

If you are looking at wood flooring, or even something that looks like wood flooring, you need to become familiar with the variety of products now available.

There are two types of hardwood flooring: solid and engineered.

The former is milled from hardwood—often oak—to form planks, tongue & groove strips, or parquet squares. Parquet usually comes in 12” x 12” squares made up of small strips of wood that are arranged in a geometric pattern.

The second hardwood product, engineered hardwood, consists of several thin sheets of underlying plywood that are glued and compressed and finally topped with a hardwood veneer.

Cork and bamboo are also natural materials that have recently gained domestic popularity,

Cork flooring is made from the ground up bark of the cork tree. It is pressed into sheets, baked in a kiln and cut into tiles.

Bamboo floorboards come from the stalk of the bamboo plant. The outer green layer is removed and the rest is cut into strips, steamed under pressure to bring up the colour, kiln-dried and, finally, glued to form plank-sized pieces. Scraps from this process can be laminated and pressed together to make ‘strand woven’ bamboo flooring. It is an excellent product for high-traffic or commercial use.

Popular for its price-point, versatility and durability, laminate flooring is a man-made product comprised of layers of materials—resin, wood pulp, Kraft paper—compressed under intense pressure. The wood-look surface—an image printed onto a thin film—is laminated on top then sealed.

Armed with this basic information, choosing your flooring material depends on a number of criteria: traffic and use, appearance, environmental impact and, of course, budget. Most of these products are available in a vast array of shades and finishes, are durable and straightforward to install. Hardwood is usually the most expensive and laminate is the least.