

What's Underfoot?

Floors in today's homes are more than something to walk on. They are also visual statements. This quick guide to choices from Stanton Homes can help home buyers ask the right questions when making flooring decisions.

Hardwood Floors

Until recently, hardwood floors were found only in high-end homes. Now homebuyers find "hardwood" a common word in marketing materials and home descriptions. Advances in wood flooring during the past few years means that you can now have wood anywhere in your home. However, buyers should be aware of the different types of wood and hardwood floors.

Solid Flooring

Solid wood flooring refers to anything that consists of one piece of wood from top to bottom. Most often 3/4" inch thick, a solid wood floor can be sanded and refinished over several generations of use, making this extremely long-lasting flooring. Oak and maple are most commonly used, but ash, hickory, and a variety of exotic woods are also available. Custom builders often include at least several rooms with solid or engineered hardwood floors.

Engineered Flooring

Still most often referred to as hardwood or wood flooring, this wood flooring product consists of layers of wood pressed together. Because grains run in different directions, it is more dimensionally solid wood. If the top layer is thick, it is possible for the flooring to be sanded and refinished, multiple times depending on the thickness.

Site Finish vs. Prefinished

Solid or engineered wood floors can have stain and varnish applied in several ways. The most premium is "site finish". Unfinished hardwood is installed in the home. The buyer or builder chooses a stain color, which can be customized at the time of application by mixing one or more standard colors together. This stain and a final coat of varnish is then applied to the floor over a period of 3-5 days. Pre-finish is another choice - with this method, the individual pieces are pre-stained and varnished, then installed in the home. This process is quicker and less expensive, but with today's production standards can be even higher quality than site finished. Some manufacturers offer a 50 year warranty, and apply up to 12 coats of verathane. Both methods create great looking floors.

Wood Laminates

Wood laminates consist of a plywood base covered with a layer of veneer. Plies and thicknesses vary, but three-ply, 3/8 inch flooring is most common (compared to 3/4 inch for solid hardwood). The veneer topping of wood laminate floors (commonly 1/8 inch thick) can be sanded and refinished 3 times, at most. Most manufacturers have 5-year finish warranties. Laminate wood flooring can be a great way

for a first time home buyer to experience the benefits of a wood floor. It's a low-maintenance alternative to carpet, and great for pets.

Synthetic Plastic Laminates

Usually ½ inch thick, plastic laminate flooring consists of a fiberboard center wrapped in top and bottom layers of high-pressure laminate - a tougher version of the same material used in many kitchen countertops. These floors cannot be sanded or refinished, so they must be replaced when they wear out rather than refurbished. They usually come with 10 or 15 year manufacturer warranties. These laminate floors are very tough - they hold up very well, even under heavy traffic and dog claws! Because they are inexpensive and last 10-15 years, even if they eventually need to be replaced the long term cost is low.

Making Your Choice

Another point to consider when comparing laminates with real wood: Real wood has variations - no two pieces are ever quite the same, which is part of the charm of a real wood floor. Look closely at a laminate wood floor and you'll see that the "wood grain" repeats itself - because laminate flooring is actually a kind of "photograph" of real wood carefully applied to a wood composite. Laminates don't sound quite the same as real wood either, when they're walked upon - listen closely on your next home walk through, and see if you can tell the difference.

Most custom homes have solid or engineered wood flooring in at least some rooms. Many production homes offer laminates or wood flooring as upgrades in place of carpet. Buyers should choose the type of wood flooring that they feel will make the most sense, from an aesthetic view as well as from the cost of the floor over the life of the home. Solid or engineered hardwood floors cost more upfront, but are likely to last the lifetime of the home with proper care.

Laminates will most likely need to be replaced several times over the life of the home, but can be lower cost and allow buyers a low-maintenance alternative to carpet. Buyers should ask their builder and/or real estate agent exactly what kind of flooring is standard in their new construction home, and if not hardwood, decide whether to upgrade or not.

Stanton Homes offers a variety of fine floorings to suit your needs, and is happy to help answer your flooring questions.

Throughout the Research Triangle region of North Carolina, Stanton Homes is building a reputation of quality, through outstanding craftsmanship you'll love to call home.

Call 919-278-8070 or 919-418-9536 for information about homes available in your area.

