

Solid hardwood flooring— is it really the best choice?

Conventional solid hardwood flooring is truly beautiful—it's elegant, classic and timeless. But for all of its wonderful qualities there are challenges to living with this floor. Conventional wood flooring can be influenced by changes in temperature and humidity, causing it to shrink or expand.

This, in turn, leads to warping, buckling, and gaps between planks—think of the uneven, squeaky floor boards you've walked on in older homes. Is there a solution to this problem? Absolutely—instead of conventional hardwood, look for "engineered" hardwood flooring.

Engineered hardwood flooring is specifically designed to give you all the beauty of hardwood, without the gapping. Here's how it works: Engineered hardwood planks are comprised of three layers—a top layer of hardwood; a stable core layer; and a hardwood backing (see diagram). All three layers are fused together to create a floor more stable than solid hardwood, and less resistant to changes caused by temperature or humidity. In addition, because it's not solid wood, the price is typically lower!

Here are the most common questions consumers ask when considering engineered hardwood:

Once installed can you tell the difference between engineered and solid wood flooring when you look

at it? No! For the simple reason that the top of an engineered hardwood floor plank is real hardwood. What you see and walk on is the same as a solid wood floor plank (see photo).

How do you install engineered hardwood? Engineered hardwoods are available in a variety of colours and designs. But if you don't want to fuss with nails or glue, go with a "floating floor" system, such as TORLYS Hardwood. With this type of system, you simply click the planks into place, ending up with an ultra-tight fit. A floating floor is held down by gravity, and can be laid directly over an existing floor, including concrete, as long as the floor underneath is flat, solid, and dry.

Can you refinish engineered hardwood? Yes. Most engineered hardwood floors come pre-stained and prefinished, with a multi-year warranty. Depending on the thickness of the wood layer on top, some engineered hardwoods can be sanded, restained, and refinished, often several times. In that respect, they're no different than solid wood planks.

So if you're thinking about investing in wood flooring, let me leave you with this advice: There are not many things in life you could say cost you less and are better, but engineered hardwood flooring is one of them.

—News Canada

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