

## **Bamboo Flooring – Just because it's green, does that make it great?**

by Donna Teagle

General Manager

Floor Coverings International

Wheaton, Illinois

So, I have been asked by Basement Dave, my home remodeling comrade, to write an article on bamboo and cork flooring. Being a flooring professional, and by nature a very helpful person, I of course responded with a resounding "yes" to my colleague's request. After much deliberation I feel I should stick with the subject of bamboo flooring as there is so much to talk about. Maybe I will tackle the intricacies of cork flooring for you all at a later date.

Ah, there is so much to be said about bamboo. Let's start with how very "green" it is. If you are into the idea of green flooring, bamboo may be just for you. No doubt those little bamboo shoots do shoot up quickly, making it an awesome renewable resource. Compared with how long it takes the old oak tree to grow, bamboo wins that race like the hare beating the tortoise.

Now that we have confirmed bamboo's "green-ness", let's get down to the real questions clients have for me and I have for clients. When considering new flooring . . .

### ***My questions for the client:***

What area of your home are you looking at for new flooring?

What is the traffic flow that travels through that space?

Dogs? Big dogs? (and by this I don't mean husbands that are large)

Children? ( and by this I DO mean ones that are large, and ones prone to using their outside rollerblades inside)

Do you have a basement beneath the space? (No, I don't ask this just to get leads for Basement Dave! I truly am interested in the sub-flooring here.)

How often do you clean your floor?

### ***The client's questions for me:***

Can bamboo be refinished?

How hard is bamboo really?

And as a smart follow-up question, "What is all the talk about strand bamboo?"

Do people really put bamboo in their homes?

Is bamboo flooring usable in bathrooms and basements?

Is bamboo very expensive?

The list could go on and on and quite often does. But these are the starter questions to determine if bamboo flooring is a good, **livable** option for your home.

So here are some reality check answers.

I have always felt the **use of the space should be the lead consideration** in determining what types and style of floor coverings to install. For example, if you need to cover a space in your home from your front door, through the kitchen and out the back door to the garage, then you need to be very concerned about high durability. In the world of wood flooring, how susceptible a wood floor is to scratches or gouges, and/or how much will these show, are key considerations in rating the ***livability*** of wood flooring.

**When considering where to install** bamboo flooring, remember bamboo is wood and all wood will warp or discolor if subjected to moisture over long periods of time. For this reason I would never put it in a bathroom with a shower/tub and would be very concerned about a powder room. In a below grade basement area, sticking with the engineered-style (thin bamboo veneer and a plywood base) is a good option. I would recommend a floating system with a moisture barrier installed under the floor. Even though the product will work in a basement, proceed with caution. There are many potential hazards in your basement that could cause a flood or enough water damage to ruin the floor. Hazards include washers, hot water tanks, sump pump failure, back up of sewers and drains and foundation cracks.

Another **key question is cleaning**. Not a fun road to travel when all excited about purchasing a new floor, but very necessary if you want to love your selections for a long time! From my experience, when it comes to cleaning there are three predominating attitudes.

***Cleaning Attitude Number 1:*** I love to clean and I make sure everything is perfect at all times (these people really do exist and my hat goes off to you if you are one of them!)

***Cleaning Attitude Number 2:*** I like it when my house is clean but hate keeping it that way.

***Cleaning Attitude Number 3:*** The less I have to clean my house the better.

So **what do usage and cleaning have to do with Bamboo flooring?** Well, if you have taken a close look at bamboo you will notice that it is a floor with a clear grain, which means not many dirt-hiding characteristics there folks! While beautiful, bamboo's beautiful clear grain will not disguise scratches or dents well either. The finish on bamboo will scratch, just like any other hardwood floor. In addition to surface scratches, the product will dent. Wet bamboo - cheap bamboo - will dent more than dry bamboo. Strand bamboo is harder and will survive better than a good quality dry, solid or distressed bamboo. This is now measurable on the Janka Hardness scale rating system. Way to go guys for finally including bamboo flooring! For the record, a good quality strand bamboo rates 3x's harder than red oak depending on the supplier of the bamboo.

**.Finding a good bamboo supplier** seems to be where the difficulties lie. There are few reliable sources that monitor the growing cycle and accurately harvest bamboo when at its strongest. Moso Bamboo, plantation monitored crops and harvesting, is close, but not perfect. So in a perfect world, bamboo may be the perfect floor. Unfortunately, the world we live in is not exactly. . .perfect.

The great news is if you purchase solid bamboo flooring, you can have your floor sanded and finished just like any other hardwood floor. It becomes a matter of if you can live with the floor's appearance in between refinishing work. FYI, for those of you who have not had a wood floor sanded and finished, this is typically a cumbersome process that you don't want to have to do very often.

Keeping in mind the above information, here are my overall recommendations regarding the purchase and installation of bamboo flooring in your home. If you can answer "yes" to the following questions then bamboo flooring may be right for you.

1. You love purchasing green.
  2. You love the clear grain look and style of bamboo flooring and it fits with the overall décor of your home.
  3. You have a cleaning attitude of person number 1.
  4. The amount of traffic throughout your home is minimal to medium.
- You have the budget to afford a good quality strand bamboo.

If you can't answer yes to these questions, then maybe, just maybe, bamboo flooring is NOT right for you. If you really want to have the product in your home no matter what anyone says or recommends, then by all means go for it. Just don't tell your friends, "My flooring guru Donna told me this was a great idea and look what happened to my floor!"

P.S. For all you out there who are green conscious, have you ever heard of reclaimed wood flooring? Ah, I feel a spark of interest and another idea for an article coming on! So much for the article on cork flooring!