

Massive or Engineered hardwood floors?

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Darren Barrett from the Hardwood Flooring Store in Markham, Ontario and a long time expert in hardwood floors joined me in the TV studio to discuss the evolution of hardwood flooring. We set aside for this discussion all the plastic laminates with press board bases that have become so common. No, I wanted to respond to those viewers who say they want "real" hard wood. Massive hardwood is just that, one single piece of wood. The only evolution we have had with this variety of flooring is that you can now buy it in a prefinished format, which means that you don't have to have the sanding and finishing fumes all over the house. It does mean that there will be a very slight bevel on the edge of each board, to cover for the fact that they are not all sanded together after being put on the floor and may not be exactly level, but very very close. But then there is what was originally called a "lamine" floor (meaning layers glued together) but now that term has been abandoned to the plastic laminates. So real hardwood laminate flooring is now called "Engineered flooring". It looks like that terminology might stick for a while. How do you judge quality on engineered flooring? There are two main elements. First is the thickness of the beauty layer. In the best of the flooring it is almost as thick as the part of the massive wood that is found above the tongue. That means that you can sand the two equally, and that such a floor could last 100 years. The second thing to look for is the number of layer in the laminate. The more laminates, the stronger and more stable the wood tends to be. Total thickness of the wood is probably not important unless you need to bridge over an uneven subfloor. There is a slightly different laminate, not really like plywood, that puts little blocks of wood under the wear layer with spaces between them, allowing for bending the flooring to follow curves. Generally the engineered flooring comes in single board widths, and is applied exactly like regular hardwood flooring. Note that originally these could not be floated because they would just pull apart. You can get real hardwood engineered flooring that looks much like its plastic laminate imitators (the original imitating the imitators) in that it comes about 2 feet long by about 3 or 4 boards wide. This one could be glued together into a floating floor, but is most often used for fancy parquet style patterns. Follow this link for details on the assembly of Engineered hard wood flooring. As with all products, time brings change. If you are looking for new flooring, give yourself a lot of time to visit several flooring stores to see what is on the market and hear why you should buy one or another of the wide variety of choices available - with choices in every price range. If you are thinking of continuing the floor into another room later, but all the stock now -- the colours can change, or the particular style of fitting together may disappear by the time you get around to wanting to expand. Never throw out whatever is left over after an installation -- again those boards may be irreplaceable in a few years so you will be very happy to have a few pieces around for repairs.

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