

Laminate flooring gaining popularity

Laminate flooring is steadily gaining popularity in the marketplace.

Many people recognize this material by one of its brand names, Pergo. There are, however, many other manufacturers. Two major manufacturers beside Pergo are Wilsonart and Formica.

Most people see the name Formica and think of countertops. By and large, laminate flooring is the same material as Formica counter material.

Laminate flooring is available in square or rectangular pieces made to look like stone or tile and in planks that simulate wood. Both look pretty much like the real thing, with the tile and stone looking surprisingly so.

The laminate surface is bonded to a medium density fiberboard (MDF) substrate. The individual pieces have tongue and groove edges, which are glued together. The result is a smooth, gap-free surface.

Unlike conventional flooring, laminate isn't attached to the sub floor. It "floats" on a thin layer of foam underlayment.

A quarter-inch gap must be left at all edges of the floor to allow for expansion due to changes in temperature and humidity. These gaps are easily covered with quarter-round molding or other trim, which would normally be used to finish flooring.

Installation of the laminate flooring is easy and can be done by amateurs. The instructions supplied by the manufacturers are generally simple to follow. Do-it-yourselfers will be able to efficiently install laminate flooring and create a very professional look-

ing job. Laminate can be applied over many existing surfaces including wood, vinyl and concrete, even some carpeting. I personally wouldn't recommend the latter, however.

Major manufacturers require vapor barrier when installing the flooring directly over concrete. All offer their own brand of 6-mil poly but just about any 6-mil poly should work. Check with the packaging, however, to verify whether using another brand of vapor barrier will cause warranty problems.

Most manufacturers have both standard and premium grades of foam underlayment. I highly recommend the premium grade because it has better sound deadening properties.

My wife's parents have a Pergo floor with standard grade underlayment in their home. When we visit them along with our two dogs, the noise the dogs' nails make

clicking across the floor can be rather irritating.

One criticism of laminate flooring I heard from Dan Murphy, owner of 4 Floors, a Livonia-based flooring installer, is that the warranty on scratching of laminate floors is fairly weak by some manufacturers.

Laminate is quite hard, however. My wife's folks have had theirs for many years with little signs of scratching or wear. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dan for contributing labor and flooring materials on several of our Habitat for Humanity projects this year.

Harry Jachym writes Ask Dad, a column on home issues ranging from repairs and maintenance to buying and remodeling projects. He is a Plymouth resident. Send any questions or comments to Jachym at askdad@comcast.net or in care of Ken Abramczyk, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Check it out - beware of animal urban legends

I tried for years to unlock the mystery of why Canadian Kit Kat bars taste better than American Kit Kat bars. Don't get me wrong - both are darn yummy, but the Canadian Kit Kat bars just plain taste yum-

mer. After extensive, intensive research (actually, I just called the 800 number on the package), I found out Nestlé makes the Canadian version, and Hershey makes the American version. Hmm. Why? I have no idea. That's not the point.

The point is, few of the people I've run across this over the years have believed me. Now I have facts that corroborate my story.

Without facts a story is just unbelievable.

Well, not always. Some stories people just want to believe. I have clients who fear that their cat will sneak into the baby's room at night to "steal his breath." Those villainous felines also cause abortions just by being in the same house with a pregnant woman. And, you know pit bulls can lock their jaws when biting something, or someone!

Each of these has some level of fact. A cat might lay on a baby and hinder breathing, but it's very unlikely. Pit bulls have powerful jaws and are tenacious at holding on, but there's no mechanism to "lock his jaws." Taxoplasmosis is a threat to cause abortion, but you're more likely to get it from cooking dinner than from your cat's litter.

Personal hygiene should make everything just fine if you are pregnant and have a cat. If you decide to clean the litter yourself, wear rubber gloves and clean up promptly. I have been told, however, that this is an overreaction to get husbands to change the cat litter! (Discuss concerns with your physician.)

These stories each mislead the listener to varying degrees. People believe them because they hear them so often, passed on from friends, parents, grandparents, even from medical professionals. Believable and truthful are two different things.

Jan Harold Brunvand has written several books about urban legends, which are basically facts passed around as though true, sometimes to scare children (example: "...and when they opened the car door, there was a hook attached to the handle!"), to reinforce stereotypes, or just to repeat a great yarn, you heard from a friend.

ANIMAL TALES

Many urban legends involve animals.

In one, a woman arriving home from work finds her Doberman Pinscher choking and in convulsions. She takes the dog to the vet, leaves him there and goes home, to find the phone ringing. The vet has removed two human fingers from the dog's throat, and the police are on their way.

On arrival, the police follow a blood trail to a closet, where



About animals

Dr. Brad Davis

they apprehend an intruder, who's a few digits short of a full hand.

Of course, sometimes the dog's a pit bull, or a German Shepherd, or a toy poodle. Sometimes it's in Los Angeles, or Detroit, or Salt Lake City. That's the nature of these stories - they may start with a nugget of truth in them, but grow toward pure fiction, told as having happened to a "friend of a friend."

How about the teenager who dries the dog after a bath by placing it in the microwave? Sometimes they are wild, like the baby elephant who escapes from its handlers and sits on a VW Bug, denting in the roof. Or the dog who retrieves his owner's stick of dynamite and runs under the brand-new car just as it explodes.

These stories give a glimpse into the psyche of our culture, and, heck, they can be pretty funny. Problem is, misinformation too often blocks out real information.

How many owners give their dog gunpowder to "make him mean"? Rare, but certainly misinformation.

Lots of otherwise very good owners wait to spay their animal "until after the first heat," or "after the first litter," sure the animal needs this hormonal charge to feel complete. Just absurd.

How many times have I heard someone tell me that cats have a need to be outside? Too many itching dogs come in covered in motor oil, which cures allergies, I get told with a wink. And every breed of dog has a completely different physiology from every other breed of dog. Owners know - the breeder told them about it. When you hear something that seems odd, call your vet. Misconceptions can go beyond mildly amusing, all the way to harmful. Ask and ask. What can it hurt?

Unless your vet has a hook for a hand and stalks angrily through the woods at night, I've heard stories about that guy!

Take Home Message: When you hear a wild story about animals, or anything else for that matter, remember there is a reasonable chance it's just an urban legend. Seriously, though, try those Canadian Kit Kat bars - you can thank me later.

Dr. Brad Davis is the medical director for the YCA of Garden City, 2085 Inkster Road, Garden City, MI 48135. Feel free to write him there with questions and comments.

He is also one of the hosts of the nationally syndicated radio show Animal Talk. Visit the Web site at www.animaltalkradio.com. You can send e-mail questions or comments to Questions@animaltalkradio.com.

Design center showcase to benefit DSO

The Volunteer Council of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, in cooperation with Michigan Design Center (MDC), will present a major fund-raiser, Orchestras for the Home, Friday-Sunday, March 7-9.

This inspiring design showcase, open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, will give the general public a great opportunity to enter the world of professional designers at MDC in Troy.

MDC is at 1700 Stutz Drive, north off Maple Road, between Coolidge and Crooks.

The open house will be preceded by a gala opening the evening of Thursday, March 6.

Proceeds from both events will support concert and educational activities of the DSO. Orchestras for the Home will offer an open house of 40-plus showrooms at MDC, which is normally open to designers and their clients only.

Inside, patrons will be able to view primary sources for design ideas and materials for the home. Local interior designers will create more than 50 different vignettes or special room settings for the occasion. Local interior designers, architects, landscape architects and garden and floral artists will be on hand each day to

offer demonstrations and lead informal discussions on a wide variety of topics.

Showcase tickets are \$18 in advance, and \$20 at the door.

Advance tickets are on sale now at the Orchestra Hall box office; Suite 25 at MDC; the Somerset Collection Concierge, Big Beaver Road and Coolidge in Troy; Blossoms in Birmingham; Hagopian in Novi; all English Gardens locations; and the League Shop in Grosse Pointe Farms.

Tickets can also be bought by calling (313) 576-5111 or visiting www.detroitmhsymphphony.com. Groups of 15 or more are eligible for a pre-opening docent-led tour, beginning at 9:30 a.m. March 8 and 9. Space is limited. Call (313) 576-5154 to make arrangements. Additionally, Orchestras for

the Home will present a series of design-related seminars featuring internationally renowned guest speakers, including Mariette Himes Gomez of her namesake firm, Carlton Varney of Dorothy Draper and Company, and Jeffrey Simpson of Architectural Digest.

Lecture tickets for Varney, Himes Gomez and Simpson are \$15 and are in addition to the general admission ticket.

A special Sunday brunch, catered by Opus One, will take place March 9 with designer Alison Hampton, president of the design firm founded by her father, Mark Hampton.

Tickets to the brunch are \$50 and include general admission. A 24-hour design showcase information hotline is (313) 576-5155.

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