

## History of Laminate Flooring

Laminate is a man-made material that has been used in surfaces such as counters and back splashes since the early 1920's. Originally it was not strong enough to be used in flooring, but over time innovations in the manufacturing process refined the finished product and made it increasingly durable.

The first laminate flooring was invented in Sweden in 1977 by a company called Perstorp. In 1984 they began marketing this product in Europe under the name Pergo, and by the mid-nineties it had spread to the United States. Today the word "Pergo" is almost synonymous with laminate flooring, although there are other manufacturers of this material.

Glueless interlocking laminate flooring was invented by two separate companies at the same time in Europe during the years 1996 and 1997. Because of this the Swedish company Välinge and the Belgian company Unilin have had a number of legal conflicts over the years.

Today almost all interlocking laminate floors are sold by one of these two corporations. Laminate flooring is one of the most resilient and durable floor surfaces available. A relatively recent invention, it has gained in popularity due to its ease of installation, low maintenance requirements, and long life. This material can also be printed to simulate a wide variety of natural flooring materials include hardwood planks, and slate and ceramic tiles.

## Structure of Laminate Flooring

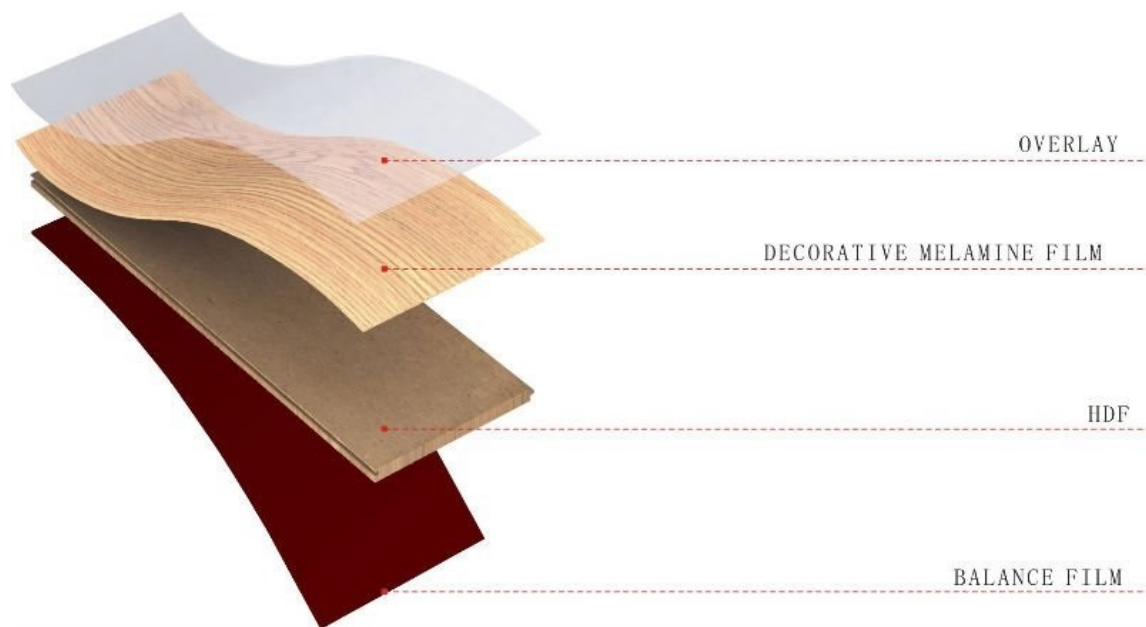
Laminate is a type of synthetic flooring that is made by fusing several layers of different material together using heat, pressure, and adhesive, in a process known as lamination. While laminates are often manufactured to replicate the look of a variety of hardwood surfaces, they actually contain no wood materials.

**Top Wear Layer or Overlay** - The top layer of laminate floor is known as the wear layer, an invisible surface that rests over the material, protecting it from scratches and other damage. This is generally made from an aluminium oxide chemical treatment.

**Photograph Layer or Decorative Layer** - This is the surface that gives the laminate its actual appearance. It is created when an image or pattern is printed on paper like materials that are embedded in resin. The actual image can be almost anything, but typically laminate floors are manufactured to simulate the look of hardwood, cork, bamboo, natural stone, ceramic, or even brick pavers.

**High Dense Fibreboard Core** - This is the heart of the material and it provides the depth, structure, and stability of the actual surface covering. It is generally comprised of wood chips or sawdust ground into a very fine powder, then coated with resin, and pressed into flat sheets.

**Back Layer or Balance Film** - Many laminates will have a moisture barrier back layer. This works with the water resistant wear layer on top to sandwich the fibreboard and picture layers of the laminate, creating a water tight seal around the core material. The back layer also provides additional stability for the installation.



## **Pro's and Con's when choosing Laminate Flooring**

### **Cost**

**Pro** - The manufacturing of Laminate wood flooring is cheaper than hardwood and laminate wood installation cost is on an average 50% less than hardwood.

### **Durability**

**Pro** - Since laminate wood flooring is made from pressed wood it is more durable and resists scratches, moisture and wear and tear better than hardwood flooring. Laminate flooring is also easier to clean on a routine basis.

**Con** - Even though laminate is more durable it is not as visually appealing and lower qualities of laminate may have artificial looking wood grain textures.

### **Repair**

**Con** - Laminate flooring doesn't repair easily. If you buy flooring that comes in individual pieces and snapped together, you may be able to replace. Although, depending on sunlight and age, the new piece may not match properly.

## **Applications of Laminate Flooring**

Laminate flooring is durable, stain resistant, and mould resistant, which means that it can be used in high traffic areas.

- Living Rooms
- Hallways
- Entryways
- Dining Rooms

It can also be made water resistant during the manufacturing process, making certain laminates appropriate for kitchens, baths, laundry rooms, and other water heavy environments. Check with your retailer for the specific characteristics of the laminate material you are purchasing.

Laminate flooring is a man-made material that has characteristics that make it appropriate for installation in a variety of environments. When deciding whether to use it in a particular location you have to consider things such as the price, life cycle, maintenance requirements, and durability of the floor. Balancing the requirements of the space against the abilities of the material will allow you to make an appropriate decision on where laminates should be used.

## **Life Cycle and Laminate Flooring Warranties**

How long a laminate floor will last will be determined by the quality of the manufacturing process and the thickness and durability of the wear layer. The level of foot traffic in the area of installation is also an important determining factor.

This life span can range anywhere from 5 to 20 years. One of the major drawbacks to a laminate floor is that the surface cannot be refinished. When the material is damaged it needs to be replaced. If a single plank or tile is damaged, it can usually be replaced relatively easily.

This is especially true if the floor was installed using a click together adhesive free method. However once the surface finish has worn down on the entire floor, it will have to be replaced altogether.

Most laminate floors come with a manufacturer warranty that can give you a good idea of how long you can expect the material to last. Generally longer warranties will be attached to higher quality, more expensive products.

However it is important to check the terms of the warranty before you make a purchase, as many actions can end up voiding your protection. Often the warranty will specify that the laminate materials have to be installed in a certain way, or that you will have to use their installers.