

Making Sense Of Timber Flooring

At first, trying to get an understanding of timber flooring can seem difficult. But, by reading this short article, we hope that you will quickly know enough to enjoy specifying your own timber floor. Good luck!

Firstly – What is Hardwood Flooring?

Almost all durable timber flooring is made from the group of timbers known as hardwoods, which are trees that have broad leaves (in contrast to conifer or softwoods). Actually, the term has no reference to the actual hardness of the wood. Examples are: oak, maple, ash, beech, cherry and walnut.

If you're thinking about wooden flooring, you may have heard about a choice between engineered or solid wood boards. Or maybe you've just been browsing different samples at McMahons or other stores, and you're wondering what the difference is. Well, here a quick guide to help you.

Engineered Wood Boards

Engineered wood is made by attaching a layer of hardwood to a softwood base, often with a plywood bottom. Unlike with solid wood boards, you're not getting all pure hardwood. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, however, because the plywood base improves moisture resistance and stability. The hardwood layer on the top is made from one, two, or three strips of wood (the one-strip version is called "plank").

Engineered wood boards come pre-finished (i.e. they don't need any varnishing or further coating) and are laid as a floating floor. They don't need to be glued or nailed to a base. They usually come with tongue-and-groove edges that are fitted together like puzzle pieces as you lay them.

There is more than one kind of engineered wood. There are engineered wood floors available that some experts prefer to solid hardwood. Some other types have a high-density base with a very thin wood veneer, and they're cheaper than other types. Like

all products, you generally get what you pay for, and these cheaper versions are less durable than other engineered wood.

Solid Wood Boards

Solid wood boards come in random lengths with tongue-and-groove edges for nailing and gluing, and they fit together much as engineered wood boards do. (In the old days, all solid wood boards came with straight edges, which had to be butted up closely to each other and glued to the sub-floor).

While some solid wood boards come unfinished, most hardwood floors come with pre-finished wood, just as with engineered boards. It's just a matter of your preferences and cost (unfinished wood is generally less expensive, but if you don't fancy the idea of regularly reapplying a varnish or waxing your floors, pre-finished may be a better fit for you).

Sometimes solid wood boards are laminated together into 2- or 3-strip-wide planks that are treated as solid single-strip boards. These planks are easy to mistake for engineered boards, but they're heavier than engineered wood, and that makes them hard to nail or glue--however, you can lay them on the existing surface to make a floating wood floor.

No matter which solid wood board you choose, be careful with the installation because solid wood boards are more prone to expansion and contraction than engineered wood. You want to leave a little room at the edges for the wood to breathe and expand. (Because of its plywood base, engineered wood is less susceptible to this.)

Laminate flooring

Laminate flooring is generally seen as a low cost alternative to hardwood flooring. In construction, they are quite different. Laminated flooring is often composed of printed pieces of paper laminated onto a "fibre board" and then sealed with a protective coating.

This doesn't necessarily mean laminate is an inferior product (it doesn't have quite the rich warmth of hardwood, but is generally fairly durable), but it is NOT hardwood flooring and is, as a result, is generally cheaper.

Laminate flooring is a relatively recent invention. It is generally seen as having a limited life-span – manufacturers will guarantee it for 15-25 years. Hardwood floors, on the other hand, are time-tested. Some homes over 100 years old still have the original hardwoods (though they've probably been refinished a few times). If you can afford the extra money, opt for hardwood. This really adds warmth and value to the home. However, if you are on a budget, laminates can give you the look, if not the feel, of hardwood flooring.

Hardwood v Laminate

For the long term, choose hardwoods. They will last, become as individual as your home, and they will look great if looked after. However, laminates are genuinely practical and cost-effective solutions for those with medium term plans. For example, laminates are ideal for kids' play areas because they are easy to clean and take a lot of abuse. Laminates can also be put in where you feel you might want to change your mind in a few years! And, ultimately, they require less maintenance and care than hardwoods.

Finally - Types of hardwood floor

Mention wood floors and many people instantly think of oak. There are many other wood species, however. While shopping, take some time to look through all the selections. The list below is a brief summary of some of the most popular woods used in timber flooring.

Oak

Oak is a regular in home floor selection in Ireland. It has a nice rich look and interesting graining. Oak has been used in homes for many years, making it a top choice for those who like tradition and nostalgia.

White oak flooring is harder than red oak, and it has a more uniform appearance. It is a heavy and hard wood that is good at resisting wear.

Red oak flooring has an open grain that makes it more porous than white. Red is also hard and heavy, possessing a medium bending strength and stiffness.

Maple

Maple is a lighter wood than oak and has fewer variations in the grain. It is a harder wood than oak and one of its characteristics is that it expands and contracts more. Maple hardwood flooring varies from pale white to a light reddish brown.

Its uniform texture is appealing, and it's a very hard wood, with good strength properties which means it's less likely to scratch or dent. It has a closed grain. Maple is a hard and heavy wood that has good strength properties.

Cherry

Cherry is available in several shades, ranging from light red to reddish brown. American cherry, for example, has a light red color and blends well with the popular shades of cherry kitchen cabinets on the market. It is similar to pine in its softness. A natural cherry finish has a warm, honey color, as opposed to the dark, mahogany look that most people associate with cherry.

Birch

Birch is a popular selection, as it is similar in appearance to oak and can be less expensive. It blends easily with other light coloured woods because of its tone and the many variations in the wood.