

CONDO LIVING

Saturday, June 9, 2001 Section P thestar.com

P6 THE TORONTO STAR Saturday, June 9, 2001

ASK AN EXPERT

Laminate flooring is wear-resistant but check condo bylaws

Q My husband and I live in a condo and we are planning to install a laminate floor in the living room, leading into the hallway. There are no restrictions, as such, in the condo. We are, however, utterly confused by what is available and every store we go to has a different opinion about the underpadding. We need to have it installed, as we are unable to do it ourselves due to our complete inability to do any handiwork! It would be really good if you could have an article about laminate floors for condos in your Saturday section.

A *Condo Living contacted Martin Gerskup, the principal of Best Consultants Inc., for advice. He is an investigative architect and building science specialist with more than 18 years' experience in the field of condos, and is an adjunct assistant professor at U of T:*

Laminate floors, often thought of as a "new" type of flooring, have actually been produced in Sweden for close to 80 years. Laminate flooring may look like either hardwood or vinyl, but it is neither!

It uses a floating installation technique based on the provision of a layer of foam under the top decorative surface or wear layer, combined with adhesive applied at the tongue-and-groove joints of the floor planks, which allows installation over existing sub-floors like vinyl, parquet, plywood, concrete and even ceramic tile.

There are several excellent companies that manufacture high-quality, wear-resistant laminate floors (i.e. Bruce, Formica, Pergo, Wilson Art), which offer up to 15-year warranties against wearing, staining and fading.

Each manufacturer has its own installation requirements, and readers are urged to ensure their installer is both experienced and trained in the particular laminate floor selected.

Most manufacturers have simple installation guidelines and videos that provide step-by-step installation instructions for the "do it yourself" type of purchaser.

It is strongly recommended that the manufacturer's instructions be closely followed to ensure a successful installation.

Laminate flooring is right for some people and not for others. It comes down to personal taste and expectations.

Basically, laminate flooring has the look of real hardwood, the comfort of resilient flooring, and the easy maintenance of vinyl.

If considering the purchase of laminate flooring, test a piece of regular laminate flooring next to one with sound absorbing under-padding by walking on both samples in the dealer's showroom.

It is not unusual to hear a little bit of a tapping echo when you walk on laminate flooring, which could be objectionable to some people. Premium underlay materials are available from most manufacturers, which are intended to provide maximum walking comfort and a significant reduction in impact sounds due to foot traffic.

Condominium owners are advised to carefully check their corporation's declaration and bylaws to determine whether laminate flooring is restricted within any areas of their unit.

In the event that there are no bylaws specifically restricting the type of flooring, there may

be a bylaw that imposes the responsibility upon unit owners to seek the consent of the board of directors.

If a change in flooring from, say, carpet, to tile results in noise transmission to the unit below, there may be restrictions on the types of floor finishes set out in the declaration or its bylaws.

Any change that will interfere with the reasonable use and enjoyment of the adjoining units may require the consent of the board of directors.

Laminate flooring can be easily installed in all areas of the home, but care must be taken in following the manufacturer's specific installation instructions for wet areas like bathrooms, laundry rooms, and unit entrances.

Prolonged exposure to moisture may cause warping and buckling. Splashing water on to the floor surface should not result in problems so long as moisture does not come into contact with the edges or bottom layer.

With only an 8-mm thickness, the transition between laminate flooring and other finishes must be carefully considered to reduce the potential for a trip hazard. Most manufacturers have a wide variety of transition strips to compensate for differences in thickness between adjacent floors.

Once the brand and style of laminate flooring has been selected, readers are urged to find a floor dealer they trust.

Do you have a question about condominiums? Send it to Condo Living, The Toronto Star, One Yonge St., Toronto M5E 1E6; fax it to Ask an Expert, 416-865-3635 or send it by e-mail to condos@thestar.ca