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Laminate Flooring Comes on Strong

American homeowners like laminate. Popularized by Formica and now produced by a host of companies, the material is common on countertops. Now, suppliers are betting that customers will buy it for floors, too. At a price similar to wood or high-end vinyl, but with much easier installation, exceptional hardness, ease of maintenance, and a wide range of looks, manufacturers hope laminate flooring will draw millions of customers away from carpet.

First in the game was Sweden's Perstorp corporation, which introduced its European-made Pergo laminate flooring to the U.S. in 1994. Strong sales surprised the company, and they start-

ed making the material in the U.S. this year.

Hot on Pergo's heels, Wilsonart started making laminate planks and tiles in compatible sizes for mix-and-match patterning. Formica introduced its version of laminate flooring last month. Bruce Hardwood Floors has started a new division, Traffic Zone, to sell its patterned laminate. Armstrong Industries, the carpet giant, plans to import laminate flooring manufactured by Austria's Egger, Inc. And seemingly dozens of lesser-known names are pushing laminate floors. "Everybody's bringing it out," says flooring retailer Paul Mazaika of The Floor Store, in Fitchburg, Mass. Remodelers who check out specialty floor-



Installing the edge-glued, floating laminate floor is simple enough for the average carpenter — and there's no finishing required.

ing stores will find plenty of choices.

Fiberboard core, tough surface. Laminate flooring consists of a core of quarter-inch medium- or high-density fiber-

board, with a top and bottom facing of melamine paper and a protective topcoat. The upper melamine facing bears the pattern — wood grain,

continued

Regulatory Fairness Law Protects Small Business

With little fanfare, Congress and the President have agreed on a new law that could make important changes in the federal regulatory environment for small businesses. Sponsored by Republican Senator Christopher Bond of Missouri, the "Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act" calls on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) to seek input from small businesses before adopting rules that substantially affect them. The new law also requires all agencies to publish "plain-English" guides to regu-

latory compliance. Strong majorities in both parties supported the new law, dubbed "Reg Lite" by Washington insiders. President Clinton signed the measure after it was attached to an act raising the government's debt ceiling.

The "Regulatory Flexibility Act," passed in 1980, already requires rule-making agencies to consider ways of reducing the economic impact of new rules on small business. But that law has been widely ignored. The new bill puts teeth into the law by allowing small business owners to sue in federal court to overturn rules passed without due consider-

ation of the cost for small business.

Under the new legislation, agencies must allow a 60-day grace period after passing any new rule. During that time, Congress and the President can strike down the rule and order the agency to start over.

The law also provides businesses with potential help in contesting unreasonable citations and penalties. In the past, businesses have often chosen not to contest regulatory actions because of the high cost of mounting a defense, even if they believed they had not broken any rules. But under the new law, small businesses who success-

fully defend themselves in court can recover legal fees and expenses from the enforcement agency charging them with a violation.

In addition, "Reg Lite" sets up ten regional review boards within the Small Business Administration, reporting to an SBA Ombudsman. The boards will collect feedback from small businesses about federal regulation, and rate federal agencies on their responsiveness to business concerns. National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) safety director Regina Solomon says NAHB will have representatives on all of those boards. □

STATE BY STATE

Michigan. An ad-hoc committee developing the state's next energy code has adopted guidelines for determining cost-effectiveness. To qualify, code measures would have to reduce annual energy expenditures by more than they raised the annual cost of home purchase.

Wyoming. Comp reforms that took effect in 1995 are getting credit for a 4.7% drop in average premiums. Reforms that encourage employers to use safety programs have cut reported injuries by 10%.

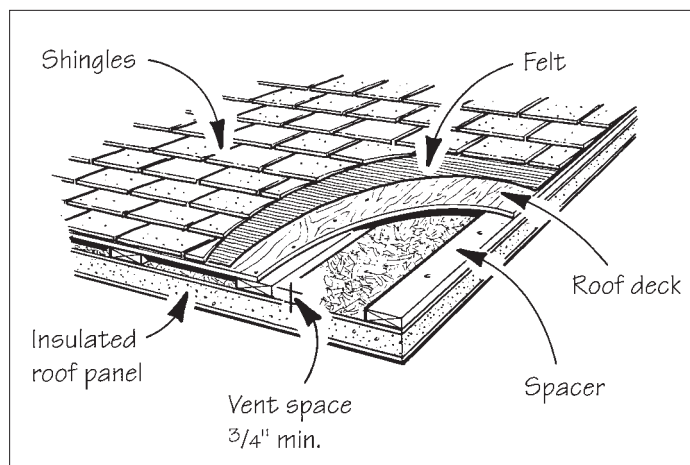
Colorado. Homeowners have won one lawsuit and settled a second against Denver-area developers after concrete basement slabs built over expansive soils heaved and cracked. Because soils in the area tend to move and damage slabs, many builders are now installing treated wood basement floors, which can flex without cracking.

Arizona. The August 1 *Arizona Business Gazette* reports that the homeowner association of a Phoenix-area master-planned community has dropped its opposition to roof-mounted solar panels on one resident's house, forestalling an expected court battle. Some neighbors consider the solar panels unsightly and say they lower property values, but the owner of the panels argues that they save him money and reduce pollution.

Ventilate Roof Decks, Advises Industry Group

Nailing shingles directly onto foam insulation will impair shingle performance, according to recommendations released in July by the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association (ARMA). Hammer blows may damage or puncture the shingles during installation, the ARMA advisory states, and foam lacks the nail-holding power to prevent shingles from blowing off during high winds. In addition, since it's impossible to provide adequate ventilation to cool a foam-covered roof, heat may degrade the shingles and reduce their life expectancy. The fire rating of the shingles may also be affected.

Venting recommendations. In fact, the ARMA guidelines advise against nailing shingles to any insulated roof deck, even if the insulation is placed below the roof sheathing, unless a minimum 3/4-inch air space is provided between the sheathing and the insulation, along with soffit and ridge vents to allow outdoor air to cool and dry the roof. Roofs with cavity insulation in rafter



Before shingling over an insulated roof deck, recommends ARMA, create a 3/4-inch ventilation space with with strapping and sheathing.

bays should be equipped with a vent channel to allow air to flow through the system, while foam-core panel roof decks should have added strapping and sheathing to create the required 3/4-inch air space (see drawing above).

Warranty concerns. Failure to provide correct venting details on an insulated roof deck may void the shingle maker's warranty, the ARMA bulletin warned. In fact, most manufacturers will not guarantee shingles nailed to unvented roofs.

CertainTeed Corporation recently made headlines when it extended its written shingle warranty to installations on insulated roof decks. But the company took pains to point out that the written guarantee for insulated deck applications is limited to only 10 years, while the same shingles on a properly ventilated roof would be guaranteed for 25 or 30 years, or even longer.

For information on shingle installation, call ARMA at 301/231-9050. □

Safety Tip: How to Save Severed Fingers

Quick action can often save a severed limb. But if someone cuts off a finger, hand, or arm on your job site, would you know what to do?

Veteran contractor Felix Marti recalls just such an experience. As a young framer, he cut off his thumb with a worm-drive saw. Surgeons were able to reattach his thumb, but only after Marti spent hours searching for the appropriate medical center (most urban areas have a hospital unit that specializes in reattachment).

Marti now posts a sign on all his job sites describing standard procedure in case of an

amputation injury. In addition to emergency numbers and directions to the nearest reattachment center, the sign provides the following first-aid instructions:

- **Stopping the bleeding.**

Wrap the stump with a snug pressure bandage and elevate it above the rest of the limb. This will usually stop the bleeding if a sharp (as opposed to crushing) amputation has occurred. Tourniquets are often unnecessary. Most adults are not in danger of bleeding to death, even when the amputation involves most of the arm.

- **Saving the part.** Gently wash or rinse the amputated part with cold water. Wrap it in a clean, damp (but not wet) cloth or paper towel, and put it in a watertight plastic bag. Place this in ice water (39.2°F is the perfect temperature). Do not place the part directly on ice.

- **Partial amputations** are often more serious than complete amputations, because bleeding may not stop after the limb is bandaged and raised. First, wrap the partial amputation firmly with sterile bandages. Then splint the limb or

continued

Springtime in January

Ground Heater Cracks Frost in Days

Everyone has a Christmas wish. In the northern U.S. and Canada, most foundation and excavation contractors probably wish the ground wasn't frozen, so they could work and make a living. This year, Santa might bring some of those contractors a new toy: the *Ground Heater*, a powerful boiler-and-tubing system that thaws out the ground to allow excavation, then provides supplemental heat so concrete can properly cure.

Ground Heater is simple in concept: It's just a Burnham oil-fired boiler in a trailer that can be hauled to any job site. You connect the boiler to rubber tubing laid out over your site, cover the tubing

the contractor inserts into drilled holes in the earth, to quickly carry the heat to a 3- or 4-foot depth.

George Blank, of Construction Materials, Inc., in Fargo, N.D. (701/282-7100), bought a Ground Heater last year for his equipment rental business. Blank says demand for the unit was high: "I could have hooked one up every day last winter. The phone was ringing all the time." Blank currently rents the unit for around \$400 a day.

Ground Heater comes in several sizes, ranging from a small unit priced around \$10,000, designed to quickly defrost a 100-square-foot area for a deep pier, to larger units



The oil-fired Ground Heater (left) applies heat directly to the earth through rubber tubing, thawing out a foot of frost per day. For deep frost, 3-foot heating probes are inserted into drilled holes (above).

with sand and poly to hold in the heat, and fire the boiler up. A 180-degree antifreeze solution circulates through the tubes, sending 150,000 Btus per hour into the earth until the frost is gone. For deep frost, the company supplies probes that

selling for upward of \$30,000 and able to thaw a foot of frost a day over 6,000 square feet. If you'd like to buy, get your order in early — units will be in limited supply this year. For more information, contact Ground Heater at 906/337-1599. □

FROM WHAT WE GATHER

Pilot lights on gas fireplaces waste a lot of fuel, according to a study by Natural Resources Canada (NRC). The research group looked at 68 homes with gas fireplaces, including 38 units with continuous pilot lights. The study found that 30 of the homeowners left the pilots lit throughout the summer months. The pilot lights consumed an average of 219 cubic meters of gas annually. By comparison, the 14 fireplaces without continuous pilot lights burned only 199 cubic meters a year on average — less than a continuous pilot alone.

Interested in home automation? You might want to visit the first annual Home Automation Show and Conference in Orlando, Fla. (Feb. 9-11, 1997). The show will offer extensive exhibits of home automation systems, along with seminars aimed mainly at dealers, installers, and other specialists in home automation. For registration information, call 203/840-5658.

Technical help with concrete questions is only a phone call away at the new Residential Concrete Clearinghouse (toll-free 888/602-4663), a project of the NAHB Research Center. Experts at the clearinghouse focus on insulating concrete forming systems and other innovative concrete wall technologies, and can help with design, code acceptance, and inspection issues.

The world speed record for laying brick has been shattered, according to a report in the August 1996 issue of Aberdeen's *Masonry Construction*. Twenty-one-year-old mason foreman Travis McGee, of McGee Brothers in Monroe, N.C., blew away the competition along with the previous official world record by laying 1,494 bricks in one hour in the U.S. Brick National Bricklaying Challenge, held last May in Dallas, Texas. In eclipsing the previous record of 1,048 bricks, McGee earned himself a \$20,000 first prize. Runner-up Russell Huntly, with a 1,429-brick effort, received \$1,500. McGee Brothers president Sam McGee, Travis's uncle, says the young champion often lays 2,500 to 3,000 bricks in a day, compared with the average bricklayer's 1,500.

Want to buy the White House? Actually, it's not for sale. But if it were, it would bring around \$64 million dollars, according to a realtor survey released by Coldwell Banker Residential Affiliates. The 168x85-foot residence boasts 132 rooms and 32 bathrooms, and includes such amenities as 29 fireplaces, three elevators, a dentist's office, a tennis court, a swimming pool, a bowling lane, a movie theater, and a jogging track installed by the current tenant. (Historically, tenants have always moved out on schedule.) Talk to your banker before you start dreaming — to qualify for a mortgage, one expert estimates, you'd need a \$25.7-million-dollar income.



Laminate Flooring, *continued*

tile, or a decorator style. To install floors, you edge-glue the tongue-and-groove pieces together into a "floating floor" over any smooth surface.

Illinois remodeler Dave Bowyer gives Perstorp's Pergo high marks for ease of use and attractiveness. "My guys can't do wood flooring," he says. "I have to sub it out. But my guys can do laminate floors themselves." In fact, installing Pergo is so easy that a couple Bowyer worked for installed their own kitchen floor in a single Saturday. Edges match up nicely, says Bowyer, and finishing work is nil.

The melamine laminate used for flooring is tougher than the type used for countertops — up to 20 times more wear-resistant, according to Pergo — and much harder than wood. "Every flooring material has its problems," comments flooring pro Paul Mazaika. "Vinyl will scratch, wood dents, tile is cold. This stuff was presented to us as the 'bulletproof' solution." A

burning cigarette will not leave a mark on laminate floors, Mazaika affirms, and even indelible marker comes off with acetone. But he says one determined customer who tested a sample was able to chip the material by dropping canned goods on it. "I hear they're coming out with a patch kit," says Mazaika.

You can install laminate flooring over virtually any existing floor — concrete, tile, wood, even low-nap carpet, says Mazaika. But he warns that the existing surface must be very flat: Any irregularity will produce noticeable cracks at the joints.

What about water? The higher-density fiberboard in laminate flooring's core resists moisture better than ordinary particleboard. Even so, the effects of water are a concern. The material is fine in bedrooms and living rooms, but if you install it in kitchens, be sure to warn customers that major water spills could damage their floor. Bathrooms are not a suitable place for laminate flooring. □

Severed Fingers, *continued*

hand to take stress off the injured tissue. If bleeding does not stop, apply a tourniquet to the upper arm or thigh.

Loosen the tourniquet every 10 to 15 minutes, just long enough for the skin to turn pink (this takes only a few seconds). If there is no visible bleeding after the

tourniquet is loosened, remove it entirely.

- **Recordkeeping.** Try to record exact information about the accident, the nature of the injury, and what has been done to help the person.

- **Don't create expectations.** Avoid statements like, "They'll put your finger back on and in six months you won't know this happened!" □

NEW ALLIANCE OFFERS HYDRONIC AND AIR HYBRID

If you want radiant floor heat, you no longer have to design your own system out of components from unrelated manufacturers. In a new joint effort, Lennox Industries and Maxxon Corporation (formerly Gyp-Crete) are teaming up with a radiant floor system combining Lennox's *CompleteHeat* gas-fired water heater and Maxxon's *Infloor* system.

The Infloor system distributes heat to living areas through cross-linked polyethylene (PEX) tubing embed-

ded in lightweight gypsum concrete. Maxxon supplies a manifold to connect the tubes supplying different zones, while Lennox's electronic control panel allows separate zone temperature control.

If a customer wants radiant heat in some zones but forced air in others, the CompleteHeat unit can be connected to the air handler via a heat exchanger coil. Air conditioning can be supplied through the same ductwork. If the customer

prefers, individual rooms can get baseboard or wall-mounted radiators instead of radiant floors. The same Lennox unit that powers all these heating options also supplies domestic hot water.

CompleteHeat gets rave reviews from hvac contractor Joe Iorio, of Atlantic Heating and Air Conditioning in Brookline, Mass. Iorio installs CompleteHeat even in homes with no radiant heat, because of its simplicity. "One unit supplies hot water and warm air," he explains.



The new pairing of Lennox and Maxxon offers builders a package that can combine radiant floor heat with domestic hot water and forced air.

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If a customer wants radiant heat in some zones but forced air in others, the CompleteHeat unit can be connected to the air handler via a heat exchanger coil. Air conditioning can be supplied through the same ductwork. If the customer

"There's one gas fit and one exhaust vent — that's it." And the quality of heat supplied to air systems is high, according to Iorio: "It's quiet, there's no fried-air syndrome, there's no pulsing."

CompleteHeat can be fired by natural gas or propane, but not by oil. For information on CompleteHeat, call Lennox Industries at 214/497-7218. For information on Infloor radiant heating systems, call Maxxon Corporation at 800/356-7887. □