consumer will be happy with the end result. And much of the time, laminate is the proper recommendation.

Not only is laminate visually stunning with superior realism and unique textures, but it is also extremely durable, standing up to life's most challenging mishaps. Also important to note, laminate is easy to install, whether the consumer chooses a do-it-yourself approach or professional installation.

With Shaw manufacturing and supplying products in all flooring categories, it affords us certain competitive advantages most other companies can't claim. We are in the unique position to benchmark trends from other categories to ensure our laminate visuals not only emulate the most popular and best-selling hardwood, LVT and EVP (enhanced vinyl plank) looks, but also those that will coordinate with carpet fashions to best serve the modern-day consumer's desire for multiple flooring surfaces

within the home. We have our finger on the pulse of consumer preferences in every category, which tremendously benefits our laminate offerings and ultimately our customers who sell Shaw products.

Additionally, Shaw is committed to leading the industry in laminate innovation around moisture, noise and ease of installation—not to mention our stellar reputation for superior quality, safety, and carefully following and adhering to industry compliances—which sets us apart. Retailers never have to worry about products either manufactured by or sourced from Shaw Floors and can sell our products with confidence.

We will continue innovating within the laminate category. Over the last 12 months alone, we have introduced several new products that have been widely accepted at retail with sales exceeding

our expectations. Four that have been especially impressive are Designer Mix, Designer Choices, Grand Mountain and Grand Summit. Designer Mix and Designer Choices both feature the popular mixed-width visuals with three sizes coming in each box. Grand Mountain and Grand Summit both showcase longer and wider planks, perfectly answering the current consumer demand of longer, wider hard surface products. All four styles do a wonderful job of affirming Shaw's ultimate goal: visually and mechanically narrowing the gap between hardwood and laminate.



Shaw Floors' Designer Mix laminate series features mixed widths and sizes.

## selling

# Dealers employ creativity to generate interest

Although laminate seems to have lost some of its popularity—due in part to the rise of competing products, namely LVT—the category still carries benefits that appeal to consumers: durability, ease of maintenance and simplified installation. Retailers who still generate significant business from laminate focus on these well-known advantages.

“Durability is the key with laminate,” said Ron Rogers, founder of America’s Carpet Barn in Traverse City, Mich. “But if an ice cube melts on the seam, it’ll ruin it. Right now we are only selling Balterio from IVC—it’s waterproof and I think that’s going to be the only thing to save laminate flooring. When IVC combined durability with waterproof features, it took off like wildfire.”

Independent flooring dealers provide a personalized shopping experience for the customer, a perk specialty retailers should optimize when selling laminate. While big box stores and major home centers are known for low prices,



The waterproof attributes of IVC Balterio allow laminates to be installed in spaces prone to spills, such as kitchens.

it is recommended that retailers stop competing with major outlets altogether and concentrate on delivering a simple, easy and painless buying process for the customer.

“The best thing a specialty retailer can do is stop trying to compete with the big boxes and focus on selling their strengths,” said Eric Mon-dragon, hard surface buyer for the flooring divi-

sion of RC Willey Home Furnishings, with multiple locations throughout Utah, Nevada, California and Idaho. “They should staff professional sales associates who can correctly qualify the consumer to products that best meet her needs. Consumers will gladly spend a little extra to have a great shopping experience.”

At RC Willey, laminate sales have increased by 20% over last year, although units are down 13%. This translates to consumers opting to buy higher-grade laminate. The sentiment is the same at America’s Carpet Barn, where laminate offerings consist only of high-end product, benefitting both the business and the customer.

“I make a nice profit out of laminate because I don’t offer the lower end,” Rogers said. “The key is to only offer the nicer laminates and make it about quality instead of price points. We don’t sell \$0.69 or \$0.99 laminates because we wouldn’t make money on it. We don’t want our customers to have problems so it’s not worth it.”

Many dealers agree that laminate has a story to fit multiple consumer needs. No longer targeted toward the budget-conscious, first-time homeowner, new technologies have made laminate an ideal fit for a larger audience.

“Initially laminate was all the same regardless of the manufacturer; it was a wood plank look,” said Dawn Iversen, president and owner of Jerry’s Floor Store in Fridley, Minn. “Since then it has expanded into stone, different sized tiles. As the product category was growing, we started to see the return of our past customers. A few years ago it may have been the younger customer attracted to the price, but with the evolution of style and design, 40- to 50-year-olds are coming in interested in the product.”

Iversen makes sure to promote all of laminate’s advantages including those that come with the forgiving nature of the material, allowing it to be installed over existing products. “Instead of tearing out underlayments and tearing the customer’s home apart, laminate is a better solution,” she continued. “It takes less time and is less of a headache. It could cost several hundred dollars or more for some units to accept a new sheet vinyl, whereas laminate floors may be installed over existing conditions. It offers a more efficient solution and could be cheaper for the customer in the end.”

Another surefire way to generate a larger profit from laminate is to simply have it in stock. Product that is ready for immediate installation is desirable for customers who want to make the process as easy as possible, dealers say.

## laminate 101: installation

# An invisible feature with big impact

BY ULF MOLÉN

Director of sales & marketing, Välinge Innovation Sweden AB

Although a locking system is not visible to the user after installation, it is a feature that will have a direct impact on the perceived quality of the flooring. All laminate floors are installed as floating floors and constantly move due to humidity changes. The locking system must be active during the entire lifetime of a floor. No one likes gap openings or lipping, and it is a well-known fact that a robust and strong locking system is imperative to avoid such problems.

While a locking system with no play might solve the problem with gapping, it simultaneously runs the risk of resulting in floor edge lipping due to pre-tension in the locking profile. Furthermore, some floating installation methods require tools to lock the

floorboards. The consequence of using a hammer and tapping block to snap the boards in place can cause damage to the floor’s top surface, also known as chipping, which, in turn, might result in customer claims.

The locking system in a floor can ensure that the installation is an enjoyable experience, which typically means a fast and easy process with great results. However, it also has impact on the final product and, in

the end, customer satisfaction. With the 5G fold down technology, for example, you don’t need to be a professional to install a floor. The single-action installation method ensures anyone can do it while having the confidence that the locking system delivers a floor that looks great for a long, long time.



Välinge’s 5G fold down technology simplifies installation for both the rookie and the professional floor layer.

# Don't forget to tell your customers the difference.



American Concepts laminate is made  
with real American timber.



LVT is made from crude oil.\*



- We're made from real timber
- Our wood = sustainable forest management practices
- LVT = dwindling oil supply
- Healthier than LVT for the home and the planet

\*Source: [www.whatisvinyl.com](http://www.whatisvinyl.com)



## trendspotting

# Lighter colors, improved textures rise in popularity

Laminate flooring manufacturers are counting on continued innovations in the way of performance and design to not only help the category keep pace with competing hard surfaces but also to give specialty retailers more products that can't be shopped at the big boxes.

Many of the recent advances and developments span the spectrum from 12mm to 14mm boards featuring improved cores and more realistic wood visuals. Manufacturers are showcasing their capabilities via new color renderings and depth of textures with floors designed to authentically replicate varied techniques from light surface treatments and subtle wire brushing to heavy hand scraping.

"We're making things today that experts cannot distinguish from high-end hardwood that's much more expensive," said Roger Farabee, senior vice president of marketing, Mohawk Hard Surfaces. "We're just getting unbelievable acceptance of products today by customers who would not have even consid-

ered it five or 10 years ago. It's important that we continue to leverage that."

Mohawk Flooring has taken color and style cues straight from its hardwood collections. Chalet Vista, its top performer in laminate, is an 8-mil product with wider and longer planks featuring Uniclic technology that helps guard against moisture penetration. "Everyone has moved away from the traditional, smooth golds, reds and cherries to distressed grays, creams and browns with a little bit of gold tones with a blend of some black in there," said Tammy Perez, director, hard surfaces, Mohawk. "We also have a coastal look for those regions that like them."

Historically, colors in the U.S. have leaned toward vibrant reds and golds but the gap between European and American tastes has gotten smaller, manufacturers noted. "We're seeing a little more interest in European-style colors," said Travis Bass, executive vice presi-



Reds are out, grays and browns are in. Shown is Mineral Oak from Quick-Step's Elevae collection.

dent of sales and marketing, American Concepts, a Swiss Krono brand. "You're seeing more maples, whites, whitewash—colors have lightened up and [beach-like] looks are trending. Reds are definitely out.

In response to the shift, American Concepts has come up with several decors in the past year (such as Saranac and Morgan Hill) with plans to introduce products about every six months as opportunities arise.

BerryAlloc is also getting on board with the trend toward lighter shades and tones, especially grays and Old World European looks, by revamping two of its popular collections: Grand Avenue and Original.

## laminate 101: selling

# Marketing to today's time-strapped shoppers

BY TAMMY PEREZ

Director of hard surface, Mohawk

Laminate is experiencing a Renaissance thanks to innovative technology and savvy styling. Consumers are often taking a double take due to the precise detailing that goes into every board to capture the look and feel of authentic hardwood.

Laminate flooring is a practical choice not only because of its beauty and durability but because it is easy to install, easy to clean and easy to maintain, making this the go-to flooring option for today's busy consumers.

The best approach to displaying laminate is to quickly and conveniently provide the information customers are seeking when they shop a retailer's showroom. Mohawk wants consumers to instantly understand that laminates are:

- Developed to capture the unique character found in the most sought after hardwood
- Practical for households with kids and pets as well as entertainers
- Much more resistant to denting, scratching and fading from sunlight
- Easy to install and can be installed on any level

With green products becoming such a hot commodity, it is impor-

tant for your customer to know laminate is an environmentally friendly flooring option, often made with recycled materials and requiring no harvesting of rare trees. Laminate floors are exceptionally durable and resistant to both staining and fading, providing worry-free assurance that the new look of the floor will last over time.



RSAs should present laminate as a more practical solution to a homeowner's needs, not as a cheaper alternative to wood.

A number of laminate brands, Mohawk included, are made in the USA. Consumers feel more confident trusting products produced in the U.S. under U.S. standards and regulations. There is also a renewed pride supporting brands that keep Americans working. When it comes to displaying laminate in the showroom, present it similarly as hardwood with larger formatted samples featured in a similar display. This allows the consumer to focus on the visuals and not be distracted by product that is displayed in a completely different manner.

When it comes to closing a sale, present a hardwood and laminate product with similar features, hide the edges and ask the consumer to attempt to

guess which product is which. Sales associates will find that consumers rarely guess the right answer. This Dare to Compare test is a great way to communicate the similarities and differences in hard surface products.

Finally, RSAs should present laminate as a more practical solution to a homeowner's needs and NOT as a cheaper version to wood.

## trendspotting

# Wider widths, thicker planks gain momentum

When it comes to top-selling patterns and designs in laminate flooring, bigger definitely appears to be better. Thanks to innovations in printing and manufacturing technology, suppliers are able to render wider boards (6 inches and higher) in much longer plank formats. What's more, manufacturers are able to offer multiple widths in each box, thereby expanding installation options on the job site.

"There is a renaissance in laminate where everybody wants to step up their game and go to next-generation models," said Brad Northcutt, laminate sales manager, IVC US.

Northcutt cited another benefit to thicker laminates: improved noise reduction. "Balterio [IVC's laminate offering] doesn't have that clickety-clack sound you typically get with laminate where you feel like it's moving under your feet."

The transition to wider, longer planks is also paving the way for the move to thicker boards. Increasingly, manufacturers are expanding their offerings to include 14-mil products as an alternative to the popular 12-mil format. "When we looked at our strategies

and priorities from a retailer's standpoint, the biggest thing for us was to focus on the 12-mil category because that's really where all the growth and focus is in the industry," said David Moore, product director for Unilin, North America, parent company to Quick-Step. "We see that consumers value thicker products and we are responding to the marketplace."

Quick-Step's Elevae is a 12-mil offering with extra-long 54-inch planks that are 6½



Mohawk's Chalet Vista speaks to the trend toward wider, longer boards.

inches wide. "It sounds better, feels better and you can get more depth in the surface texture," said Erinn Valencich, Quick-Step's celebrity designer partner.

Pergo, another well-known brand, is now available in a beefier format. The new Pergo line, which is now under the Mohawk umbrella, will feature 12-mil products at mid to upper-mid tier price points.

Other companies are taking thickness to the next level with 14-mil introductions. "The cheapest prices are in the 6-, 7- and 8-mil range," said Franck Taubert, group export commercial director, Alsapan. "We offer 14-mil; it's still a niche market but we know when the 6-, 7- and 8-mil range hits rock bottom 12 will be the next target." The company's latest launch, Creativ', comes in four colors and is focused on selling patterns rather than individual planks, particularly Creativ' Heringbone and Creativ' Ladder.

Then there's Grand Selection Origin, the newest addition to Swiss Krono's premium Grand Selection line and the company's first 14-mil offering targeted toward high-end consumers in the market for laminate.

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: ARMSTRONG

## Rethink what's possible: Armstrong brings originality, practicality

Armstrong Flooring has always understood a floor has to excite and inspire the consumer, yet deliver on the more rational concerns around quality and value. This is where laminate shines—from incredible, innovative looks and, most important to customers, the confidence to live on the floor every day.

Drawing inspiration from art, nature, fashion and culture, Armstrong Flooring designers transform the latest interior trends into fabulous floors. The biggest innovations in laminate revolve around design—realistic texture, unique visuals and random-width planks and color. When it comes to design options, there is no limit with laminate.

Armstrong Flooring is the only laminate manufacturer to include the look of multiple species combined with multiple unique textures and a high number of unique plank visuals within one design. With additional variations in plank visuals, the company provides the broadest selection of realistic wood reproductions in the market. These groundbreaking designs are brought to life in such brilliant detail they are often mistaken for the real thing.

"We pride ourselves on having designs with two to three times the number of unique visuals than most manufacturers, so when you lay it on the floor it has the variety of real hardwood," said Sara Babin-

ski, design manager, hardwood and laminate. "Traditionally laminate visuals have followed hardwood trends pretty closely, yet we are able to offer a focus on laminate's ability to translate specialty looks that are difficult or impossible to do in real wood, with textures to compliment the design so it is realistic to the touch, too."

A new trend is using laminates, such as Architectural Remnants and Coastal Living Patina, on walls as accents and dramatic design effects. "Consumers are loving this," Babiniski said. "Plus, it gives the retailer an opportunity to make another sale."

Beneath all this striking beauty and realism is quality and durability. Homeowners can live life comfortably on these floors without living in fear of every scratch or scrape. Armstrong Flooring laminates are built around a solid core for stability, lasting durability and moisture protection. HydraCore protects the floor from surface spills and subfloor moisture, so it's at home in kitchens, basements—any room in the house. Plus, it installs over nearly any existing floor with no mess and no hassle. And Lock&Fold is the fastest, easiest two-step installation available. Just lock and fold, and the floor is ready to be lived on.



The popular Architectural Remnants laminate collection pairs the elegant look of high-end, reclaimed hardwoods with diverse species, colors and realistic rustic textures.

## laminate 101: selling

# Reclaimed looks generate buzz

BY PAIJ THORN-BROOKS  
VP brand marketing, Quick-Step

The growing interest in reclaimed hardwood created a unique problem for manufacturers: satisfying consumers' hearty appetite for the material (and the look) in the face of limited resources for recovered woods typically repurposed for "new" flooring. Laminate flooring essentially solves this problem by virtue of its ability to mimic virtually any hard surface, reclaimed looks included.

For consumers in the market for laminate

planks that are highly authentic, they will find them to be virtually indistinguishable from real reclaimed wood once installed. However, be sure to seek out a truly fashion-based laminate line that offers a variety of reclaimed designs. These might range from time-worn, weathered, saw-cut, wire-brushed looks to chattered, cerused and

white-washed visuals.

But unlike rough-hewn boards, laminate is a surface consumers can live with. No splinters that could damage clothes, furniture or skin; planks are typically lighter than traditional reclaimed hardwood; a professional installer or DIY-er can easily install an accent wall as a weekend project; and it's easy to clean.

Another great benefit of reclaimed flooring is its versatility. Increasingly, designers are coming up with more creative scenarios by installing reclaimed hardwood looks on walls. Accent walls can liven up an otherwise dull space. Plus, these walls offer just enough texture, pattern and color to make a room more interesting without overpowering the space.

The most popular accent walls are those that bring the beauty of reclaimed wood into a room. Unfortunately, the challenge for most homeowners is that real reclaimed wood is often over budget. The perfect design solution is to place laminate flooring on the accent wall. Laminate is the perfect way to add the same style, charm, beauty, warmth, texture, and artistry of reclaimed wood at a price that fits most decorating budgets.

## accessories

# Moldings, trim add the finishing touches

A successful laminate flooring installation requires a few accessories that lend themselves to a more professional job. All laminate flooring manufacturers produce their own accessories. However, it is best to keep to one brand of laminate flooring and accessories rather than mixing-and-matching to ensure all the flooring and accessories match for color and pattern.

### Underlayments

There are various types of underlayments. The type to choose will depend on the subfloor, and considerations like noise transmission.

- **Damp-proof membrane (DPM):** Used to provide a moisture barrier when installing laminate over concrete or heated subfloors.

- **Foam:** Evens out minor irregularities in the subfloor and reduces impact sound. A damp proof membrane is also required if the subfloor is concrete.

- **Combi foam:** Includes foam underlay and a damp proof membrane in one product.

- **Board:** Premium underlay system, higher performance for walking comfort, sound reduction and thermal insulation. Evens out minor irregularities in the subfloor.

- **Sound+DPM:** Combines a damp proof membrane with enhanced sound proofing qualities. Ideal for upstairs rooms.

### Trims

There are numerous shapes and sizes from which to choose depending on the installation requirement.

- **Scotia bead:** Used to cover the expansion gap left around the edge of the laminate flooring up to the existing skirting boards.

- **End molding:** Used in situations where beading is not suitable, against patio doors, etc.

- **T-molding:** Used between two laminate flooring sections to create an expansion joint in large floor areas. Also used as a transition bar between laminate flooring and another floor covering of the same height.

- **Decorative skirting:** When there are no existing skirting boards (or they are being replaced), the perimeter gap around the laminate flooring can be covered with decorative skirting boards that match the laminate flooring.

### Transition bars

These accessories are used where the laminate flooring meets another type of flooring or sur-



VersaWalk from MP Global Products offers superior performance under nail-down, glue-down or floating laminate floors.

face, such as a doorway. Various colors are available to match the laminate flooring.

- **Carpet transition:** Used between laminate flooring and carpet.

- **Hard surface transition:** Used between laminate flooring and ceramic tiles or vinyl flooring.

- **T-molding:** See above.

### Stairs

When installing laminate flooring in halls and landings, it is sometimes required to laminate the staircase as well.

- **Stair nose molding:** Used on the leading edge of the step to hide the two edges of laminate flooring. Available in various colors.

### Floor protectors

It is preferable to use floor protectors on all furniture to prevent scratching of the laminate flooring.

- **Felt pads:** Self-adhesive and simple stick on the feet/base of all furniture.

- **Castor cups:** For any type of furniture with wheels, use rubber-based castor cups and simply place the wheel of the furniture in it.

### Sealants and repair kits

Sealants are used where an expansion gap is required but not possible to fix a molding over it. Repair kits are suitable for most small scratches.

- **Sealant:** This is normally an acrylic-based product that allows a certain amount of movement. Various colors are available to match the laminate flooring.

- **Repair kit:** Comes with a few colors that enable mixing together as desired to provide the best shade suited for the area of the damaged board. Most include a spatula, the repair paste and a couple bottles of pigment.



Laminate flooring is not just for floors anymore. They are increasingly gracing vertical spaces.



## underlayment

Using underlayment plays an important role during the installation of laminate flooring, including sound deadening and moisture mitigation.



## What you need to know about sound testing

**R**eported sound test results for laminate underlayments can be somewhat confusing and, perhaps, misleading. There are three different laboratory tests for sound vibrations traveling from one living area to another:

1. Impact Insulation Class (IIC). IIC evaluates the ability to block impact sound by measuring the resistance to transmission of impact noise or structure-borne noise (simulating footfalls, objects dropped on the floor, etc.).

2. Delta IIC. Delta IIC consists of two IIC tests, one for 6-foot concrete and the other for that same 6-foot concrete with underlayment and laminate included. The difference between those two readings is the delta or “change-in” IIC. Delta IIC provides a more direct method to evaluate the impact sound deadening characteristics among different underlayments.

3. Sound Transmission Class (STC). STC evaluates the ability of a specific construction assembly to reduce airborne sounds, such as voices, stereo systems and TV.

Non-laboratory, “field” tests for impact sound (FIIC) and airborne sound (FSTC) are also available. These sound tests utilize

the same testing methods as IIC and STC but are conducted in an actual building after the floor installation is completed.

The International Building Code (IBC) suggests ratings of 50 or higher for both IIC and STC, and ratings of 45 or higher for FIIC and FSTC testing.

It is important to note that IIC/FIIC and STC/FSTC tests are not single component tests, but an evaluation of the whole floor/ceiling assembly, from the surface of the floor covering material in the upper unit to the ceiling in the lower unit. An integral part of a report for any of these sound tests is a detailed description of the floor/ceiling assembly used in the test. IIC/FIIC and STC/FSTC tests are essential tools for evaluating sound in multi-level dwellings. However, without knowing the whole floor/ceiling structure used in the test, the results are basically meaningless.

Using IIC (FIIC) and STC (FSTC) results to represent the sound-deadening ability of an underlayment without describing the whole floor/ceiling assembly used in that testing causes confusion at all levels of the marketplace and can be misleading.

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: SWISS KRONO

## Made in the United States for American consumers’ tastes

The Swiss Krono Group has its origins in a company founded in Menzau, Switzerland, in 1966. Today it is one of the world’s leading producers of engineered wood products with more than 4,500 employees in Switzerland, France, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Russia and the United States.

Swiss Krono USA, known as KronotexUSA until 2016, began distribution in the United States in 2000. In 2005 the company opened its current manufacturing facility in Barnwell, S.C., where it creates virtually any style, shape, finish, texture, scrape, bevel, locking system, thickness, size and attached pad of laminate flooring planks. The company’s products are sold through distributors, dealers and chains nationwide.

One of the company’s most successful product lines is American Concepts, a collection of 57 SKUs sold through distribution to specialty retailers. The line includes 7mm through 12mm planks, some with pad attached. What’s more, the products offer consumers a lifetime warranty.

In January 2016 Swiss Krono announced several changes designed to provide distributors, retailers and consumers the best innovations and quality in laminate flooring. The manufacturer also changed its name to Swiss Krono to reflect the parent company’s Swiss heritage in woodworking and precision technology. In that



Swiss Krono recently announced plans to expand its state-of-the-art plant in Barnwell, S.C.

same time frame, all divisions operating across eight countries where Swiss Krono has a presence changed their name and logo to reflect this pooling of expertise and knack for research and development.

Swiss Krono’s state-of-the-art plant in Barnwell is ideal for both accessing wood from sustainable forest suppliers and shipping flooring more efficiently. The company employs American workers in highly skilled management, marketing, design, sales and customer service positions—all of which are based in Barnwell. American workers craft some of the best products in the world. To that end, Swiss Krono believes it has assembled the best workers in the world to make the best floors in the world using high-quality ingredients sourced from its suppliers in North America and Europe.

## Installation

# Variations in latest locking systems

While good looks and performance are major selling points, a key component of any laminate floor is ease of installation. Technological advances in the past few years have led to several variations of the tongue-and-groove design, enabling interlocking elements to slide into place with no fuss or mess.

These sophisticated locking systems enable the floor to be laid down and taken up again whenever necessary. This enables installers to save time so they can move quickly from one job to the next while allowing do-it-yourselfers to save money on installation. Most laminates require angle-fitting along the length of the plank and end-to-end while some brands

use tongue-and-groove locking, and the ends of the planks fit or drop into place.

The number of glueless laminates and “click” flooring—where the tongue of one plank is “clicked” into the groove of another—has transformed the marketplace, each offering features to compare and benefits to weigh. Experts say the quality of the locking mechanism is critical to the durability and look of the floating laminate floor.

The following chart provides a sampling of some of the major locking systems licensed by laminate flooring suppliers, a brief description about how they work and distinguishing features/benefits.

Locking system Manufacturer	Locking System	How it works	Features and benefits	Licensees
Classen	Megaloc	Long edges are engaged at a 45-degree angle. As planks are lowered into place short edges automatically lock together. Megaloc utilizes a plastic clip made from PET plastic that is compressed during the dropping motion and then snaps back into its original form when the short end is in the correct installed position. This creates an audible “snap” sound resulting in a locked end joint. This all occurs in one motion.	Fast, glue-free installation that does not require a tapping block or special tools. Multiple rows can be installed at one time. Joints are injected with Isowaxx during production, ensuring easy installation and enhanced moisture resistance.	Classen has cross-license agreements with both Välinge and Unilin, and their respective licensees.
Unilin	Uniclic	Proven glueless locking profile for both sides of flooring panels. Enables angling and snapping/sliding installation methods.	Provides fast and simple installation in all situations and results in extremely strong locking and seamless joints with no height differences.	Unilin has 72 licensed laminate flooring partners worldwide that are authorized to use its technology. Uniclic has patent protection thanks to cooperation agreements.
	Unifit/Unifit Plus	Allows for multiple installation possibilities including the popular angling and snapping/sliding installation methods in Uniclic. Provides vertical locking along the entire width of the profile and the ability to use one insert for all plank widths.	Unifit technology results in one of the strongest and safest fold-down systems on the market, is suitable for high-speed production lines and easily integrated into those lines.  Unifit Plus has the additional advantage of having pretension in the profile, pushing the panels once assembled toward each other. This makes it possible to create waterproof fold-down connections.	Unilin has 72 licensed laminate flooring partners worldwide that are authorized to use its technology. Unifit has patent protection including fold-down patent rights.
Välinge Innovation	5G fold down	5G fold down secures installation with a visible and audible locking function. When a panel is folded down, a flexible plastic tongue is pushed into a tongue-groove. As the panel reaches its final position, the locking tongue snaps out into a wedge groove, emits a “click” sound and locks the product vertically.	5G enables a significantly faster and easier installation compared to traditional locking systems. The optimized profile, including plastic tongue on the short side of the floor panel, achieves a strong and robust locking with a single motion. The panel is just folded down and no additional angle or snapping movement is necessary.	Välinge pioneered the concept of floating floors. The 5G fold down system has been used by more than 80 licensees worldwide in the production of hundreds of millions of square feet of flooring. In total, more than 220 licensees such as Alloc, Armstrong, Berry Floor, Faus Group, Shaw Industries, Tarkett and Witex are using or have used a Välinge locking system.
	2G	2G angling locking system is machined in the core material. The system is preferably combined with 5G fold down on the short side for fastest and easiest installation. However, it can also be used both on long and short sides for an angle installation.	2G is marketed as the strongest integrated locking system on the market. The system offers a high locking angle and requires no installation tools.	

## ABCs of proper installation

Today there are many manufacturers producing laminate flooring products. Most have their own specific installation guidelines; however, the overall process is the same.

Almost all laminate floors employ a floating floor installation, meaning the planks simply lay

on top of the floor without being adhered to the subfloor. They are only adhered to each other on the edges. Or, the side seams can be joined using a glueless installation where the planks tightly interlock together.

In general, there are six basic steps to install a laminate floor:

1. The first step an installer takes when laying a laminate floor is to closely inspect the subfloor for any imperfections. While no floor is perfectly level, the subfloor should be checked for any noticeable gaps or ridges that could cause problems.

2. Acclimation. The installer will also make sure the laminate planks or tiles have had sufficient time to acclimate to their new surroundings, usually in 24 hours.

3. The next step is to put down an underlayment directly over the subfloor. This allows the floor to expand and contract with changes in temperature and also acts as a sound and moisture barrier. The underlayment is typically rolled out and taped together at the seams. Many laminate floors now come with an attached pad, making the installation of laminate that much easier.

4. Begin in the left corner of the area and



Although manufacturers may have their own guidelines, installation basics remain the same.

leave a minimum ¼-inch space between the flooring and the perimeter walls. This is done because the laminate requires space around the edges of the room to expand or contract. If the floor is touching or too close to a wall, it can buckle in the middle.

5. Along the wall, use spacers to ensure the accuracy of this perimeter space. Then use one spacer for each square foot. Once the floor is fully installed, the spacers are removed and the perimeter gap is covered with quarter round trim or a wall base.

6. To finish the installation, molding is added to cover the perimeter gap as are transition trim pieces needed in doorways or where the laminate meets a different type of flooring.

### Common laying methods

1. **Glueless.** This method lends itself to quick and easy installations. A thin, plastic underlayment is needed to seal out moisture from below.

2. **Attached underlay.** These floors come with several different types of tongue-and-groove locking systems and an attached underlayment to reduce noise levels.

3. **Glued flooring.** The original laminate floors that require a special formulated glue to be applied to the tongue-and-groove of each plank.

4. **Pre-glued.** The glue is already applied to the tongue and grooves. A thin, plastic underlayment is needed to seal out moisture and prevent the glue from sticking to the substrate.

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: VÄLINGE

## The many advantages of 5G fold down technology

The obvious advantages offered by fold down installation systems have resulted in a trend toward implementing them in more products. While there is a range of available systems from which to choose, some factors make the 5G fold down technology by Välinge Innovation stand apart from the competition.

#### Faster and easier

Tests have shown that a floor can be installed up to two times faster with the 5G fold down technology compared to other installation systems. This is primarily attributed to the ease of the system. The floor panels are installed with a single movement by angling the long side (the Välinge 2G profile) and folding down the short side (the Välinge 5G profile). The locking system includes a flexible glass fiber-reinforced polymer tongue that creates a strong and permanent pre-tension during the lifetime of the floor. It secures locking while simultaneously providing an audible cue that the panel is in the correct position. It's so simple that everyone can do it—without worrying about making mistakes.

#### Stronger

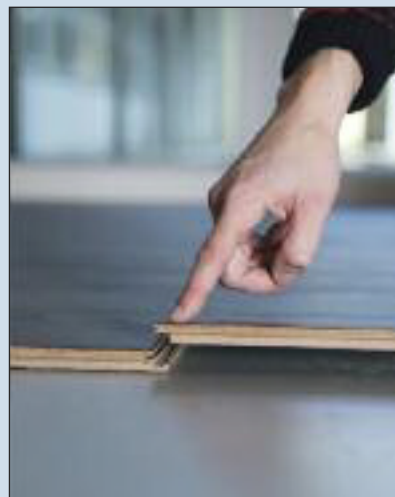
Locking strength, both horizontal and vertical, is

one of the main benefits of the 5G fold down locking system. The separate, flexible plastic tongue provides high locking strength with large overlapping locking surfaces and easy locking in all types of core materials and floor thickness. This is a unique feature that makes the 5G locking system less dependent on core material properties and production tolerances in comparison to other locking systems.

All Välinge locking systems are particularly developed to allow high-speed production with normal production tolerances. The geometry is such that dimensional changes due to normal swelling and shrinking are completely eliminated.

#### Patent protected

Välinge's patent portfolio includes more than 1,200 granted patents as well as cross-licenses and non-assertions covering IP rights from companies such as Classen, Unilin, Windmüller, US-Floors and more, thus providing great protection for the flooring producers. The L2C labels applied on flooring products manufactured in China enable importers and distributors dealing with laminate products to easily identify non-compliant manufacturers and products.



All Välinge locking systems are particularly developed to allow high-speed production with normal production tolerances

## cleaning & maintenance

# Regular upkeep goes a long way in making sure

One of the biggest advantages of laminate floors is they are made to look good for many years with minimal effort. They require no special products or equipment to maintain their look. For cleaning purposes, a vacuum cleaner, dry mop and perhaps a damp towel

for the tougher stains are all that's needed to keep laminate floors looking good.

Laminates are built to stand up to wear, but like any product, there is a degree of requisite maintenance. By offering a few recommendations, sales professionals can help

educate consumers on the proper way to clean and maintain laminate floors.

Although it mimics the look of hardwood flooring, laminate flooring requires different cleaning care and can't be treated the same as a true wood floor. Here are some tips from the pros to tell your customers:

First, the end user should dust mop the floor regularly with a micro fiber dust mop. Although sweeping or vacuuming gets the bigger debris,

most brooms and vacs leave behind the smaller particles of dust that a micro-fiber dust mop will catch. This is important because minute pieces of sand and rock, which are often ignored or unseen, are almost as dangerous as the larger pieces. Small pieces of sand and rock that move

around the house will not cause evident scratches, but they can cause microscopic scratches. After a period of time, these microscopic scratches will pile up and cause dulling of the floor. However, micro-fiber mops usually do the trick if used regularly. They are available in 18- and 24-inch sizes and in several styles.

As a precaution, it is advised that homeowners place floor mats and foot brushes outside doorway entrances to keep sand or rock from entering the home. Dirt can also lead to scratching that eventually will dull the floor.

Next, an occasional damp mopping is suggested. The key here is damp, not soaking wet. Getting a laminate floor too wet can cause water to seep between the joints, causing the flooring pieces to swell and suffer damage. Sales pros recommend to damp clean the laminate floor using a vinegar- or ammonia-based solution. They suggest pouring a quarter cup of vinegar into a 32-ounce empty spray bottle filled with plain water for a quick solution. Then dampen a terry mop or a Swiffer with water and mop, spraying the floor as you go. When damp mopping, standing fluids should be avoided so as not to saturate the floor.

Other possible cleaning fluids that have

## laminate 101: maintenance

# Keeping floors looking newer longer

BY DORON GAL  
President, Eternity Floors

While laminate floors are built to last a lifetime, they do require some maintenance to ensure they continue to look beautiful over the long haul. Fortunately, this can be achieved with minimal effort. Following are a few tried-and-true cleaning and maintenance tips:

- Sweep or use a dry Swiffer on a regular basis. By preventing abrasive dust and debris from accumulating, you are less likely to experience scratch marks on the finish of the floor. Vacuuming with the wood floor setting and beater bar removed is also a good practice.

- Use a quality cleaner designed specifically for use on laminate floors. Brands such as Bona offer superior cleaning agents that won't harm the surface of the floor.

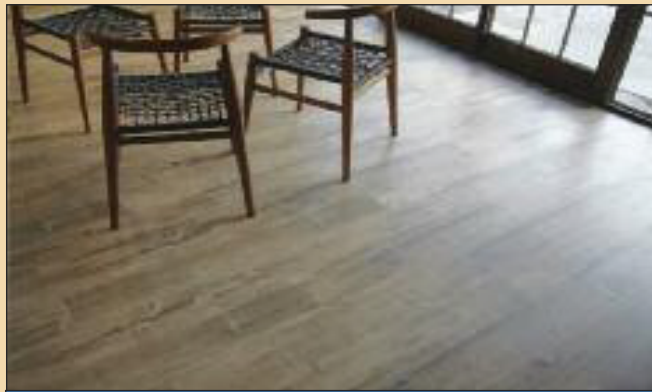
- Refrain from using a damp mop, which retains too much water. Excessive moisture can leak into the seams of your floor. It is best to use a microfiber cloth.

- Never use wax, oil-based detergent or any other household cleaners on the floor. These may dull or damage the finish, leaving a greasy film and making the floor slippery and more difficult to clean.

- Although laminates are stain resistant, the surface may occasionally become tarnished. To remove stains, use a type of solvent (i.e., mineral spirits or paint thinner). Any one of these items will remove surface

stains caused by soda, wine, oil, grease, gum, etc. After using a product to remove the stain, there will be a slight haze on the floor that can be fixed by buffing with a dry terry cloth.

- Place natural fiber rugs at entry points to help trap grit and absorb moisture that may damage the finish. This can protect the



By applying simple techniques, laminate flooring can keep up its appearance for many years.

floors from dirt or water.

- Wipe spills immediately. Be especially attentive to sink, dishwasher, stove tops and dining rooms.

- Add felt pads to all furniture and chair legs to prevent damage to the floor. However, be sure to replace the felt pads when they wear out or become dirty. For extremely heavy objects, use wide, non-staining rubber cups.

- Keep high heel shoes in good condition. Damaged or worn high heel shoes may expose a metal tip, which is certain to damage the surface finish.

- Shield floors from direct sunlight or any intense source of artificial lighting. Over time, intense natural and artificial light may



Everyday household cleaning products can be used on laminate floors, which do not require wax, polish, oil or varnish.

## floors stand the test of time

been suggested include a combination of vinegar, rubbing alcohol and water (equal parts)—one-third white vinegar, one-third rubbing alcohol, one-third water and three drops dish-washing liquid (1 quart total).

Do not use polish or wax on these floors.

While laminate floors are especially durable, as with any hard surface flooring they can be scratched or gouged. If there is furniture in the room, it is suggested that homeowners use felt pads or wide-base casters under the pieces. Moving heavy furniture without these pads will cause the floor to scratch.

### Tips on spot cleaning?

To remove oil, paint, permanent marker, tar and rubber heel marks, experts recommend using a neutral cleaner on a clean, light-colored cloth. If needed, alcohol or a nail polish remover containing acetone can be used. To remove blood, fruit juice, wine, beer, soda pop and pasta sauce, warm water should be used. To remove chewing gum, harden with ice then scrape very gently. Wipe the rest with warm water on a clean, light-colored cloth.

In case of more severe damage, which is unlikely to take place in most homes, a trained professional can be called to replace a plank.

The new plank should be almost indistinguishable from the others, if done properly.

Spills should be wiped up immediately because liquid can seep into the cracks or joints of the floors and cause them to become weak and damaged. Liquid can also cause the lamination to wear away. Despite having easy

care requirements, laminate generally cannot be refinished and must be replaced when damaged. Because it has a wood or fiberboard core, large spills and excessive moisture can damage a laminate floor. Thinner versions are less expensive but do not resist wear as well and will degrade in a matter of years.

## The dos and don'ts of proper cleaning

1. A mixture of  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of vinegar into a 32-ounce spray bottle works well with a mop. The water and vinegar are combined, then sprayed on a small area of the floor and mopped up right away.
2. Another option is to sell cleaners made specifically for laminate floors.
3. Microfiber pads also work well without the need for liquid.
4. Laminate floors can also be cleaned by using the wand attachment on a vacuum. (Anything else can scratch the laminate if sand or grit is in the vacuum.)
5. Laminate should never be waxed or polished.
6. Spills should be blotted up as soon as they happen. Liquids should never be allowed to stand on the floor.
7. The floor should never be washed to prevent swelling, warping or delamination. The less water applied, the better.
8. For spots such as candle wax or chewing gum, the spot should be hardened with ice then gently scraped with a plastic scraper (like a credit card). Then the area can be cleaned with a damp cloth.
9. Protective pads can be placed under tables and chairs. A rug under furniture with coasters is also a good idea.
10. If there is an area that cannot be cleaned to your customer's satisfaction, a trained professional can be called to replace the plank(s).

### A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR: INHAUS

## Striving for excellence in styling, design and performance

The core of Inhaus' values is its focus on innovation, design and value. The company prides itself on "boutique excellence," an approach that is reflected in its carefully curated collections and passion for design.

This year Inhaus completed a major investment in building its new design center, a 100,000-square foot facility in Germany where its team of designers and master carpenters work full time on new looks. This wood-to-finished facility enhances the company's product offering with original and constant design innovation.

All of Inhaus' laminate products are manufactured in its vertically integrated facility in Berlin, Germany. As the largest single-site laminate production facility in the world, Inhaus controls the entire manufacturing process from the fiber to the finished product, all in one location. The result is a consistent, safe, high-quality product.

In keeping with its environmentally friendly focus, the company only uses wood from sustainably managed European forests in close proximity to its

manufacturing facility. Furthermore, all Inhaus floors meet or exceed all mandatory air quality standards in North America and Europe.

Inhaus understands that quality is a key consideration. To that end, each collection is constructed with the same high-quality materials. This makes it simple for customers to choose the product best suited to their home or project — with the reassurance that all of Inhaus' products are of the highest quality.

Standard to every product in the Inhaus line is the company's patented premium locking "angle-drop" system called Megaloc. This innovative system makes it easy to lay down multiple rows at once, thereby expediting installation. In addition, due to its joint strength, this means installations up to 40 x 40 can be achieved without transitions.

The vast majority of Inhaus' floors are rated AC4 or higher and all of the products' textures, be embossed-in-register or all-over, are specifically designed to enhance the visual, resist premature wear and provide ease of maintenance.



Inhaus' newly constructed 100,000-square-foot design center in Kaisersesch, Germany.

# Glossary of laminate terms

**Acclimation** The adaptation of the laminate floor to its installation environment.

**Acoustical properties** Absorbance, reflection or transmission of sound waves.

**Backing** The bottom layer of laminate floors; a melamine plastic layer that lends dimensional stability to the planks and also helps guard against moisture coming up from the subfloor.

**Colorfastness** The ability of a material to withstand color change upon exposure to light (i.e. light resistance).

**Crook** Specific type of warping when an individual panel has curvature from end to end (i.e. banana).

**Crowning** Specific type of warping when an individual panel assumes an inverted shape lengthwise or width across the face (i.e. convex).

**Cupping** Specific type of warping when a panel becomes “U”-shaped lengthwise or width across the face (i.e. concave).

**Decorative layer** Print film adhered on top of the core board which gives the floor its visual. This decorative layer is a printed, high-definition photo-reproduction of wood grain, natural stone or tile pattern.

**Direct pressure laminate** Process by which resin-impregnated material layer(s) is permanently bonded to the core.

**Dimensional stability** The ability of a material to resist changes caused by environmental factors, such as moisture or temperature.

**End molding/carpet reducer** Used as a transition from laminate floors to different flooring surfaces when the reducer does not allow enough height, such as on high-pile carpet or thick laminate tile.

**Expansion gap** Space necessary between fixed objects, i.e. walls of a room, pipes and cabinets, and between the material itself to allow for the movement of the material.

**Fiberboard** Core material primarily com-

posed of cellulose fibers combined with synthetic resins or other suitable bonding systems under heat and pressure.

**Floating floor** An installation system by which the planks sit directly on the underlayment and are not anchored to the subfloor but rather on the edges.

**Glued flooring** The original laminate floors that require a special formulated glue to be applied to the tongue and grooved areas on each plank.

**Glueless flooring** Installation method where the planks or squares simply interlock together.

**High pressure laminate** Laminating process where materials are consolidated under heat and pressure exceeding 750 psi.

**Melamine resin** Helps improve the moisture resistance and durability of the core board of laminate floor covering.

**Moldings** Trim pieces that cover the space that allow the flooring to expand and move naturally on top of the subfloor. They also help with the transition to an adjacent floor.

**Overlapping stair nosing** Similar to a flush stair nosing except the nosing overlaps the exposed edge of the floor. It is secured to the subfloor so the floor is free to move.

**Overlay** Product of paper, plastic, film, metal foil or other material incorporated into laminate flooring that provides the wear resistance and protection.

**Peaking** Seams that raised where the laminate planks or tiles join.

**Plank** Panel that is typically 5 or 6 inches wide and 48 inches long, though some now go up to 7 feet.

**Pre-glued flooring** No-mess method of in-

stallation because the glue is already applied to the tongue and grooves. A thin, plastic underlayment is needed to seal out moisture and prevent the glue from sticking to the substrate.

**Quarter round trim** Installed where the floor meets the wall or baseboard.

**Reducer strip** The transitional piece installers use to connect the laminate with another type of floor covering such as vinyl or low-pile carpet.

**Resins** Polymeric material used for impregnating and bonding layers of laminate flooring.

**Screens** The photography and the number of photographs per style. The more screens a product has, the more variation it can offer.

**Seams** The junction where the laminate flooring panels connect together.

**Square nosing/universal edge** Used where the laminate flooring butts up to carpet or various vertical surfaces where the edge will be exposed, such as along a fireplace.

**Step down stair nose** Coordinating molding piece providing the proper transition for all the steps in a home.

**Thermofusing** Process where resins are consolidated under heat and pressure to create a permanent bonding.

**T-molding** Commonly used in doorways to join two laminate floors in adjoining rooms.

**Underlayment** Material used between the flooring and subfloor that acts as a sound and moisture barrier, also allowing the floor to expand and contract with changes in the temperature.

**Wear layer** The durable, top layer of laminate flooring that provides protection and stain resistance. Many wearlayers contain aluminum oxide as well as melamine resin to create exceptional durability and performance.



HOWARD BRODSKY,  
CHAIRMAN OF THE FCIF,  
HAS BEEN PART OF THE  
FLOOR COVERING INDUSTRY  
FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE. FROM  
WORKING IN HIS FAMILY'S  
FLOORING BUSINESS TO  
FOUNDING THE LARGEST  
FLOOR-COVERING RETAIL  
COOPERATIVE IN THE WORLD HOWARD KNOWS  
THAT PEOPLE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT  
PART OF THE BUSINESS.

HE WANTS TO TELL YOU  
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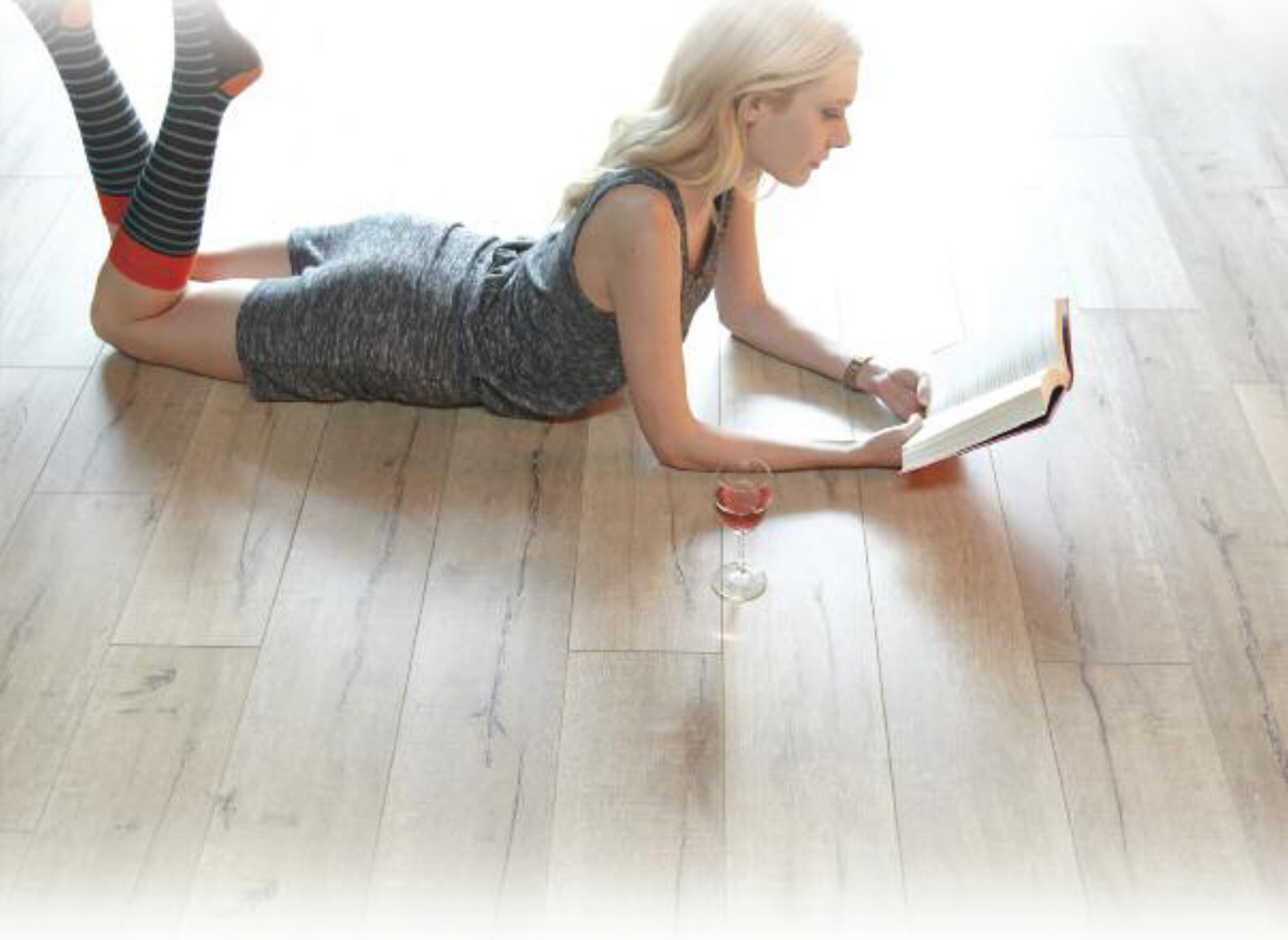
Sincerely,  
Howard



Howard Brodsky  
Chairman  
FCIF

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