

# WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS

## CONSUMERS GUIDE TO HARDWOOD FLOORS

### "19 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU HIRE A HARDWOOD FLOOR COMPANY TO REFINISH OR INSTALL WOOD FLOORS"

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## **INTRODUCTION**

We hope that you find this consumer guide interesting and informative. We produced this guide so that you can make an informed decision regarding the install or refinishing of wood floors for your home.

We have designed this booklet with you the consumer in mind. We have tried to make it easy to use while giving you good information. We have identified 19 key areas to consider when hiring a hardwood floor contractor.

We recommend that you use this guide to develop a series of questions when interviewing a company to install or refinish your hardwood floors.

If that company is WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS, we believe that there is sufficient information regarding our organization to make that informed decision. Feel free to call our office at 724-891-2761 with any questions or to ask for additional copies of this guide for friends or family.

As a consumer you need to have **realistic** expectations about how wood floors will perform in your home.

Wood floors are beautiful, naturally warm, strong, flexible, and easy to work with. **Health benefits are gained by nearly eliminating the harmful allergens and contaminants found in and attached to carpets.** Wood is available in a wide variety of domestic and exotic species, with a marvelous spectrum of color and styles.

Your wood floors will be far superior to any other floor covering in both appearance and function. The bottom line is your wood floors will last a lifetime with proper care and maintenance.

Wood flooring has an interesting and illustrious history. Used first in the middle ages in Europe, wood floors were reserved for the wealthy only.

Colonial America began to use wood plank flooring because of the great abundance of hardwoods in North America. Tongue and groove oak wood strip flooring became prominent in the southern U.S. in the late 1800's because oak was plentiful and inexpensive.

Most homes built before 1966 had wood floors because they were cost efficient. At this time with the advent of woven, inexpensive carpet fibers, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) permitted the use of carpeting in new home construction.

This was the beginning of a trend to cover up existing hardwoods with carpet, or to install carpet in newly built homes.

Wood flooring took a short hiatus but never really went away. With advances in new polyurethane finishes, and homeowners desire to have longer lasting, more functional floors, wood flooring is back to stay.

**Sections 1 - 12 are designed to inform you about wood floor contractors, and what to specifically look for when hiring one.**

## **#1- ARE THEY CERTIFIED & TRAINED PROPERLY? DOES THEIR MANAGEMENT HAVE APPROPRIATE EXPERIENCE?**

When you hire a hardwood floor company, you need to know their level of expertise. Sanding, finishing or installing a hardwood floor is not an easy task. Individuals require specialized skills that can only be obtained by proper training. A good hardwood floor contractor will have an apprenticeship type program in place, where new employees are mentored by more experienced individuals.

The best hardwood floor companies have been trained and certified by the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA). The NWFA was formed in 1986 and has over 3000 members worldwide. The NWFA sets all of the standards and promotes EVERYTHING to do with hardwood floor installation and refinishing. The NWFA holds training classes from beginners to experts. You can find more information on the NWFA at the following address. [www.woodfloors.org](http://www.woodfloors.org)

Some companies or owner operators have passed the trade of hardwood floors down from generation to generation. CONTINUOUS TRAINING IN ANY INDUSTRY IS NECESSARY to maintain consistent quality, and to stay ahead of the curve regarding advances in technology. Would you allow a surgeon to operate on you who hasn't had any new training for 30 years? Probably not! Well then, why would you hire ANYONE who has not kept up with trends, changes, and technology of their particular industry?

The staff at WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS is extremely well trained. In addition to various NWFA training schools, all new employees are assigned to work with an experienced team member for approximately six months. Then after attendance of a certified school, WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS management evaluates the performance of that individual. This system assures continued development of our employees. All employees are required from time to time to attend industry specific meetings and training's to keep abreast of changes in the industry.

**Collectively our staff has over 80 years experience in the wood floor industry.** Vice President Brent Kelosky is a Certified Master Craftsman as designated by the NWFA.

President Rudy Kelosky who has been in the wood floor industry since 1984, has been involved in NWFA training, and is a well respected local businessman with over 30 years experience as a business owner.

## **#2-ARE THEY INSURED, BONDABLE, HAVE PROPER WORKERS COMPENSATION, AND DRUG TESTED?**

This is an interesting topic. When most service companies advertise their services, we as consumers see a few commonalties. Companies will typically advertise screened, insured, bonded etc. But are they really? The first thing to understand is the difference between liability insurance and workers compensation.

When an employee(s) of a company is sent to your home to perform a service, it is REQUIRED by Pennsylvania law that the employer covers the individual(s) with workers compensation insurance. So it is appropriate for you, the consumer, to ask for a copy of not only the companies liability insurance, but their workers compensation coverage as well.

Here is the tricky part- and this is what you need to specifically look for. A SOLE PROPRIETOR CANNOT BUY WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE ON HIMSELF IN THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA. Why is this critical? **Sanding a floor can be a dangerous proposition; people have been seriously injured, even killed by improper use of equipment.** If the sole proprietor was injured in your home you could be sued. You must then prove that a contractual relationship existed with no contributory negligence on your part. Most of these small contractors say they don't have employees but that's not really true. They claim their helpers are independent contractors but if a claim goes to court they would lose.

Now we don't want to scare you, remember the purpose of this guide is to help you ask the right questions. Here's what you need to do. Ask the contractor if he is a sole proprietor, or a corporation. Does he have employees and are they covered by workers compensation insurance.

ONCE AGAIN, ASK TO SEE THEIR LIABILITY & WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE. If they don't have the proper insurance we recommend that you DO NOT HIRE THIS COMPANY.

Understand that this is a complicated issue. We in no way want to construe this as legal advice. We advise you to read our disclaimer on the inside cover of this booklet, AND to consult an attorney for clarification of any of these issues.

Other things to ask: Are their employees bondable? Do they have a safety program? Are their employees drug tested?

WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS is a corporation. All of our employees and management alike are covered by liability and workers compensation insurance. Ask us for a copy, we will be happy to show it to you.

**All WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS employees are bondable and have cleared their Act 33 and 151 clearances (Criminal Background and Child Abuse clearance).** WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS performs a large amount of gymnasium wood flooring in schools and this is required of all of our employees.

WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS participates in a drug free workplace program, as well as a safety program. We would be happy to provide you with details upon request.

### **#3- HOW LONG HAVE THEY BEEN IN BUSINESS?**

We believe how long a company has been in business says a lot. As in all industries, there are companies that are here today and gone tomorrow. Be careful to always ask for a companies qualifications and to find out how long they have been in business.

**Wood Floor Designs has been in business for over 15 years.** President Rudy Kelosky, and Vice-president Brent Kelosky, father and son have built a small humble operation into the leading hardwood Floor Company in Western PA.

Rudy and Brent perfected their craft by attending training schools, and by keeping abreast of changes and new

technology in the industry. The Kelosky's have made a pledge to be the finest hardwood floor company in our area.

## **#4- PRICE, WHY CHEAPEST ISN'T ALWAYS BEST!**

How many times have you tried to save money by spending less, and, in the long run, it ended up costing you more? It has happened to all of us. That's why the old saying rings very, very true. YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR!

Cheapest isn't always best, we recommend that when you hire a hardwood floor company look for the following:

1. A PHYSICAL ADDRESS-Ask the company where they are located and if you can stop in? Even if they work from there home, they should have a shop or warehouse that they can store their equipment and material. If they are reluctant to give you an address, BE WARY OF THIS COMPANY.
2. DO THEY ANSWER THEIR PHONE? If they don't answer when you call to schedule a quote; will they be there to answer their phone when you have a complaint? Any company worth their salt will answer their phones during business hours, if not personally, then at least by an answering service.
3. DO THEY HAVE THE PROPER INSURANCE? This keeps coming up again and again. We recommend that you ask for a copy of their liability insurance and their workers compensation coverage.
4. HOW WELL DO THEY PAY THEIR EMPLOYEES? Now we understand you can't just ask how much their workers get paid, but things to look for are, do they have a dedicated sales staff? What type of vehicle does the salesperson drive? Are the workers cordial? Do they seem to enjoy their work? All of these things can be used to determine if a company is dedicated to paying their employees properly and treating them right. Use all of this information when comparing the cost from



one company to another. A company with all these attributes WILL be more expensive than an operator working out of the back of his truck. Which would you rather have working in your home?

Wood Floor Designs is located at 5401 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, Koppel, PA 16136. We welcome you to stop by during business hours, Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. We have a warehouse showroom as well as many examples of flooring. We even have cork flooring and exotic woods installed in our offices. If you want to stop by to say hello, please do so at your convenience. If you want to visit to look at specific flooring, it would be best if you made an appointment. Please call our office at 724-891-2761.

Speaking of calling our office, our phones are answered live, by us, Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Whether you want to schedule an appointment, order material, give us a compliment, or, if you have a complaint, we answer our phones. We don't claim to be perfect, but we try our darndest to make our customers happy.

Cheapest is not always the best. You do GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR. We at Wood Floor Designs have dedicated employees that are treated fairly by management. We believe that a hard days work deserves good pay. **Our employees, many of whom have families, are compensated fairly. As a result, our prices are not going to be the cheapest.** We support our employees, and stand behind all of the work that they do; so you will get a good job at a **fair** price.

## **#5- DO THEY HAVE A SHOWROOM? WHERE CAN YOU SEE EXAMPLES OF THEIR WORK?**

In the wood flooring business customer confidence can be gained by seeing finished work performed by the wood floor contractor. The best and easiest way to view this is to go to the wood floor contractor's showroom. If they do not have a showroom, they should have a way for you to view their work.

Here at Wood Floor Designs, we have a warehouse showroom that displays several different types of wood floors done

in many different species and styles. We also have African Doussie and Cork flooring in use in our offices. All of these floors are here for our customers to gain confidence that we will perform high quality work for them.

You can see examples of our work all over Western Pennsylvania and Northeast Ohio. Since we have a commercial division, you most likely have walked on a Wood Floor Designs wood floor without even knowing it. Dave & Busters restaurant at the Waterfront in Homestead, and in Westlake Ohio, have beautiful Texas Mesquite wood floors installed by us. Many other local installations include mall stores such as Ann Taylor, and many gymnasium floors including Slippery Rock University and the Beaver County YMCA.

Wood Floor Designs also has a shop-at-home service. With today's busy lifestyles, it is sometimes impossible to come to our warehouse showroom. You may call our office at 724-891-2761 to schedule an in home appointment.

You may also see examples of our workmanship and different product lines at various home shows in the Pittsburgh area. In addition to several home shows at local malls, Wood Floor Designs participates in the Home Remodeling show and the Home & Garden show at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. We welcome you to stop by and visit us at any of the shows.

## **#6- DO THEY HAVE A DEDICATED SALES STAFF?**

It is important that a hardwood floor company have a dedicated sales staff. A person whose main job is customer interaction and service. This person should be a liaison for you, the customer, to connect with; and the person that the office staff and crew workers get job advice and are told the "do's and don't" **in regards to your Job.**

Here at Wood Floor Designs we have a dedicated sales staff. Our residential sales representative has many years of experience in the industry as a general contractor, carpenter, and wood floor installer. He is extremely qualified and has the expertise to evaluate your current wood floors if you are considering refinishing, and make

proper recommendations regarding the installation of new wood floors. Call 724-891-2761 to make an appointment.

Our commercial sales department's main function is representing the company in our athletic floor division and the distribution of flooring products including; Expanko Cork Flooring, BSL prefinished hardwood floors, and Berti Wooden Floors. We work with Architects, Designers, flooring retailers, and general contractors in distributing these products. We can be reached at 724-891-2761.

## **#7-Refinishing versus Recoating, Ask them to define the difference to you?**

Unfortunately this is the one area where customers may not get what they paid for. First of all, lets define the difference between refinishing your wood floors and re-coating your wood floors.

Refinishing your wood floors, means that all of the old finishes, varnishes, etc., will be sanded off all the way down to BARE WOOD. They will use a large drum **sander** starting with rough grit sandpaper, then 2 finer grits to achieve a smooth surface. Next they should use a buffer with a sanding screen to blend in the sanding. **Then a stain, sealers, and polyurethane will be applied to the surface** giving you a "like new" appearance.

Recoating your floors is nothing more than a light sanding with a rotary buffing machine, then putting 1 or 2 new coats of polyurethane on top of the old coats. Although all floors should have periodic recoating, this is a maintenance procedure that WILL NOT take out gouges, watermarks, or fading caused by ultra violet rays. You can find out more about recoating in #9 Maintenance.

We are concerned for you, the consumer, because we have bid jobs against other companies where the customer thought the deal included a complete refinishing; and the contractor gave them a price for just a recoating. **MAKE SURE YOU ASK THE CONTRACTOR WHAT THEY ARE BIDDING, RECOATING OR REFINISHING.** There will be a difference in price. Re-coating is less expensive.

There are several national companies that are promoting dustless or sandless refinishing of your wood floors. These companies are usually not exclusively wood floor companies; they perform other services like carpet cleaning. They try to sell you on the fact that it is faster and cleaner to do it their way. They do not use any type of floor sanders. They use chemicals that are supposed to mimic the appearance of a wood floor that has just been refinished. We really don't have a lot more to say about this except; the only way to completely refinish your floors is with a qualified contractor using a floor sander.

When you receive a quote from Wood Floor Designs, you can be sure that we will make the proper recommendation for your wood floors. If your floors can be recoated instead of refinished, we will tell you so. Please note all floors that have an old varnish, shellac, or wax type of finish on them will need to be sanded to the bare wood. No recoating or chemical system will be able to make them look new. Please call us (724-891-2761) if you have any questions on refinishing or recoating.

## **#8- Do you have any Testimonials from satisfied customers?**

You can judge the quality of a company by what their CUSTOMERS have to say about them. Any company in business is going to sing their own praises by saying they are the best, biggest, or cheapest, etc. The true test is what other people have to say about them. You should ask ANY company that is going to do work for you if they have referrals or testimonials. If you're not completely sure about a company you are considering hiring, ask to call a few customers.

At Wood Floor Designs, we have a multitude of testimonials from satisfied customers. You may have even been referred to us from one of those satisfied customers. Our goal is to also make you a satisfied customer.

The following is a small sample of testimonials for you to read. If necessary we can provide you with more. For additional testimonials, please call our office.

*The installation crew was especially neat & courteous. They did a tremendous job. Overall job was excellent- other "wood guys" even*

*commented on what a great job you did. Thanks. Ashley Setcavage  
Moon Twp. PA*

*We will definitely use your company again, and recommend you to  
family, friends, and neighbors. Anne Linaberger & Tom Mazula  
Pittsburgh, PA*

*I love my floors. I couldn't believe it was my house. Thank you,  
Thank you, Thank you. Lori Kosak, Emsworth*

*Thank you so much! Beautiful job! From the estimator to the  
finished product... I was so pleased! M. Lutz Butler, PA*

*Thanks so much for all the time and dedication put into our  
floors. You went above and beyond what was expected. Needless to  
say we both love the flooring and color! We are extremely  
satisfied with all the work you've done and the professionalism  
of your staff. John & Angie Lehman Beaver, PA*

*I had a bad experience with an insurance claim and your company  
had to come in and re-do the work they had done. Their bad job  
took 2 ½ weeks; your excellent job took 3 days. I. Rosenfield  
Pittsburgh, PA*

*We enjoyed working with all of the workers on your crews and got  
a wonderful job! Thanks. C. Mullins Sewickley, PA*

*The poor old floor looks great. Your two men did a good job.  
Thanks. Mike Conlon, Zelienople, PA*

*Your work crew was very easy to work with. I was especially  
pleased about how clean they left our home. We are thrilled with  
the floors- we never imagined they could look this good. Sally  
Hanley, Zelienople, PA*

*Men are good workers and ambassadors for Wood Floor Designs. Well  
satisfied. Philip & Joan Conti, New Castle, PA*

*Couldn't of made a better choice! Thank you. Angela Stratakis,  
Moon Twp. PA*

## **#9- Do they guarantee their work? More importantly can they back up their guarantee?**

Anyone can guarantee their work. In fact almost all  
companies will say they guarantee their work. The problem  
is talk is cheap.

Here are some questions to ask: If I am unhappy about the  
work you perform, what are your company's policy for

handling complaints? Will I have to wait while you perform other work? Will it be handled quickly and efficiently?

Sanding, refinishing or installing a new hardwood floor can be a complicated task. There are many minor hiccups that could take place. You, as a consumer, need to know that any concerns will be handled quickly and efficiently.

The problem with many companies is that they may not have the resources to handle minor problems on a past-completed job. With schedules packed, and deadlines to meet, I have heard of clients that had to wait weeks-even months before their problems were fixed.

This is a major advantage of working with a company like Wood Floor Designs. First off, we have multiple crews that are available to fill the gaps in our schedule.

Frankly, our reputation also is riding on the fact that you, as our customer, are going to be happy. Just like any company, we do have times where we have to go back and fix a minor problem. The difference between Wood Floor Designs and other companies is that we handle our complaints courteously and we GUARANTEE satisfaction on every job.

Remember earlier in the booklet when we noted how important it is for a company to answer their phones? It couldn't be more important if you have a complaint. If a company doesn't answer their phone, when you call to schedule a quote, they PROBABLY WON'T ANSWER IT IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT AS WELL. More importantly they may avoid you on purpose.

As mentioned before, we answer our phones Monday through Friday during business hours. Whether you call with a question, concern, complaint, or praise, we are here to accept your calls, and we GUARANTEE EVERY JOB WE DO!

## **#10- How many grits of sandpaper will you be using 3 or 2?**

A HUGE way for a flooring contractor to cut costs is by using only two grits or cuts of sandpaper instead of three. This saves time and money. Remember we mentioned getting what you pay for? That could not be truer here.

Some contractors will only sand your floor with 2 grits of sandpaper instead of 3. You may ask why they do this, and they will defend their process. They will say "you can achieve the same results with 2 cuts instead of 3", but that just isn't the case!

The reason they are doing this is so they can lower their labor costs, to make it look like you are getting a better deal when, in fact, you are not. What they are doing is generating an "apples to oranges" comparison, to make it appear more favorable to you.

When they use only 2 grits of sandpaper, they usually start with A rough grit of 36 and finish with a grit of 80. There are several reasons why we do not recommend 2 cuts of sandpaper versus 3.

1. The most common floor that is refinished is oak. Oak has a part of the grain that is softer than the rest of the wood. We sometimes call this the "flower" part of the grain. This is what makes oak a beautiful wood. By only sanding with a 36 grit, then an 80 grit, the "flower" or "soft" part of the grain gets torn out and the result can be a floor that is uneven and can have "dips" in the floor. By properly sanding a floor with 36 grit, then 50 grit, then 80 grit; sandpaper will remove this unevenness.
2. By using only 2 grits of sandpaper, it can sometimes be difficult or impossible to remove the sanding marks left by the first cut with 36 grit sandpaper. Sanding with 3 grits will take out the initial sanding marks left behind by 36 grit.
3. Old gouges, pet stains, and watermarks are more difficult to remove with 2 grits of sandpaper. Using 3 grits allows for a better chance of removal.
4. Old contaminants on old floors, wax, varnish, shellac, etc. are more difficult to remove with 2 grits of sandpaper. Not removing ALL of these contaminants can cause the new polyurethane to not adhere properly. Again, with 3 grits of

sandpaper, non-adhesion due to contamination is less likely.

5. The finished floor looks different with 2 grits of sandpaper than with 3. Using 2 grits the floor tends to have a worn sunken finish look. Because the floor is not sanded properly, the finish will tend to absorb into the wood. Polyurethane finish is supposed to be a topcoat to protect the wood. If half a floor was sanded using 2 grits, and the other half used 3 grits; you would notice that the floor with 3 grits looks better.
6. Properly sanding a floor will allow the polyurethane to remain as a topcoat, it is supposed to protect the wood, NOT SOAK INTO IT. Contractors will tell you they are going to put 3 or 4 coats of finish down; this is a sales gimmick. As a consumer it **sounds better for you, but its not. It is more important to sand with 3 grits of sandpaper than to use 3 or 4 coats of polyurethane. The reason for this sales tactic is simple, it is easier, faster and more cost effective to sand with 2 grits, and use 3 coats of polyurethane. This is unethical in our opinion, because they are TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO LOWER THEIR PRICE, TO MAKE REPUTABLE COMPANIES LIKE WOOD FLOOR DESIGNS LOOK MORE EXPENSIVE. The reality is, we know what works and what don't, and we use 3 grits of sandpaper BECAUSE IT WORKS!**

This is a very important subject to talk about if you are going to have your wood floors refinished. Your floors will look better and the finish will last longer by using our method of **3 grits of sandpaper. In our opinion, if it were possible to sand with only 2 grits of sandpaper and achieve the look that can be had with 3 grits, rest assured, WE WOULD DO THIS. But we are confident that this is the proper way. The NWEA teaches this as well, so the old saying rings true once again, "YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR"!**



## #11-How does the company handle Customer Service?

This subject is covered in other places in this booklet as well. Customer Service, in our opinion, covers several areas:

1. Answering the phones during business hours. DO NOT DO BUSINESS WITH A COMPANY THAT DOES NOT ANSWER THEIR PHONES ON A REGULAR BASIS.
2. Having a dedicated sales staff that can be your liaison to the project manager and the work crews.
3. Knowing that a company has the ability, time, and resources to get your job finished in a timely manner, keep its promises and back its guarantees.
4. Customer Service is also about being realistic. We are honest and up front about certain limitations and won't promise things we cannot deliver.
5. Customer Service, in our opinion, is about, UNDERPROMISING AND OVERDELIVERING.

Here at Wood Floor Designs, we want to service you. We will do whatever we possibly can to make our customers as satisfied as possible.

## #12- How do they handle scheduling and project management?

When you hire a company to refinish or install your hardwood floors based on price, you may be sacrificing several things.

First is scheduling. You may have to wait weeks, even months to **get your job scheduled**.

Unfortunately, many consumers only look at the bottom line price, when considering hiring a hardwood floor contractor. Now, don't get me wrong, we are consumers as well, and we like to get the most for our money, too. We have already

identified many areas in this booklet that a contractor can cut corners in order to make the price more attractive. Those are just some of the consequences when going with a lower priced contractor.

Next is project management. We here at Wood Floor Designs will schedule your job as soon as possible. We have multiple crews that are dedicated to either installations or sanding and refinishing. Rest assured, we would make every effort to schedule and complete your work on time.

Brent Kelosky, Vice-President of Wood Floor Designs personally schedules and manages every job. Brent, with his many years of experience in the industry, will be working with you to assure that your project goes as smoothly as possible.

**Sections 13 - 19 are designed to give you basic information about wood, its properties, finish, and other general area's that are related to wood flooring.**

## **# 13-DO YOU OFFER A TRUE DUSTLESS REFINISHING SYSTEM?**

Back in section 7, we briefly touched on what some companies refer to as a "**dustless refinishing system**". This section is designed to educate you on what a true dustless system is, and also to discuss the dust that is created when a hardwood floor is sanded.

First, let's talk about the traditional refinishing of floors. Drum sanders that are driven by 220 electric are what has been the norm in the hardwood floor industry for many years. A drum sander has a cloth bag on it that has to breathe in order to work. This works just like the vacuum you use in your home. Because the bag has to breathe, (it would burst like a balloon if it didn't), there inevitably will be dust particles distributed in the home from sanding.

Every precaution is taken to seal off the areas of refinishing by using plastic zip walls, but you should ALWAYS expect dust to be present after the job. Wood dust can cause allergic reactions in some people. Exotic woods are usually worse, but dust from white oak has been known to cause rashes on some people. True dust containment is very important to people that are susceptible to allergic reactions to wood dust.

This is where a true dust containment system will be beneficial to someone who does not want to deal with the dust created from traditional sanding, and the **possible** cleanup that is associated with it.

I say true dust containment, because there are companies that advertise dustless refinishing to try and ride the coattails of companies like Wood Floor Designs.

First, you have the companies that aren't really hardwood floor companies, like the ones mentioned in Section 7. The companies that perform other services like carpet cleaning are just trying to capitalize on the trend of pulling up old carpeting and refinish the wood floors underneath.

There are still other types of hardwood floor companies that claim to have "dustless" refinishing. Although some of these companies are reputable hardwood floor contractors, they too are trying to capitalize on the "dustless refinishing" trends. These companies use various dust collection systems that are attached to the floor sander. The major challenge is that whatever type of collection system used, **THE COLLECTION DEVICE STILL REMAINS IN YOUR HOME. Therefore, there is dust that will leak into the environment.**

The only true way to make the environment **dust free** is to take the dust that is created from the floor sander and vacuum it to the outside. If you have ever had your carpets cleaned with a large van mounted type machine you probably know what type of system we are referencing.

We at Wood Floor Designs have and use two **Atomic Dust Containment Systems** from the leader in the industry; Boni Kemi. This is a large trailer mounted vacuum that is parked outside your home (a picture is on our web site **[www.woodfloordesigns.com](http://www.woodfloordesigns.com)**). Vacuum hoses are attached to the floor sanders, carrying the dust outside, thereby

eliminating any airborne particles. This is true dust containment, not like the other systems we spoke about previously. Also there is less prep work with the Atomic system, plastic walls that would be necessary with regular sanding is not necessary.

You will most definitely appreciate the technology that this new system brings. When you have our sales representative at your home, ask him about the differences and he can price out the job for you using the **Atomic dust containment system**.

## **#14-EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOLID WOOD, ENGINEERED, AND LAMINATE FLOORING?**

In the past 10 years or so, laminate flooring has become extremely popular. So popular that some people have been led to believe that laminate is better than hardwood. Laminate and engineered floors certainly have their place. This section should allow you to differentiate between them and allow you to make the proper choice for your home.

Remember, with all products that consumers purchase, there are high quality, medium quality, and low quality products. Keep that in mind when shopping for solid wood, engineered wood, and laminates. You will find products with quality all over the spectrum. Follow your instincts, because usually **YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR!**

First of all, solid wood is just that, solid. Solid wood comes primarily in  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thickness, although some woods come in a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " thickness.

Nothing can outlast or outperform a solid hardwood floor. Available in numerous domestic and exotic species (see section 17 for more info), and various width's from 2  $\frac{1}{4}$ " strip, all the way to 7" wide plank flooring. Solid hardwood is also available in prefinished or unfinished (please see Section 16 for more information).

Solid wood flooring will last a lifetime. There are many wood floors in use in our area that are 70, 80, even 100-years old. Solid wood has the ability to be sanded and

refinished many times. **You most likely would never be able to sand the floor down far enough to make it unusable.**

Considering the beauty, durability, and design capabilities of solid wood flooring, there is no better value for the homeowner in today's market.

Next, let's talk about engineered wood. Engineered wood flooring is REAL WOOD. It is several compressed layers of wood, stacked and glued using heat and pressure. This type of floor will have a "wear layer" of solid compressed wood, on top of layers of stable plywood type material.

High quality engineered wood flooring can look just as beautiful as real wood flooring. These floors, though mainly prefinished, can also be installed unfinished. They come in the same variety of species and widths as solid hardwood. There are several advantages to engineered wood flooring. This floor is considered more stable than solid wood because of the layers of wood. They are less likely to be affected by high swings in temperature and humidity; and can be installed in a basement. These floors can be glued or nailed, and they are usually only ½" thick.

**Engineered floors will not last the same length of time that you can expect from solid hardwood. At best, you MIGHT be able to sand and refinish an engineered floor once maybe twice but some can't be refinished at all.**

Here at Wood Floor Designs, we will generally recommend an engineered floor when it is impossible to install real wood because it needs to go in a basement, or because there are other installation issues.

Next Lets discuss what laminate is, and more importantly, what laminate is not.

Laminate is not real wood in any way shape or form. A laminate is manufactured to LOOK like wood. In other words it is a picture of wood. Laminates are made from a variety of materials including plastic and vinyl.

Some companies say that their product is better than wood. We don't fully agree with those types of statements. Although laminates have a place in today's marketplace, we generally consider a laminate to last similarly to how long carpet will last in your home. Now that will be different

from home to home based on wear and tear, traffic, kids, pets etc. A well cared for laminate that is not abused can last 20 to 25 years, which is pretty good, but not the lifetime that solid wood will give you.

One of the other things to be aware of with laminate is there seems to be a very wide discrepancy in quality. The market has been proliferated with cheap products mainly from Europe and China. Our advice is stay away from the cheap stuff. We offer only the highest quality laminates here at Wood Floor Designs. We can make recommendations of a laminate based on your needs.

All three types of floors have their appropriate place. Rest assured, we would make suggestions to you based on your likes, dislikes, the application, and your budget.

## **# 15-HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY HARDWOOD FLOORS?**

We all remember someone in our family: Our mom, Grandma Maybe, or Aunt Sally who used to complain about getting on their hands and knees to wax their hardwood floors. That was the old days when wax was the finish of choice for hardwood. With the technology of today's finishes, this is no longer necessary.

We get a lot of questions on the maintenance of hardwood floors. The following is a list of Do's & Don'ts of hardwood floor care.

### **THE DO'S OF HARDWOOD FLOOR CARE**

1. DO vacuum or dust mop frequently- Dirt and grit are a hardwood floors worst enemy. You should vacuum or dust mop your floor according to how much use and traffic that it receives. For some people this may be weekly, for others it could be every day. In our opinion the easiest way to accomplish this is using a canister vacuum with a soft brush attachment. It is relatively easy to do this. Some people that have different flooring surfaces like carpet have a cleaner that goes from one surface to another. If you choose to use a dust

mop be sure that you remove all of the accumulated dirt and grit.

2. DO damp mop only- Wood and water don't mix very well. Using too much water or overwetting your floor can allow water to get between the boards, and it can even seep into minor cracks in the wood. If this happens the wood could swell, and cup. You could have a mess on your hands. You only need to damp mop your floors. The mop should only be slightly damp to the touch, not dripping wet. If you vacuum or dust mop frequently the only time that you need to damp mop is when your floor is dirty. This shouldn't be very often. You can clean your hardwood floors with a neutral cleaning agent obtained from us, or just a simple vinegar and water solution. In between mopping just wipe up any spots with a slightly dampened cloth.
3. DO use walk off mats- You should have walk off mats or throw rugs at all entrances to each room, inside and out. Be sure to shake out these mats each time you vacuum your floor. You can be sure they will catch a lot of the dirt and grit that is harmful to your wood floor. You should also use a cotton mat in any area that has the potential for moisture. In front of the kitchen sink, the refrigerator, or wash room. Be sure not to use any vinyl-backed mats.
4. **DO pay attention to the humidity in your home-** **Wood is hygroscopic which means that it is affected by the temperature and humidity in its environment. In the summer, especially here in the Northeast, wood will swell and expand because of higher humidity levels. In the winter the opposite happens when you turn your furnace on. Your wood floors will shrink and cracks can form between the boards.**
5. DO use floor protectors on all furniture- Floor protectors are the little pieces of felt that you place on all furniture with legs. Keep extra ones in your home and check your furniture often, especially chairs that get used frequently. Clean the floor protectors often as well. They tend to be a magnet for dirt and grit and hair.
6. DO wipe up spills immediately- We will repeat several important steps to be sure that you understand them.

Always wipe up your spills ASAP. Clean the floor with a lightly dampened cloth.

7. **DO recoat your floors on a periodic basis.**  
**As discussed in Section 7, recoat your hardwood floors when necessary. We recommend that you recoat your polyurethane finish every 5 years on average.** Recoating is nothing more than scuffing up the current finish, and putting one or two new coats on top. This can be usually accomplished in one day. By doing this at the required intervals, you most likely will never have to completely sand and refinish your floors. Although a very good do it yourselfer could accomplish this, it is recommended to use a professional like Wood Floor Designs. Call our office 724-891-2761 for questions about recoating your wood floors.

### **THE DON'TS OF HARDWOOD FLOOR CARE**

1. **DON'T use mats with a vinyl backing:** If water or moisture got underneath the mat it could wear the finish off or mold or mildew could form. Also grit and dirt that was trapped under that mat could scratch your finish. It is recommended that all of your Mats are made of **cotton**.
2. **DON'T over wet your mop:** Over wetting can cause **BIG HEADACHES**. Be sure that your mop is damp to the touch.
3. **DON'T put down area rugs for 15 days:** Wood floors will Oxidize and get darker with time. You should not put any Rugs or throw rugs down for 15 days. Because of differing light exposures, it is recommended to move your area rugs around from time to time, to allow the those areas to be exposed to light.
4. **DON'T use household dust treatments or furniture polish:** If you do, you will contaminate the current finish, and re-coating will be impossible. The only option at this point, would be to sand your floor, all the way to bare wood. Also be extremely careful when you are polishing furniture. Don't get any over-spray on your wood floor. New finish will not stick to this area.
5. **DON'T use oil soap cleaners: DO NOT USE THIS ON YOU'RE WOOD FLOOR.** This will do the same thing to your floor that furniture polish does. The finish will become



contaminated. A large restaurant in the Pittsburgh area had a maintenance person use an oil soap on their floor and people started slipping and falling. The only way to fix it was to sand the floor all the way down to bare wood.

#### **WHY ACCLIMATION OF WOOD FLOORING IS IMPORTANT**

Wood is hygroscopic in nature, in layman's terms this means that it accepts and releases moisture. In the summer when humidity is high wood swells, in the winter when its cold wood shrinks. Wood Floor Designs acclimate all of the flooring products we install. This means we will not under any circumstances install any flooring material that has not been in the room or area that it is to be installed in for at least 72 hours. In some circumstances, based on moisture readings, we will recommend a longer period. Although some manufacturers don't require acclimation of their products, mainly engineered or laminate products, we always acclimate any product that we will install. So make sure you allow yourself enough time for acclimation when planning your installation.

## **#16-WHICH IS BETTER, PREFINISHED OR UNFINISHED WOOD FLOORING?**

When installing new hardwood floors, you can choose either a factory finished floor, (we call them prefinished) or a site finished floor. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. Use this section to determine what may be best for you.

### SITE FINISHED WOOD FLOORING

The advantages of a site finished floor are numerous. With more wood species available, you can customize the stain color, and you can choose the sheen (satin, gloss, and semi-gloss). Also a site finished floor, because of the sanding process, eliminates over/under wood and can help to compensate for minor subfloor variations.

Most intricate floors that have a border, medallion, or parquet (see Section 19 for more info) are site finished.

The major disadvantage of site finishing a floor is the noise and dust that is created from the refinishing process, not to mention the disruption in your home, (that is why we recommend our **dust containment system** referred to in Section 13). It will also take longer to site finish a floor. If time is an issue, you may want to choose a pre-finished floor.

## FACTORY FINISHED FLOORS

Time is the biggest advantage of using prefinishing flooring. The majority of all new home construction that uses hardwood floors, uses factory finished products.

Although a relatively new technology, factory finished floors have come a long way in the last 10 years. There is now a wide variety of products, domestic and exotic species alike, available in a variety of widths, grades, and colors. There are many finish options as well, UV cured aluminum oxides are the most common in the industry. Many come with a 25-year or longer warranty, too. There will also be less clean up and noise with factory finished wood.

The disadvantages of factory finished floors are such that if time is not an issue, then you have to strongly consider the negatives of installing this type of floor.

Mostly all pre-finished floors have a bevel on the edge of the flooring. This is done for 2 major reasons. Because the floor is not being sanded on site the floor will not be one unit, as with site finished floors. As a result a bevel is necessary to allow for the minor imperfections in the subfloor. Without this, someone could get a sock caught on the edge of a board, and in some cases a person could even trip. The other reason for a beveled edge is to allow the board to be finished properly. Some of our customers have said they did not like the way the bevels look on an installed floor. They can look like "grooves" in the floor and some people have said they are dirt collectors, too.

With prefinished flooring you may not be able to get the exact color that you want. If you are considering a specialty floor like a herringbone, basketweave, inlay etc., you won't be able to do this with prefinished flooring.

All in all, prefinished flooring has made tremendous strides in the past few years and there are some very nice products. If you are a do it yourselfer, prefinished may be the way to go. We are also a distributor for a Canadian prefinished flooring company and offer products as low as \$3 per square foot.

Here at Wood Floor Designs, we can do either prefinished or site finished flooring. We will recommend the proper floor based on your choices and your budget. Call 724-891-2761 or stop in to see some our beautiful flooring options.

## **#17-WHAT VARIETY OF WOOD PRODUCTS DO YOU CARRY?**

Wood Flooring Products are broken down into 2 basic categories: domestic or exotic. Domestic are grown in North America and exotics are from Africa, South America, Australia, and other parts of the world.

Domestic species include White Oak, Red Oak, Birch, Beech, Maple, Black cherry, Ash, Hickory, Pine/Douglas Fir, Walnut, Hickory/Pecan, and Mesquite.

Exotic species include Brazilian Cherry, Santos Mahogany, Australian Cypress, Jarrah, Merbau, Padauk, Teak, Wenge, Iroko, and Sapele.

This list, although not comprehensive, represents the most popular wood species available. Bamboo from China and Cork from the Mediterranean region are also considered wood floor products.

In addition to the color and grain pattern of a specific wood, other considerations when choosing wood flooring include the hardness and stability of each wood. The Janka hardness scale will reflect how hard a wood specie can be. The Janka test measures the force required to embed a .444-inch steel ball to half its diameter in wood. The higher number the harder the wood. The following chart shows hardness measurements.

## JANKA HARDNESS SCALE

BRAZILIAN CHERRY 2820  
MESQUITE 2345  
SANTOS MAHOGANY 2200  
MERBAU 1925  
JARRAH 1910  
HICKORY/PECAN 1820  
PADAUK 1725  
WENGE 1630  
SAPELE 1500  
HARD MAPLE 1450  
AUSTRALIAN CYPRESS 1375  
WHITE ASH 1320  
NORTHERN RED OAK 1290  
BIRCH 1260  
IROKO 1260  
WHITE OAK 1210  
TEAK 1078  
BLACK CHERRY 950  
SOUTHERN YELLOW PINE (LONGLY) 870  
DOUGLAS FIR 660

Wood can also be sawn in such a way that makes it more stable as well. Edge grain/Quartersawn lumber tend to expand and contract with the thickness of the board instead of with the width. These types of sawn woods will be less susceptible to high swings of temperature and humidity that we have here in Western PA.

Almost all woods will change color over time because of oxidation and exposure to light. Some woods will darken more than others. American Cherry and Brazilian Cherry darken more than any other wood. Wood finished with oil modified finish will tend to darken more than ones with water based finish (see Section 18 for more about types of finishes).

There are many reasons why you will choose the wood species that is right for you. You can visit us at our warehouse showroom here at Wood Floor Designs, for a wide variety of wood selections, or you may make an appointment for our shop at home service.

## **#18- WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OIL MODIFIED FINISH OR A WATER BASED FINISH?**

Before the 1970s common wood floor finishes were shellac, varnish, and wax. These finishes were not very durable, and maintenance of wood flooring was difficult. In the 70s and 80s finish technology changed dramatically for the better.

The most commonly used finishes today are referred to as surface finishes. A surface finish is a blend of synthetic resins (plastic) that form a protective coating ON TOP of your wood floor. We refer to these finishes as "urethane" or "polyurethane". We at Wood Floor Designs almost exclusively use surface finishes.

Surface based finishes are either oil modified or water based. There are advantages to both. There are new laws that have taken effect in January 2005 in Pennsylvania and other states. These new laws affect the maximum VOC (volatile organic compounds) allowed in a finish. This new law has more implications in the commercial market although regulations still need to be met in the residential marketplace.

### **OIL MODIFIED FINISH**

The most commonly used finish today is oil modified. Oil modified finishes are easy to apply, very durable and generally less expensive than water based finishes. Oil modified finishes will amber over time and gives a rich appearance of the wood.

The negatives to oil modified finishes are generally associated with the fumes that are emitted. Oil modified finish takes longer to dry, about 8 hours, so only one coat can be applied per day. Some people don't like how much the oil finish will darken the wood with age. Also, when using oil modified finishes, you have to turn off all open flames and pilot lights because of the fumes. Some exotic species contain oils that can sometimes adversely affect the adhesion of an oil finish.

## WATER BASED FINISH

Although water based finishes are a relatively new technology its use is becoming increasingly popular. The advantages of water based finishes are many. Less fumes than oil, they dry faster (usually only 2 hours between coats), and are very durable. Water based finishes will dry clear with less color change over time. They can be safely used with domestic as well as exotic species, and are non flammable. When combined with our **dust containment system** (see section 13 for more info), a homeowner can have a relatively dust and fume free environment

Water based finishes in the past have been more expensive than oil. We expect this to lessen some because of the new laws effecting the oil modified finishes. Water will most likely still be more expensive. Water based finishes have a two part system. The catalyzers or cross linkers are mixed together. More care and caution need to be used because of this.

Both oil modified and water based polyurethane have their place. We here at Wood Floor Designs use them both but believe water base finishes are safer and will be the product of choice in the future. We will recommend the proper finish based on your specific needs.

## #19- CAN MY WOOD FLOORS BE CUSTOMIZED?

Your wood floors can be customized to give it a special look unique to your home. Wood inlays done in a border or medallion have become increasingly popular. Parquet floors, as well as hand distressed floors, are other options for the homeowner. This section should give you some ideas for a beautiful unique upgrade for your wood floor.

Although some of these upgrades can be affordable, nonetheless they are upgrades so expect to pay more for them. A customized floor will usually require highly skilled craftsman, so be sure that your installer has the qualifications to perform intricate installations. Wood Floor Designs has performed many customized floors over the years to the satisfaction of their customers.

## **BORDERS**

Borders are the easiest of upgrades, while essentially creating a frame effect in a specific room. Borders can be as simple as contrasting a light wood specie with a dark species, or they can get fairly intricate with different designs and patterns.

Prefinished wood (see section 16) can be used on the more simple patterns, as long as the different woods are compatible. We would recommend that the same manufacturer of wood be used for these patterns.

The fancier you get with a border, the more likely you will have to use unfinished wood (see section 16). These types of border inlays are made in a manufacturing facility using special laser cut machines. Usually all of these laser type floors will be unfinished.

## **MEDALLIONS**

Medallions are generally used in foyers but can be used in other areas as well. Medallions usually use some geometric pattern to make the room stunning. Medallions are cut using lasers as well. The great thing about a border or medallion is you can use just about any combination of wood species to create a magnificent contrast of those woods. Here at Wood Floor Designs we use manufacturers of domestic North American as well as European manufacturers that use different woods from all over the world. If you can imagine a design, it can be done in an inlay or medallion to create the floor of your dreams.

## **PARQUETS**

Parquet patterns are repeating patterns of a specific design that can be square or geometric.

Parquet patterns date back to the Middle Ages in Europe where castles, estates, and galleries, had these types of floors. They were all handcrafted, labor intensive, and basically works of art set in a floor.

Wood Floor Designs can create a parquet wood floor to fit your needs. Parquet floors can be done in unfinished or

prefinished wood. The trend in recent years is to install them prefinished. This is because a parquet floor can be more difficult to sand because of differing cuts of wood glued together to form the parquet.

## **HAND DISTRESSED FLOORS**

Hand distressing is a relatively new practice in wood flooring. New woods floors are scraped, pounded, and beaten, to look like floors from yesteryear. These floors can be done in a variety of species, domestic and exotic alike. They can be done in straight laid wood, and even parquets. Wide widths are very popular with this type of wood. The hand scraping and distressing can be done on sight in your home as well as by a manufacturer. Hand distressed floors can be prefinished as well as unfinished.

## **MIXED MEDIA**

Mixed media floors make the use of wood with another material such as ceramic, stone, marble, brass, stainless steel, granite, and other stones and metals. These are very unique and require the highest level of skill by the workmen creating these floors.

Wood Floor Designs has installed all of the custom floors described in this section. With our degree of experience and design, we can assist you in your dream floor, call our office 724-891-2761 for questions about custom floors.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

When we began our pursuit to write this guide, our main goal was to provide you the homeowner all the information necessary to make an informed decision regarding hardwood floors for your home.

As the process took place, this project took on a life of its own. The sheer length of this "little" booklet illustrates just how relevant ALL of the subject matter is. No matter how hard we tried to cut it back and make it shorter, there were just too many important **things you know** about hardwood floors.



We believe that this publication is the first of its kind by a wood floor contractor like Wood Floor Designs. We have attempted to lay it all on the line to you. We have poured our hearts, resources, and experience into this guide, and we hope you enjoyed it.

Please call our office at 724-891-2761 with any questions, or comments about this guide or anything to do with hardwood floors. We certainly appreciate your consideration in doing business with us.

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