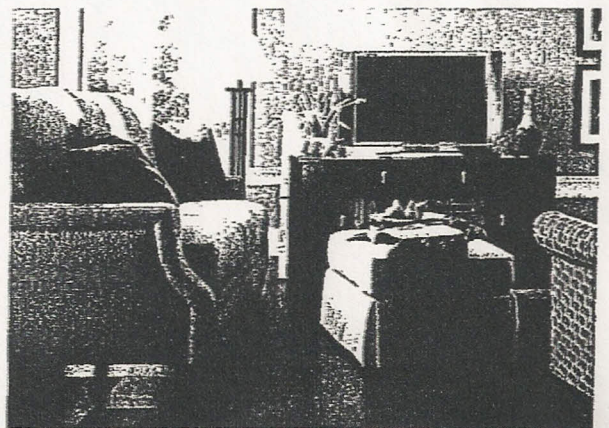
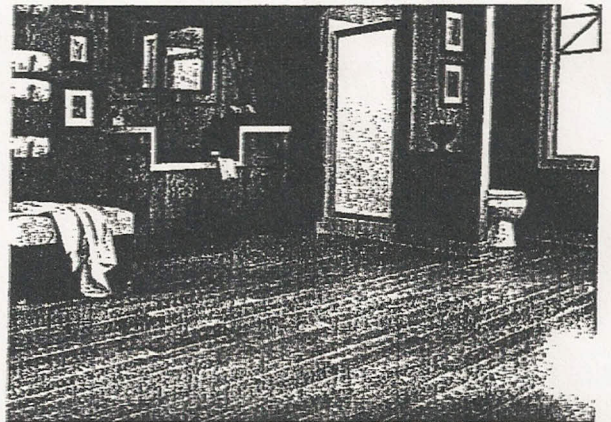
A black and white photograph of a wooden floor with a decorative rug and a vase of flowers. The floor is made of vertical wood planks. In the upper right, a portion of a patterned rug is visible, featuring a leopard print design. A vase with a bouquet of flowers sits on the floor in the upper left. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

**Solid Wood vs.  
Engineered Wood  
vs. Laminate:**  
The Battle Royale



**I**n this corner, composed of 100 percent wood, priced at \$3 to \$10/square foot, and adding as much as \$10,000 to the value of your home is...hardwood. In another, consisting of fiberboard and a durable wear layer, priced at \$3 to \$7/square foot, but adding less value to your home is...laminated. And in still another, boasting elements of pure wood coupled with almost as much stability of laminate is...engineered wood. Each has its positive and negative attributes. Before outfitting your home in one over another, it's important to understand the differences. Only then can you make a truly informed decision regarding what material is right for you. Durability depends more on the finish one puts on the base wood than the makeup of the base itself.





### **Solid Wood**

Solid wood floors are just that—100 percent solid wood. Not only are they stunning and elegant, but they're also one of the best ways to increase a home's value. In fact, a recent survey of U.S. realtors revealed that installing hardwood floors can increase your home's value by as much as \$10,000!

Wood floors are versatile—they can complement virtually any aesthetic—provide acoustic insulation, and can be refinished multiple times. They only improve with age, as solid wood acquires a desirable shine over time. Solid wood is among the longest lasting of all flooring types but normally cannot be installed directly over concrete. However, the flooring expands and contracts due to changes in humidity. The wider the wood plank, the more expansion or contraction

will occur. Although installers try to compensate for this movement by leaving an expansion gap between the floor and the wall, most experts agree that you may be better off going with engineered wood for kitchens, bathrooms, or laundry rooms.

### **Engineered Wood**

Engineered wood has a top layer of solid wood, which varies in thickness, depending upon the quality; the balance is high quality layered hardwood. They're available either unfinished or pre-finished in a range of colors and provide the same design flexibility and style as solid wood; unfortunately, they also carry the same price tag. The better makes of engineered wood have a slice cut face and are longer, up to 7 feet in length.

Although all hardwood floors will expand and contract due to moisture, engineered wood fares much better. And while solid wood floors may expand or contract slightly with age, engineered floors won't. All things equal, engineered flooring has a slight advantage over solid—particularly in regions where humidity changes are a constant, as they're dimensionally stable. In addition, they may be installed above, on, or even below ground level.

However, unlike solid wood, some engineered wood floors can only be refinished once or twice. Others cannot be refinished at all. The deciding factor is the thickness of the wear layer. In addition, it's arguable whether engineered wood will increase the value of your home as much as solid wood.

#### *Prefinished or Custom*

If you decide upon solid or engineered wood, your next dilemma is pre-finished or custom. Pre-finished wood arrives at your home ready to install. Custom wood flooring, on the other hand, is installed, sanded or scraped, and finished on site. It affords homeowners the opportunity to create something truly unique—something no

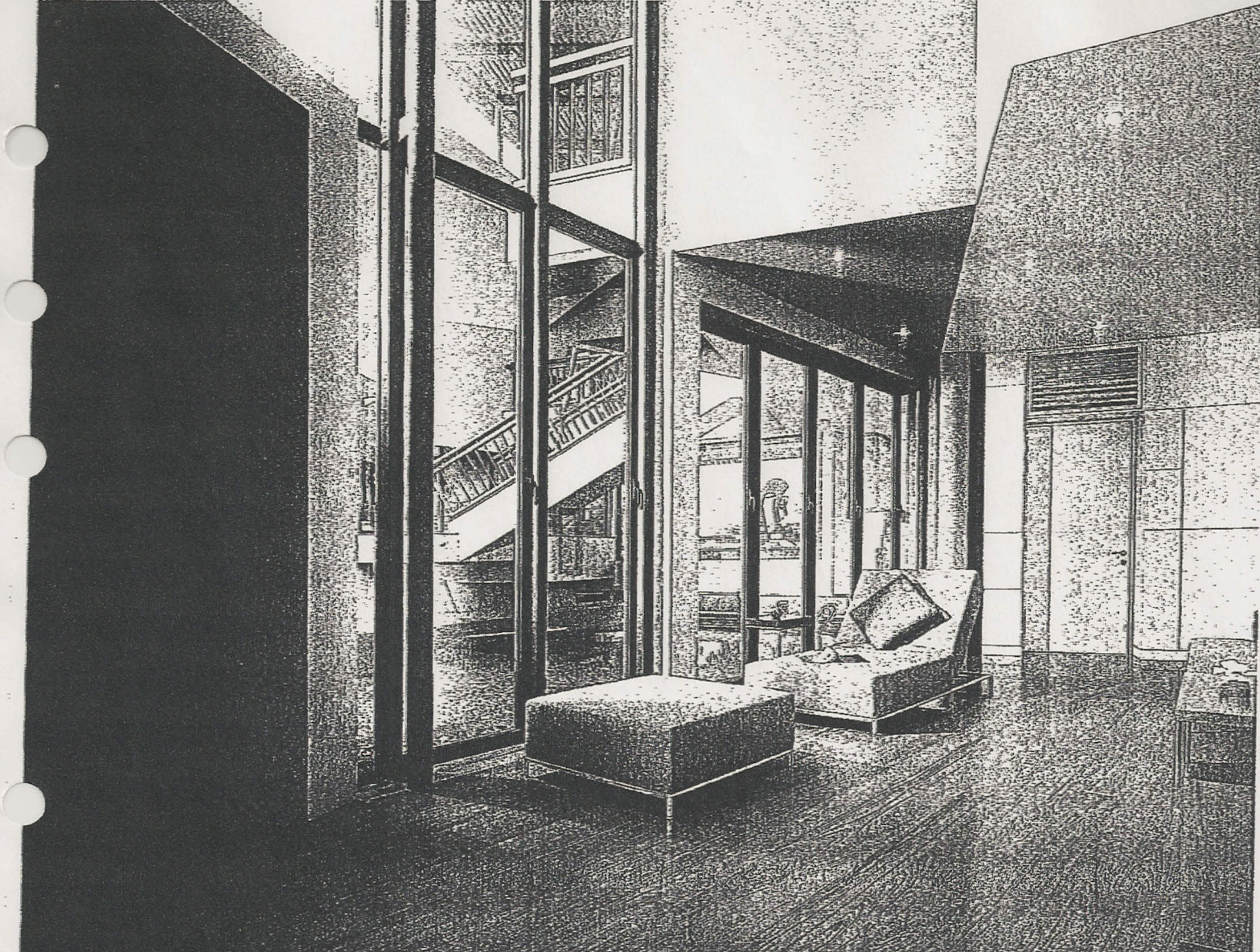
other homeowner could replicate. With custom wood flooring, you can create a one-of-a-kind floor that reflects your family's personal taste. You pay for this inimitability, of course, but for truly distinguishing tastes, there's nothing like custom wood.

#### *Laminates*

Laminates consist of a base, usually mdf or hdf fiberboard, topped with a print and then a wear layer. They're usually less expensive, and make excellent do-it-yourself projects, as they're easy to install. Many are installed by placing interlocking boards over a layer of foam, which prevents buckling in the floor and absorbs sound. Laminate floors are extremely durable, scratch-resistant, and long-lasting.

Laminates cannot be refinished or recoated, add less value to your home than solid or engineered wood, and don't have the same "character" as wood. Thanks to a pre-printed pattern, some of the boards may appear identical. But the best-quality laminates can result in beautiful floors that really do have the appearance of hardwood flooring.





## AT A GLANCE

	Wood	Engineered Wood	Laminate
Value added to Home?	Significant	Significant	Minimal
Will It Scratch?	Yes	Yes	Yes, but Scratch Resistant
Water Resistant?	Debatable; with certain polyurethane finishes, to an extent	Much more so than solid	Yes
Can it be Refinished?	Repeatedly	Sometimes	No
Cost?	\$3 to \$10/sq. ft.	\$3 to \$10/sq. ft.	\$3 to \$7/sq. ft.
Do-It-Yourself Friendly?	No	No	Yes

## And the Winner Is ...

*On pier and beam construction:*  
A solid wood floor

*On slab construction:*  
An engineered wood floor

*For a quick and inexpensive option:*  
Laminate floors

Cost aside, most experts believe that engineered hardwood is the way to go. However, both solid and laminate woods have their own positive and negative attributes. One thing's for certain—there's nothing quite like the look of hardwood floors to give beauty and distinction to a home.





## True or False: How Much Do You Know about Wood Floors?

1. Doctors often recommend hardwood floors for patients with allergies or respiratory problems.  
**True!** With their smooth surfaces, hardwood floors don't harbor animal dander, fleas, dust, pollen, or other allergens.
2. Hardwood floors are impractical for large families, because they can't handle heavy foot traffic.  
**False!** Professional basketball courts are made from maple, and trains run on oak rail ties. If Shaquille O'Neal can't damage the court, neither will your family damage your floors!
3. Hardwood floors are difficult to maintain.  
**False!** Whether solid, engineered, or laminate, wood floors are easily maintained with a few simple precautions. Simply sweep or mop every couple of days, and make sure to mop up any spills as soon as they happen. In addition, keep pets' nails clipped to avoid scratching, and take care when moving furniture across the surfaces. (Do not use abrasive cleaners on your floors — if you must wet mop on wood, use only a slightly damp mop, and make sure to dry thoroughly. Finally, it's OK to add cleaning product to the water you are mopping with but be sure it is a product made for your type of floor.)