

Taunton's

**BUILD LIKE A PRO®**

EXPERT ADVICE FROM START TO FINISH

# Installing Floors



**WOOD ■ LAMINATE ■ VINYL ■ TILE ■ BAMBOO**

Joseph Truini

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Joseph Truini



The Taunton Press



To Marla, for her many years of unwavering love and support. To Kate and Chris, my heart and soul.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Back in 1985, I installed a radical** new type of “floating” hardwood floor from Sweden that was unlike anything I—or most anyone else in the United States—had ever seen before. It was called laminated flooring because each plank was composed of thin wood layers that were glued—or laminated—together. The top layers of the long tongue-and-groove planks were covered in 1/8-in.-thick hardwood strips. (This type of flooring is now called engineered wood to differentiate it from plastic-laminate flooring.)

I installed the flooring in the living room at my parents’ home, and even wrote an article about it for *Popular Mechanics* magazine. And although I didn’t know it at the time, that Swedish import helped revolutionize the flooring industry and kick off an explosion of do-it-yourself flooring products.

Over the years, engineered wood became more popular and easier to install, and soon other DIY-friendly flooring products started to appear, including snap-together laminate planks and tiles, floating vinyl sheets, cork-veneered planks, prefinished solid bamboo, even tape-down carpet squares.

The result of all this upheaval—and billions of dollars in research, design,

and manufacturing—is that professional contractors no longer dominate floor installations. Today, there are dozens of floors that are specifically designed and packaged for do-it-yourself homeowners. And the widespread use—and rental—of pneumatic tools has even made traditional nail-down floors accessible to DIYers.

The goal of this book is to introduce you to the many fabulous flooring products now available, but more important, I want to give you the confidence and inspiration to tackle your own flooring project. To help you understand the installations, you’ll find detailed drawings, hundreds of step-by-step photographs, and accompanying text that describes each step of the process.

My work on this book is done, but I feel as if there’s some unfinished business. I know for a fact that every major flooring manufacturer is feverishly working on the next greatest generation of better, greener, easier-to-install flooring. And although I don’t know what to expect, each time I visit my mom and see that 1985 floating floor, I can’t help but think that the final chapter has not yet been written.







# WIDE WORLD OF FLOORING

**T**here's no doubt that we demand more from our floors than from any other building material in our home. We tromp across them with muddy boots and piercing heels, scrub them with soapy water, drag furniture across them, and assault them with clawing pets and kids in cleats. Yet we expect our floors to withstand this daily onslaught and remain in like-new condition for years.

The good news is that many of today's flooring materials not only meet our real-world expectations, but often exceed them. In this section we'll examine a wide variety of flooring options, which have been divided into six main categories: wood, tile and stone, laminate, resilient vinyl, bamboo, and cork. Within each category are many variations, styles, and colors of flooring, so I'm sure you'll discover at least a few that'll serve admirably in your home for years to come. ▶▶▶

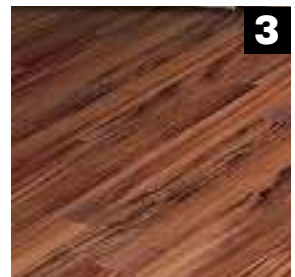
(Photo at left courtesy Kährs)



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## PRO TIP

### To protect a wood floor, be sure to

- Sweep and vacuum regularly to remove dirt and sand that can scratch the finish.
- Place mats or rugs at all entrances for wiping your shoes.
- Put protective glides on furniture legs.
- Avoid flooding the floor with water, and immediately clean up all spills.
- Never drag furniture or appliances across the floor.

## TRADE SECRET

### Most solid-wood

flooring is manufactured with a moisture content between 6 and 9 percent. Place unopened packages of flooring in the room at least three days prior to installation, so the wood can acclimate to the air temperature and humidity.

## Wood Flooring

You've got two basic choices when it comes to wood flooring: solid wood or engineered wood. And each of those types comes unfinished or prefinished. The flooring you'll ultimately choose will depend on several factors, including price, wood species, ease of installation, the type of subfloor, and the room itself.

### Solid-wood flooring

Solid-wood flooring has been popular ever since dirt-floored Colonial-era cabins gave way to more proper homes. Even today, houses with wood floors sell faster and fetch higher prices than homes without them. Solid-wood flooring offers a multitude of design and finishing options, comes in many species, and is easily repaired and refinished. Plus, a properly maintained wood floor can easily last several generations.

Solid-wood flooring is readily available in both unfinished and prefinished varieties. Traditional unfinished hardwood-strip flooring is the most popular wood floor installed today. It's affordable and attractive, and you can choose to stain it any color you'd like or to leave it natural. However, unfinished wood requires sand-



A mixture of several exotic hardwoods, including Brazilian walnut, teak, and eucalyptus, are used in this solid-wood floor from Mohawk® Flooring. Called Jakarta, it features 3/8-in.-thick by 3-in.-wide floorboards that can be glued or nailed down. (Photo courtesy Mohawk Flooring)

ing, staining (if desired), and the application of a clear topcoat finish.

Prefinished wood flooring costs more than unfinished flooring, but it's growing in popularity because it doesn't require sanding or finishing. As soon as the last plank is installed, you can nail up the baseboard and carry in the furniture. Prefinished flooring also comes in thinner planks.

## Wood Flooring: DIY Finish vs. Prefinished Flooring

PREFINISHED FLOORING has a lot going for it: It reduces installation time by several days and keeps dust and odors out of the house. Finishes are sprayed on and heat-cured in dust-free, factory-controlled settings. They include UV-protected and aluminum-oxide formulas that typically outlast a site-applied finish.

However, do-it-yourself finishing is still preferred in many cases because it allows you to choose the exact stain color and number of topcoats to apply. Plus, unfinished flooring costs considerably less than prefinished flooring, even when you take into account the cost of sanding and finishing.



**The natural warmth and beauty of Southern long-leaf heart pine is on full display in this traditional pine floor by Carlisle Wide Plank<sup>SM</sup> Floors. The planks come in widths up to 10 in., and feature tight vertical grain that's nearly as hard as oak. (Photo courtesy Carlisle Wide Plank Floors.)**

than unfinished flooring, which creates less trouble when transitioning from one room to the next.

Solid-wood flooring is suitable for virtually any room in the house, but it's best to avoid moisture-prone areas, such as bathrooms and laundries. It also shouldn't be used in below-grade situations, such as basements and other underground rooms.

Putting wood floors in kitchens has been a popular trend for the past decade or so, especially in homes with open floor plans where the kitchen, dining room, and adjacent hallway all flow together. To protect the floor from the inevitable stains, splashes, wear spots, and dents, lay water-resistant carpet runners in front of the counters and refrigerator. Another option is to install a distressed floor; its rustic appearance will hide minor blemishes.

Wood flooring is commonly available in narrow strips, wide planks, and parquet squares. Traditional 2¼-in.-wide oak strip is by far the most popular type, but 5-in.- to 6-in.-wide planks are more common than ever before, especially in large rooms, such as living rooms, dens, and great rooms. Parquet flooring comes in preassembled tiles or can be custom made from individual strips of wood. Parquet is ideal for creating eye-catching geometric patterns, weaves, and herringbones.

In recent years, hand-scraped, rustic, and classic Old World looks have become commonplace. Deeper, richer colors—cinnamon, toffee, and caramel—are popular, too. Exotic woods with unusual grain patterns and colors continue to appeal to many homeowners.

Wood is a renewable resource, but some species take so long to grow and are being harvested so quickly they're no longer considered sustainable. The best way to ensure that you're buying responsibly harvested wood is to confirm that the flooring is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council or a similar environmental agency.

### **Engineered-wood flooring**

Prefinished engineered-wood flooring was introduced to North America in the mid-1980s and quickly became the most popular type of do-it-yourself wood floor. It's composed of three or more wood layers that are glued together into long planks. The top layer is a thin solid-wood veneer, which comes in nearly two-dozen species. Laminated construction creates a floor that's much more dimensionally stable than solid-wood flooring, so it's less likely to cup, split, shrink, or warp.

## **WHAT GO WRO**

**Solid-wood flooring** isn't recommended for moisture-prone areas such as basements, baths, and laundry rooms, or for spaces with very high humidity. Moisture can cause flooring to swell, cup, and buckle, even if proper expansion space exists around the room's perimeter.

## **TRAD SECRE**

**Solid-wood flooring** is available in a variety of grades. Oak and maple, for example, are available in clear (no knots) select (small knots) and common grades, and 2 (more knots) and 3 (greater color variation). All grades are sourced from the same tree, each will give a different look, from formal to rustic. Price, too, is affected by grades, with clear flooring costing more.

**Engineered-wood flooring comes in many exotic wood species that aren't available in any other type of floor. This strikingly handsome wide-plank floor is made by Kährs from kosipo, an exotic that's denser than maple, oak, ash, or cherry.**

Engineered-wood flooring is also less susceptible to damage from moisture than solid wood. It can be installed virtually anywhere, including below-grade rooms and directly over a concrete slab. However, it's important to lay the flooring over the appropriate underlayment. Check with

the flooring manufacturer to ensure you're using the correct underlayment for the subfloor or joist.

Most engineered-wood planks measure between 3 in. and 7 in. wide and 7 ft. and 8 ft. long, and come in thicknesses ranging from about  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. It's worth mentioning t





although a vast majority of engineered-wood flooring comes prefinished, in some parts of the country you can find unfinished planks.

When shopping for engineered-wood flooring, make sure the top veneer is at least  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. thick, which will allow sanding and refinishing, if necessary. You'll also notice that the flooring comes in three basic styles: one-, two-, and three-strip planks. Those designations refer to the number of veneer strips visible in the top layer. A one-strip plank resembles a single, wide board. A two-strip plank looks like two narrow floorboards. The three-strip plank most closely mimics a traditional hardwood-strip floor; each plank appears to be three narrow boards.

The planks have tongue-and-groove joints milled along all edges and ends. The reason DIYers love engineered-wood flooring is that the planks snap together and "float" over a thin underlayment. There's no nailing or gluing, so installation is quick and neat. Plus, the planks can be laid directly over an existing floor, as long as it's hard, flat, and in sound condition.

## Tile and Stone

Although they're not the easiest to install, tile and stone products create arguably the most beautiful and durable of all floors. Man-made tiles fall into two basic categories: ceramic and

porcelain. Natural stone tiles are exactly that: slabs of stone cut from the earth and shaped into floor tiles. Which of these masonry products you should install will depend on the particular style you're trying to create with regard to tile size, color, pattern, and texture. However, also consider hardness, overall cost, installation ease, and stain and slip resistance.

### Glazed ceramic tile

Glazed ceramic tile is one of the most functional and decorative of all building materials. Made from a mixture of mined clays and other natural minerals, the tiles are shaped, topped with a glaze, and fired in a kiln. The result is a hard, flat, easy-to-clean surface that's impervious to staining.



This remodeled bath features a classic mosaic-tile floor composed of 1-in.-sq. glazed ceramic tiles. These American Olean® satin-white and gloss-black tiles come in 12-in. by 12-in. sheets for easy installation; style shown: Signature Classics Chloe, Number CH02. (Photo courtesy American Olean)

## SAFETY FIRST

When choosing ceramic or porcelain tile for wet areas, opt for matte finishes and slightly roughened textures, which will help prevent slipping. It's also smart to use nonslip mats near sinks, tubs, and showers to avoid accidental falls.

## PRO TIP

**A floating engineered-wood floor is a good choice for installation over radiant-heat tubing. It's not as susceptible to temperature and humidity as solid-wood flooring, so it's less likely to warp or buckle. However, be sure to keep the heat temperature below the maximum recommended by the flooring manufacturer.**

## TRADITIONAL SECRETS

**It's best to order ceramic or porcelain tiles needed for a room at the same time. That'll give you your best chance of getting all the tiles from the same lot number. Tiles from different lots are often slightly darker or lighter in color.**



Rich, dark brown floors are typically made of stained wood, but this dining room is surfaced with American Olean 12-in. by 12-in. glazed-ceramic tile; style shown: Signature Classics Broadway Brown, Number PK04. (Photo courtesy American Olean)



## Testing Tile Toughness

WHEN CHOOSING A GLAZED porcelain tile, check its surface hardness rating to ensure it'll stand up in your home. The test developed by the Porcelain Enamel Institute (PEI) rates tiles from 0 to 5. The higher the number, the more abrasion resistant the tile is.

- PEI 0: Not recommended for floors
- PEI 1: Light traffic
- PEI 2: Medium traffic
- PEI 3: Medium-heavy traffic
- PEI 4: Heavy traffic
- PEI 5: Extra-heavy traffic

Note: Some tiles are rated for hardness according to the MOHS test, which is based on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 having the hardness of diamond. For residential floors, a rating of at least 5 will ensure excellent wear resistance.

Unglazed ceramic, such as terra cotta tile, is also available, but it must be treated with a ceramic sealer to protect its porous surface.

The body of ceramic tile is typically white or reddish in color. If you drop something hard onto the floor and chip the glazed surface, the body color will show through. Of course, that's not a problem with unglazed tiles, which are a solid color throughout.

Ceramic tile is popular in areas that get walked on a regular basis, including kitchens, bathrooms, laundries, and foyers. It's also ideal over radiant heat because it absorbs and releases heat slowly and evenly over long periods of time. And tile is a good choice for allergy sufferers because it doesn't support allergens and it can easily be scrubbed clean.

### Porcelain tile

Like ceramic tile, porcelain tile is available in both glazed and unglazed varieties. Unglazed porcelain tiles are commonly referred to as color-body tiles, meaning that the surface color is uniform throughout the tile. However, porcelain tiles are made from ultra-fine porcelain clays and fired at much hotter temperatures than ceramic tiles. As a result, they're much harder, more dense, and less porous than ceramic tiles. Porcelain tiles are also less likely to crack, have superior resistance to moisture and staining, and can be installed indoors or outdoors. For all these reasons and others, most professional tile contractors prefer porcelain floor tiles to ceramic tiles.

When shopping for porcelain tile, you'll see many styles that are dead ringers for natural stone products, especially marble. Now, it's hard to beat the natural beauty of real stone, but a stone-pattern porcelain tile doesn't have any of the imperfections and weak spots inherent in



Rich earth tones are subtly blended together in this color-body porcelain tile floor by Mohawk. In this entryway, 12-in. by 12-in. tiles were used, but 6-in. by 6-in. and 18-in. by 18-in. sizes are also available; color shown: Montara Sage Brush. (Photo courtesy Mohawk Flooring)



This interesting floor pattern is composed of DalTile's 12-in. by 24-in. color-body porcelain tiles set between 2-in. by 24-in. tiles of the same color. The design on the tiles is reminiscent of fine silk or linen. (Photo courtesy DalTile)

natural stone. So you end up with a floor that looks like stone but is much more durable and easier to clean.

There are also porcelain-tile planks that look like weathered wooden boards, right down to the wood-grain texture.

### Natural stone

Granite, slate, marble, travertine, and limestone are just some of the natural stones that are available as floor tile. Again, there are manmade tiles that mimic stone and most even cost less, but for discriminating homeowners who value authenticity, it's hard to beat the natural beauty, texture, and color of real stone.

Natural stone is fairly expensive, so it's best to install it where it'll have the greatest impact, such as in a foyer or master bathroom. Preassembled

## WHAT GO WR

**Natural stone tile** often vary slightly in thickness, even if taken from the same quarry. This may necessitate a deeper mortar bed than anticipated and affect how you'll handle the tiles. Check each tile and remove any tiles that are much thicker or thinner than the average.



**Natural slate is one of the most dense and durable of all natural-stone floors. Here, gray-black 12-in. by 12-in. American Olean slate creates a subtle yet sophisticated floor. Note that light-gray grout was used to outline and highlight each tile. (Photo courtesy American Olean)**



**This stunning natural-stone floor, by DalTile, features large square sections of tumbled-stone tiles framed by an eye-catching mosaic border (above). The 6-in.-wide border is composed of tiny tumbled-stone tiles set in a woven serpentine design (inset). (Photo courtesy DalTile)**

stone medallions and borders are also available, which can be used in a ceramic or porcelain floor to create an attractive focal point.

Stone tile is installed very much like ceramic or porcelain tile. It's typically set in thinset mortar over a substrate of plywood or cement backerboard. The spaces between the tiles are then filled with grout. The biggest difference is that you can't cut stone with a manual score-and-snap tile cutter. You must use a motorized wet saw, which you can rent by the day. The saw employs a toothless, diamond-impregnated blade and water bath to easily slice through the stone.

A properly installed stone-tile floor will last for many generations, but it's not impervious to everything. In fact, natural stone is rather porous, so it isn't very stain or moisture resistant. That's why it's important to apply the recommended sealer at least once a year to the entire surface and twice a year in bathrooms and other heavily used rooms. To reduce scratches, regularly sweep and vacuum the tile, and place mats or rugs at doorways to collect dirt.

## Laminate

When laminate flooring was first introduced in North America from Europe in the mid-1950s, it was a mere curiosity. Some thought, a joke. Well, no one's laughing now. Laminate flooring is the fastest-growing flooring sold today and is available from more than a dozen manufacturers. It also happens to be extremely easy to install, making it a favorite amongst do-it-yourselfers.

The flooring is composed of a dense fiberboard core topped with a layer of plastic laminate, which is similar to Formica® and other laminates used on kitchen countertops, with one important difference: The high-pressure laminate used for flooring is 20 times harder than



The striking grain pattern and vibrant color of exotic hardwoods is captured in this Pergo laminate floor. Called Palissander, the 5-inch wide planks snap together without glue or nails to create a floating floor. (Photo courtesy Pergo)

countertop laminate. Consequently, laminate flooring is highly scratch and dent resistant, very durable, and extremely easy to clean.

Laminate flooring comes in both long planks and square tiles; each type has tongue-and-groove joints that snap together to create a floating floor. The flooring is installed over a thin underlayment; no glue or nails are required. Some premium laminate products come with a factory-applied underlayment already adhered to the underside of the flooring, thus saving you from having to install a separate underlayment.

Wood-look planks are without question the most popular type of laminate flooring. You can find laminate planks that mimic nearly every known hardwood and softwood species, including oak, maple, walnut, pine, cherry, teak, and even bamboo and sea grass. And they come in a rainbow of “stained” colors ranging from sun-bleached white to midnight ebony. The planks measure 5 in. to 7 in. wide and nearly 4 ft. long.

## A Look inside Laminate Flooring

LAMINATE FLOORING IS BUILT UP OF several layers of resin, paper, and fiberboard to produce an inexpensive alternative to more expensive wood, stone, and tile floors. The bottom, or backing, is typically of melamine plastic. It offers stability and moisture resistance and is bonded to a core layer of high-density fiberboard. The decorative top layer is bonded to the core and is usually printed from a high-resolution photograph. The decorative layer is protected by a wear layer, which typically contains aluminum oxide and resin.

And, like engineered-wood flooring, laminate planks come in three basic styles: one-, two-, and three-strip planks.

## TRADING SECRETS

**When shopping for** laminate planks, be sure to check the thickness of the planks. Generally, the thicker the plank, the better the flooring, and the easier it is to install.



Looking well worn from years of foot traffic, this easy-to-install plank floor will maintain its aged appearance for years to come because it's actually a plastic-laminate floor from Pergo's American Cottage Collection. Style shown: Boathouse Pine. (Photo courtesy Pergo)



## PRO TIP

**Install a special acoustic underlayment beneath laminate flooring to quiet footsteps and make them sound less hollow. This is particularly helpful in reducing the clicking sound made when cats and dogs run across the surface.**

Laminate tiles are typically about 15 in. sq. and available in a wide variety of colors and textures that resemble stone, brick, and glazed ceramic tile. Many premium products even feature recessed grout lines to further fool the eye.

Laminate flooring is best suited for living rooms, family rooms, and bedrooms. Some types can be installed in moisture-prone areas, such as kitchens and bathrooms, but they'll require extraordinary care and vigilance. It's imperative to keep water from penetrating seams or getting under the flooring, and all spills and splashes must be sopped up immediately.

## Resilient Vinyl

Despite the widespread demand for hardwood, laminate, and ceramic-tile floors, resilient vinyl remains extremely popular. That's because vinyl is surprisingly durable, quite affordable, quick to install, easy to clean, and suitable for all rooms,

including kitchens, baths, and foyers. Recent advancements have allowed manufacturers to offer higher-quality vinyl flooring in a wide array of realistic wood-grain and tile patterns. (By the way, vinyl flooring is classified as "resilient" because it gives slightly when you step on it and then returns to its normal profile.) Here's a detailed look at three basic types of resilient vinyl: sheet, tiles, and planks.

### Vinyl sheet

Like many other flooring products, vinyl sheet has evolved to become much more DIY-friendly. In fact, it's one of the easiest of all floors to install. At one time, vinyl sheet flooring had to be glued down to the entire subfloor with sticky mastic. Then, perimeter-bonded vinyl was introduced; you only had to apply glue around the room's perimeter. And although there are still some glue-down products, the latest generation of "floating" vinyl sheets in

nearly as easily as a throw rug. It's not fastened down to the subfloor in any manner.

Very few flooring products come in as many colors and patterns as vinyl sheet. There are literally several dozen styles to choose from, including ones that resemble hardwood planks, glazed ceramic tile, natural stone, slate, and brick. Plus, there's an array of solid colors to consider, including checkerboard and stripes.

Another distinct benefit of vinyl sheet flooring is that it comes in many different-size patterns—squares, rectangles, octagons, diamonds—allowing you to pick one that best suits the room. Typically, flooring with smaller patterns, such as 2-in.-sq. tiles, look best in smaller rooms, and larger patterns work best in more spacious rooms.

Vinyl sheet flooring is available in 12-ft.-wide rolls, which can be cut to virtually any length. That means seamless coverage in most rooms, but you can seam together two pieces, if necessary. Shopping for vinyl sheet flooring can be a bit tricky. Prices vary widely from one flooring to the next, even though they look exactly the same. The difference is most often based on the construction of the flooring; some are just better made than others.

Fortunately, all major manufacturers offer several lines of vinyl sheet flooring, ranging from good to better to best. Higher-quality products cost more but are also thicker and more durable, and have longer warranties. So, when comparing vinyl sheet flooring, be sure to check not only the price, but also the manufacturer's warranty.

## TRAD SECRET

**Unroll vinyl sheet flooring and allow it to "relax" for an hour or so prior to installation. That'll give the flooring time to flatten out, and will make installation easier.**



**The subtle color, grain pattern, and texture of natural slate tiles are captured in this Tarkett FiberFloor® vinyl sheet flooring; style shown: Canyon Slate Brown Moss. (Photo courtesy Tarkett Fiber Floors)**



Two types of Mannington Adura® vinyl flooring were used to create this eye-catching design. Sicilian Stone beige quartz tiles are divided into squares by strips of Spalted Georgian Maple planks. (Photo courtesy Mannington Adura)



## PRO TIP

**Vinyl tiles and planks** are more supple and easier to install when the weather is warm. If you're installing the floor during cold weather, turn up the heat in the room.

### Vinyl tiles

Vinyl tiles aren't nearly as popular as vinyl sheets, but they're still a good choice for many DIY installations. The 12-in. by 12-in. tiles are easy to handle, cut, and install, and they can be used in virtually any room, including kitchens, baths, laundry rooms, and even basements and garages.

There are primarily two types of vinyl tiles: self-stick and dry-back. Self-stick tiles come with a pressure-sensitive adhesive applied to the back of each tile. You simply peel off the backing sheet and press the tile to the subfloor. Dry-back tiles must be set in a special adhesive that you have to trowel down onto the subfloor. It takes more time and effort to install dry-back tiles, but you end up with a more permanent, harder-wearing floor.

Vinyl tiles come in a variety of solid colors and in many patterns that resemble natural stone. The advantage of using vinyl tiles as opposed to vinyl sheets is that you can easily mix and match tiles of different colors and patterns to create a custom floor.

When shopping for vinyl tiles you'll find them divided into three basic groups: printed vinyl, solid vinyl, and vinyl composite. Printed vinyl is comprised of layers; it comes in a great number of colors and patterns. However, solid vinyl and vinyl composite tiles are harder and more durable, and feature the same color throughout from top to bottom. Again, let the price and manufacturer's warranty help you identify the highest-quality products.

## Vinyl planks

The newest type of resilient flooring, vinyl planks, provides the look of hardwood flooring in a super-thin, easy-to-install vinyl strip. As with vinyl tiles, vinyl planks come in both self-stick and glue-down varieties.

The planks measure approximately 3 in. to 5 in. wide and 36 in. to 48 in. long. It requires quite a bit of work to install vinyl planks in large spaces, so this product is best suited for hallways and small bedrooms and dens. (If you want the benefits of vinyl and the look of wood in a large room, consider vinyl sheet flooring.)

Feeling creative? Combine vinyl planks with vinyl tiles to create a custom floor of “stone” tiles bordered by “hardwood” strips. Most manufacturers have design guides that will suggest different integrated patterns.

## Bamboo

The popularity of prefinished bamboo flooring continues to grow, thanks to its contemporary look and environmental advantages. Botanically speaking, bamboo is grass, not wood, so it grows incredibly fast. Most bamboo plants can be harvested in just four or five years. Even more surprising is that bamboo is harder than both oak and maple. And like hardwood flooring, bamboo can be installed in virtually any room, but it's best to avoid baths and other high-moisture spaces.

There are two basic types of bamboo flooring: engineered planks and solid bamboo planks. Engineered bamboo is similar to engineered-wood planks; it's installed using the floating-floor method. Solid bamboo is fastened with nails or staples, just like traditional hardwood flooring.



It's easy to mistake this plank floor for hand-scraped jatoba, an exotic hardwood from South America. It's actually made of 5-in.-wide vinyl planks from the Mannington Adura collection; style shown: Jatoba Roasted Pepper. (Photo courtesy Mannington Adura)



Capture the look of clear pine without sacrificing durability. These natural blond vertical-grain bamboo planks from Teragren Fine Bamboo Flooring are denser than most hardwoods and come prefinished. (Photo courtesy Teragren Fine Bamboo Flooring)

## SAFETY FIRST

Bamboo is very fibrous, so it splinters very easily. Never slide your hand along the edge of a plank or you may end up with a nasty splinter.



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