



April 5, 2005

Bamboo: What you need to know before you buy

There is no official U.S. or international grading system for bamboo flooring like traditional hardwoods enjoy (#1 Common, Select, etc.) so it's difficult to know what one is buying. Bamboo flooring may "all look alike" but the products and the companies providing them may not be. Pricing in the market varies from \$1.99 to \$6.99 per square foot. Why?

It is relatively easy to enter the bamboo flooring market. Dozens of small, new companies with offshore addresses are shipping product to the U.S. through "trading houses" in China or Indonesia. However, the quality and consistency in harvesting, milling, business practices and color vary widely from company to company.

It is important to determine if a company is an importer or a manufacturer. An importer will buy from any factory that has the best price that day; therefore, no two shipments of products are alike, and you may never find them again when you have a problem. Some exist only on the internet. Many of these importers/brokers offer 'amazing prices' – and may be 'here today/gone tomorrow.'

A true manufacturer **[like Teragren]** controls the manufacturing process from harvest to final product, ensuring consistency of color and quality from year to year. **[Teragren has been committed to manufacturing quality bamboo products and unparalleled customer service for over ten years with the same factory group in China, and now in Malaysia.]**

There are several key factors other than price to consider when choosing bamboo flooring:

How hard is it? Bamboo flooring can be as soft as fir and harder than maple depending on when it is harvested and what specie; there are over 1500 species of bamboo. **[For instance, Teragren bamboo averages 44% harder than red oak and 26% harder than North American maple. This is due to Teragren's stringent manufacturing specifications requiring Moso bamboo harvested only at maturity between 5-1/2 to 6 years.]** Younger, less mature bamboo, harvested at 3 years or less, is less expensive, softer and less stable. **[See Teragren Janka Ball Hardness test results at www.teragren.com]**

What kind of finish is used? Some companies will buy flooring blanks from one factory and have another factory mill them, while yet another applies the finish. There may be varying numbers of finish coats (from 3 to 6 depending on the mill) and varying ingredients from mill run to mill run. A polyurethane-only finish may be used, which will not be as durable as a finish containing aluminum oxide. **[Teragren's finish is a 5-coat aluminum oxide/polyurethane finish from Klumpp Coatings with a 25-year residential finish warranty and 5-year commercial finish warranty.]**

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Bamboo: What you need to know before you buy – continued

What is the formaldehyde level of the adhesive used to laminate the bamboo slats together to form the flooring planks? High formaldehyde levels negate bamboo's environmental advantages. Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen. Higher-formaldehyde adhesives are less expensive than those with lower levels.

[Teragren bamboo products have formaldehyde levels 48 times lower than OSHA standards allow. Adhesive specs available at:

http://www.teragren.com/tera_products_ter/adhesive.asp.]

Does all bamboo flooring qualify for LEED™ credits? Not unless the company can provide documentation on the bamboo itself and the binding adhesive used in the manufacturing process. **[Teragren bamboo products contribute to certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED™ (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) rating system: MR Credit 6: Rapidly Renewable Materials and IEQ Credit 4: Low-Emitting Materials. Because bamboo is a rapidly renewable resource and Teragren can document the adhesive used in the manufacturing process has virtually no formaldehyde (0.0155ppm), these credits apply.]**

Are CSI Specifications or MSDS available from the company? Unless the company is manufacturing product from the same plant consistently as a manufacturer, there is no documentation available to certify CSI (Construction Specifications Institute) specifications, Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) or other legal specifications used in commercial and government projects. **[These documents are available from Teragren.]**

How readily available is it? Many bamboo flooring companies do not maintain inventory in the U.S. and lead times can be anywhere from 12 – 16 weeks.

[Teragren stocks supplemental inventory at two distribution centers – Seattle and Indianapolis – to be certain their distributor network is able to fulfill orders in a timely manner.]

What coordinating products are available? Retailers often attempt to match products with disappointing results from several different bamboo flooring companies because very few offer complete product lines. **[Teragren is the only bamboo flooring manufacturer to provide a full spectrum of coordinating products, flooring, stair parts, moldings, vents, panels, and veneer.]**

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