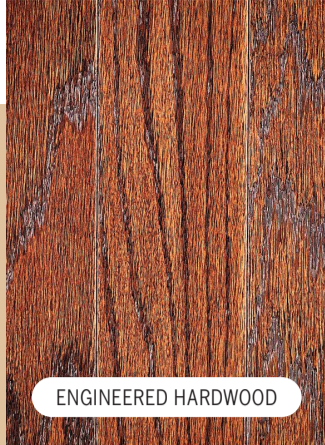
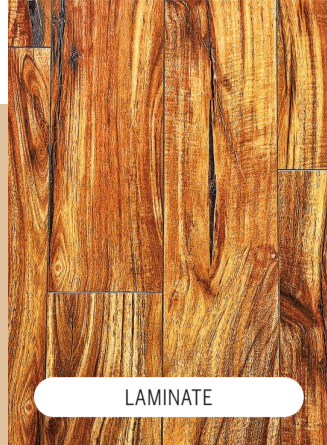


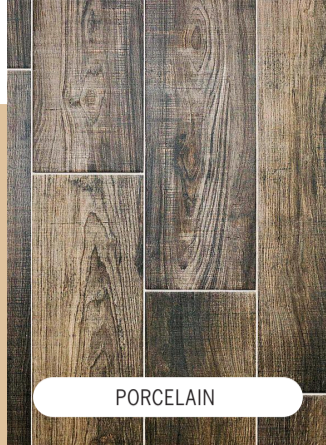
Hardwood alternatives



ENGINEERED HARDWOOD



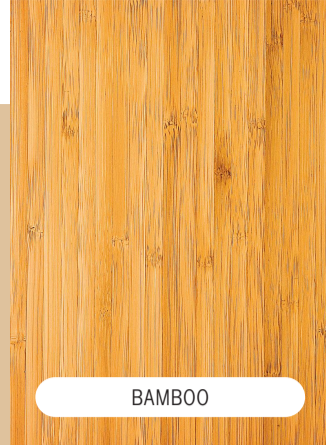
LAMINATE



PORCELAIN



VINYL



BAMBOO

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Home

+ GARDEN



JACKSON DESIGN AND REMODELING

Engineered hardwood floors come with a variety of finishes, such as urethane, which is optimal for heavy use, and an oil finish, which has a natural matte feel.

DOES WOOD FLOORING HAVE TO BE WOOD?

Engineered materials gaining as lower-maintenance alternative

BY CARON GOLDEN

There's little doubt that hardwood floors — whether light or dark, wide plank or herringbone pattern — add a very specific feeling of nostalgia for how we think of home. Shag carpeting and linoleum may come and go, but hardwood is here for the duration.

Or is it? While a 2017 homeowner survey by the National Wood Flooring Association found that 66 percent of respondents said wood floors would be in their dream home and 79 percent think it would increase the value of their home, it would appear to be more aspirational than reality. Far more homeowners have carpet (75 percent) and tile (58 percent) flooring than wood (52 percent).

"Solid wood flooring is a thing of the past," said Jen Pinto, senior interior designer for Jackson Design and Remodeling in San Diego. "They don't sell it off the shelf anymore, and most vendors and installers will tell you to stay away from it. As beautiful as it is, it does not hold up well with moisture and over time can buckle with the natural expansion and contraction of the wood."

SEE FLOORING • E4

SECONDHAND FURNITURE SUDDENLY FIRST RATE

Stay-at-home drive to remodel mindfully fuels sales of antique, vintage, preowned items

BY JURA KONCIUS

When Samantha Manocchio moved to Washington from California last year, she brought her clothing and not much more. The 23-year-old rented a studio apartment and set out on a search for furnishings, including a table to anchor her small space.

"I am very focused on sustainable living," says Manocchio, who buys mostly secondhand or sustainably sourced clothing. "My generation is conscious about how we as individual consumers can do our parts." Some change their diet, she says. Others, like her, look for preowned furniture instead of cheaply made "fast furniture." She shopped local, buying a 100-year-old English Pembroke table from Georgetown's Pillar & Post, a few miles from her home. The mahogany table on brass casters, which she plans to keep forever, was delivered a few days later in the back of an SUV.

Manocchio is part of a wave of consumers who, in the past two years, have been buying secondhand furniture. SEE FURNITURE • E2



MICHAEL ROBINSON CHAVEZ THE WASHINGTON POST

Many secondhand pieces at Wishbone Reserve in Baltimore sell almost as soon as they arrive, especially sofas.

YANK AWAY WELCOME MAT FOR INVASIVE FOLIAGE

Garden experts can guide you to what's friendly to habitat

BY LAURA SIMPSON

"Don't plant a pest!" You may wonder what the difference is between a weed and an invasive plant. Let's just say that invasive plants are weeds, only much worse.

Weeds are unwanted plants that appear in cultivated areas. They can be either native or nonnative, but they have a tendency to grow only in areas that are tended by humans. They rely on irrigation, fertilization, tilling and other horticultural interventions to

survive. They generally don't do well in natural areas that are untouched by humans.

Invasive plants can be native, but most are not. They have a tendency to escape into wild areas and take over from the native species. Once established, they will choke out native plants completely and disrupt the ecosystem. Insects and other creatures can, in turn, be choked out due to their habitat and food sources being replaced. For instance, areas that have been overtaken by giant reed no longer have songbirds because the native insects have nothing to eat, which, in turn, leaves nothing for the birds to eat.

SEE INVASIVE • E3



JACKSON DESIGN AND REMODELING PHOTOS

Porcelain tile is prized for practicality and is scratch-resistant, stain-resistant and water-resistant. Unlike engineered wood, though, it is cold and hard on bare feet.

FLOORING • Consider each variety's pros and cons

FROM E1 material. If necessary, it can be custom made. The nice thing about it is that it is meant to be sanded down and refinished so an old solid hardwood can be made to look like new."

For all its beauty, hardwood is pretty high maintenance, especially if you have a lot of foot traffic, not to mention small kids and pets, who can scratch it up and leave hard-to-clean messes.

But if traditional hardwood is oh-so-20th century, the desire for its warmth and naturalness remains. So, it's no surprise that aspiration and practicality have merged in the flooring market for those who love the hardwood look but not the cost, maintenance or vulnerabilities of true hardwood floors. Today, any homeowner looking to install new floors can get a hardwood look from several very different types of products, including engineered hardwood, laminate, porcelain tiles, luxury vinyl tile, and bamboo. The choices are a combination of aesthetic preferences and lifestyle, since each has pros and cons based on your household.

Engineered hardwood

Where traditional solid hardwood is just that — all wood — engineered hardwood has a veneer of hardwood but is composed of several thin layers of backing, mostly plywood, but it could also be fiberboard or unfinished hardwood. According to Pinto, the layers add stability to the overall strength of the material. Where there can be issues with solid hardwood floors contracting and expanding, engineered hardwood's composition makes that a nonissue. It also comes with different finishes. Urethane and oil finishes are very popular, said Pinto.

"Urethane is great for heavy use and does hold up pretty well with moisture," she explained. "Oil finishes are beautiful and have a very natural matte feel to them. It is much more expensive, and it does require some maintenance because it will need to be re-oiled every few years. But if it scratches, it can be buffed out pretty well with the oil the next time it gets touched up, fairly easily."

But there is a drawback to engineered hardwood: moisture exposure. You don't want to get it wet. That makes it a bad candidate for bathrooms, of course, but also for areas where moisture can be tracked in from outside.

Laminate

Like engineered hardwood, laminate planks are layered materials, but instead of a wood top layer, it has a high-definition photographic wood-look layer, complete with graining, and sits above a moisture-resistant, stabilizing base layer topped by a core of high-density fiberboard, all finished in resin.

Laminate flooring comes in a variety of textures and finishes. It can be smooth to resemble polished woods, embossed with a pressed pattern to add a wood grain texture, or hand-scraped for an antique wood look. It can also have a shiny high gloss or matte-like low gloss, which gets higher marks for hiding small scratches.

But there's no refinishing laminate. If any damage occurs, the plank needs to be replaced.

Porcelain tile

Porcelain tile planks can resemble wood, even with a textured



Luxury vinyl plank is a top seller, said George Larson of Rayo Wholesale Floor Covering Supply. "You can put it in every room and not worry." It does have some wear issues in extreme heat.

grain. They come in a variety of styles, colors, and designs — from sleek to rustic. They're scratch-resistant, stain-resistant and water-resistant.

"They're the most durable," said George Larson, sales associate at Rayo Wholesale Floor Covering Supply. "You can put it in every room, including the bathroom, and not worry."

When Pinto was working with a client with young boys on a new construction home, the couple went into the project with a contract for engineered wood flooring. But after realizing that they were going to install a huge three-panel door in the living room that would open to the backyard and its pool, Pinto had a heart-to-heart with them.

"You're trying to get this indoor-outdoor space that looks pretty flawless and clean, but if you're going to have a bunch of people over here for a pool party, do you really want all those wet feet tracking water in from the pool on your wood floor?"

The challenge was weighing the practicality of the porcelain tile against the more authentic look of the engineered wood, knowing that tile is cold and hard and not as comfy on bare feet. The couple

did choose the tile — and Pinto added radiant floor heating along with area rugs in the living room and kitchen to warm up the space.

Luxury vinyl

Vinyl wood-look planks have come a long way, like wood-look porcelain tile. Pinto said luxury vinyl looks and feels more like real wood than porcelain but has some of the same characteristics of tile in the sense that it is maintenance-free. It won't stain, it's moisture-resistant and it's much softer to walk on than tile, but it could still potentially scratch given the right situation.

"If a pet digs at it or a sharp object is dragged against the floor with enough pressure, then the vinyl can scratch, and then at that point that plank will need to be replaced," she said.

Budgetwise, she added that it's a great alternative to wood. And it holds up great with kids and pets, too.

Larson is a fan of this product. "It's less money to install. It's more durable than others. Designers like it because since it's a waterproof floor, they don't have to chop up the floor throughout the house with tile in the kitchen and bathrooms, wood floors in

living rooms, and carpet in bedrooms. You can put it in every room and not worry. Without a doubt we sell more luxury vinyl plank than anything else right now."

But Pinto did point out some drawbacks, including issues their team has had with installation of the material over time, and with it holding up without warping in extreme temperature fluctuations. And if a space is very open to sunlight, like an entire wall of glass, and it gets blasted with sunlight for long periods of time without any windowcovering protection, then, she said, the product could potentially buckle and warp.

Bamboo

Think of bamboo as your eco-friendly option. It has a bit in common with engineered wood in that, as a grass, it's also engineered, with strands of grass shredded, then pressed together using heat and glue to form floorboards. According to HGTV, there are three types of bamboo floors: horizontal, in which strips are layered and pressed together with those quintessential bamboo knuckles in the graining; vertical, which offers a cleaner look thanks

to the bamboo strips being turned sideways to be glued together; and woven or stranded, in which shredded strands of the grass are compressed with resin. They produce a hard, hardwood-like surface and are the most durable variety of the three.

"It's a hard material, and generally more waterproof than hardwoods, but not waterproof like porcelain or luxury vinyl," Pinto explained. "It is pet friendly and relatively easy to maintain since you don't need to seal it. Like hardwood, you need to clean up spilled water or liquid since it's not waterproof and is more susceptible to moisture."

"It's an option to consider if someone wants something more natural or earth-friendly or wants to achieve a more modern/contemporary look in their space. But many clients want something more waterproof and versatile so it's not something we order as often as the other types of flooring we discussed. If a homeowner does want to purchase bamboo flooring, they should make sure they are purchasing it from a reputable store/manufacturer so they can ensure quality control and make sure they are purchasing true bamboo flooring."

Factors to consider

Choosing among these different types of faux hardwood may seem overwhelming. A good designer or salesperson, said Larson, should ask you all the right questions about your lifestyle and budget to help guide you to the best decision for your household. But Pinto has some thoughts for homeowners to consider:

- Look at the sheen. Anything super-shiny will reveal any scratches or imperfections.
- If you want your space to look bigger, consider wider planks when considering solid or engineered hardwood. Pinto says that look also makes a space more elegant.

- Look at the core of an engineered hardwood plank to make sure it's a nice quality plywood core, as opposed to MDF or particleboard. That will help reinforce the integrity and strength of the veneer on top.

- Make sure you get a nice urethane finish on engineered hardwood. She prefers urethane to an oiled finish for maintenance reasons.

- For porcelain tiles, stay between a 6- or 7-inch-wide plank — and between 36 and 48 inches in length. Once they're installed, those dimensions will make the planks look more realistic. Also, Pinto prefers a bit of texture on them, not just for the look but because it makes it nicer to walk on the floor and helps prevent slipping.

- If you install luxury vinyl, be sure to keep the windows covered when the sun is shining into the room to avoid fading and warping. Also, when selecting a vendor, look at the back of the plank to be sure that the underlayment is already attached, to make installation easier and less expensive. Pinto also recommends finding a vinyl brand that incorporates a stone core, as opposed to a plastic or different kind of vinyl core. The stone helps make the product more structurally secure, especially when there are temperature fluctuations that could otherwise cause the vinyl to warp or buckle.

Golden is a San Diego freelance writer and blogger.