

# Laminate floors

**A**las, the kitchen at our 1950s ranch not only didn't cut the mustard, the linoleum floor more resembled spoiled mustard, complete with putrid shadings of green and yellow, chosen presumably to match the avocado counter tops. To make matters worse, the linoleum was ridged with tiny ripples, veritable grime super magnets in a high-traffic area.

I hated the stuff almost as much as Jen did, but the thought of ripping it out made me as nauseous as smelling rancid mustard. Paying someone to put in a new floor was certainly an option, if we lived in Fantasyland. As pressure from my better half rose, inaction was no longer tenable, thus armed with nothing but panic and a tiny budget, I hit upon a suitable answer — laminate flooring.

No, it's not really wood flooring; it's a tough wear layer over a really thin picture of wood atop a processed wood core. Laminate floors float — literally — atop whatever surface used to be your floor. Laminate floors, too, cost much, much less than traditional wood floors.

I paid about \$2 a square foot for the 100 square feet I needed. Adding in the tools I needed, which I will get to later, I ended up with a new kitchen floor for around \$300 and a day's

## FAUX WOOD FLOORING AT HALF THE PRICE

BY MARK LUCE

labor. If I had chosen hardwood, it would have run me at least \$1,200.

The laminate companies will tell you their floors are easier to clean, last longer and can be fixed easily. They are right. It takes but water to clean a laminate floor, so say goodbye to funky waxes, expensive polishers or special mops. But the real advantage: installation's a tongue-and-groove snap.

With the trusty help of my mother's husband, Rory, a true handyman, we knocked out the floor, including cutting a door, in about eight hours. However, before you dive in willy-nilly, a few things to keep in mind.

Like any home-improvement project, preparation remains paramount. Thoroughly clean the surface the laminate will go over, and put down (very flat) a foam underlayment, which will dampen noise and soften the feel of the floor. Make sure you have 10 percent to 15 percent more flooring than you will need. Draw up a diagram, complete with measurements, to provide a rough guide to how you will proceed.

Secure the proper accessories. Most home-improvement stores will offer a set of tools you need to successfully



install the floor. These include a pull bar, a tapping block and spacers. In addition, if doors are present, you will need a jamb saw to cut the bottoms of door jambs to fit the floor.

Stagger the planks. You don't want all the seams in the same place, so cut three or four different lengths and then proceed.

Work as a team. One person should do all the cutting (on a table saw), one person should do all the measuring, of course, with the same tape. Double-check all measurements and communicate.

Working around doors and corners can be tricky, and thresholds can be tough to match. Be patient. You will make mistakes, but they are easily resolved.

By no means will this guide do your work for you, but it will put you on your way to re-inventing nasty old floors.

*Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where his next trick will be learning to construct bookcases for his kids' rooms.*

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