

TIPS TO HELP YOU SELECT PREFINISHED HARDWOOD FLOORING

BY: SOMERSET FLOORING CO.

Just as there are so many beautiful trees in nature, there are what can seem like an overwhelming number of choices of hardwood flooring. Typically the “interior fashion” part of the decision comes down to your personal preference for color, width, species, and character. The “construction” factor will depend on where you want to install your flooring.

- **Deciding on Color:** The color of hardwood flooring can be a result of the natural tones of the species, or the addition of stain color in the manufacturing process. Many species are offered with a natural finish—which consists of a clear sealer and topcoat that provides wear protection, while allowing the natural beauty of the species to come through. Species in their natural state can range from very light (maple), to naturally dark tones (walnut) and reddish tones (Brazilian cherry). Many species, such as hickory, tiger wood, and even some grades of maple, will have very pronounced shading variations from board to board because of the natural color differences between sapwood and heartwood. Oak is a popular, durable species that is typically offered in a range of stain colors—golden browns, reddish hues, all the way to rich, chocolate browns. Whatever your preference, be prepared for the color to change, sometimes dramatically, from the initial color upon installation. With exposure to ultraviolet light, natural wood floors, just like your own skin, will change color and darken. For example, exotic species such as Tiger Wood and Brazilian Cherry become darker and more red. It’s part of the patina that is a beautiful aspect of real wood.
- **What Width to Choose:** This is entirely a design preference. If you’re looking for a sleek, modern, linear design, consider narrower “strip” flooring in 2-1/4” and 3-1/4” widths. Wider width flooring, such as 4” and 5” plank is becoming increasingly popular. You can really get creative and mix widths to create an alternating width pattern, such as 3”-4”-5”-3”-4”-5”. You can use differing widths to create a feature border in a room. You are only limited by your imagination to create a truly unique style in your space.
- **Selecting Species:** While oak is a widely accepted and popular choice for flooring, other domestic and imported species are in great demand as homeowners seek to make a personal statement in their homes. Because of the availability of oak, it can be an economical choice for flooring. In North America, Appalachian Oak is considered to be extraordinary, due to growth conditions in the region that produce beautiful grain patterns. When choosing oak, look for brands, such as Somerset Hardwood Flooring,

that don't mix red and white oak, or you could have issues down the road if you choose to sand and refinish (red and white oak take stain differently). If you're looking for an alternative to oak—something different and eye-catching to act as a focal point in a room, consider an exotic species such as acajou, tiger wood, or sagebrush. Hickory, maple, American cherry, and walnut are domestic species that offer beautiful grain patterns and rich colorations. Also, you may want to compare species using the Janka® hardness scale as a point of reference. Some hardwood flooring species are relatively harder than others—but realize that all real wood flooring, being natural, will dent and mar under certain conditions.

- **Character Options:** Today, manufacturers are offering styles of rustic hardwood flooring that feature character ranging from natural knots and markings to handscraped options that have scraping and applied character. This rustic treatment can add texture and charm to a space. A bonus with handscraped flooring is that as your family lives on and grows with the floor, any additional marks made will tend to blend in with the look and be the character—and history—you add to the floor.
- **Solid vs. Engineered Construction:** The other determining factor in choosing the right hardwood floor for your home will be where you plan to install. Engineered flooring can be installed virtually anywhere in your home, where solid flooring must be installed above grade (ground level) only, making it unsuitable for sunken areas or basements. Some manufacturers offer some species and colors in both solid and engineered construction, so you can achieve a unified look on multiple levels and in different rooms. Also, because of the natural properties of wood, it should not be installed in environments (such as full baths) where water, steam, and humidity can affect the structure of the wood. If you do so, be prepared that your warranty may not cover any damage resulting from exposure to these conditions.

If you are considering hardwood flooring for your home, congratulations. You will be making an investment in something that is much more than a floor covering—it's a floor that will become an integral part of your home. When properly cared for, a real hardwood floor is designed to last the life of your home, adding value and enjoyment. You can dress up your hardwood flooring with area rugs, to add another layer of style. If your decorating taste changes down the road, you can refinish to change the color and have a brand new look. What other floor is so versatile?! No two floors are alike, just as no two trees are alike. What a great addition to your unique space!