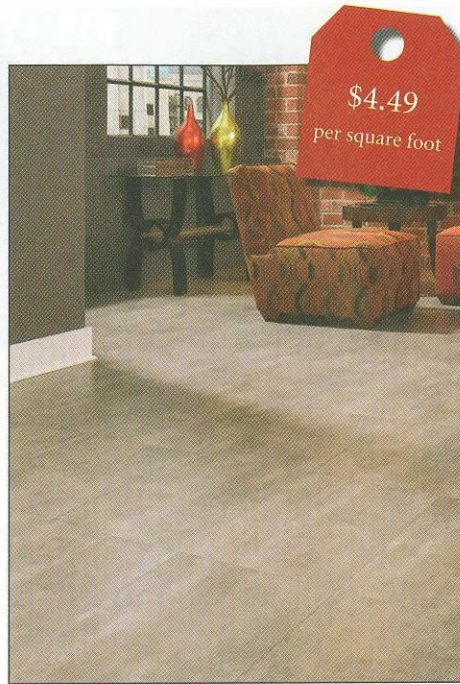


Laminates



Mirrored glass from Mannington's Diamond Bay Collection



Faus' Cosmopolitan rusted porcelain grigiore



Shaw's Majestic Grandeur features Valley Innovation's new 3G locking system.

Trends for the high end

High shine, trendy tile looks, surface texturing and beveling are just some of the category's latest highlights. If you missed their all-facial launch earlier this year, some of the industry's leading innovators shared their latest high-end introductions with FCW to keep you abreast of what's considered cutting edge within the category.

Shining bright

Mannington's new laminate Diamond Bay Collection provides the price-conscious with the opportunity to enjoy exotic species with a high-gloss finish at a fraction of its hardwood counterpart's price. The collection features Optic Edge, Mannington's patent-pending beveling technology.

What's more, Chroma's new Chroma

3G-rated surface, the product is less likely to scratch than hardwood, the company said.

Hip to be square

New introductions to Faus' Cosmopolitan line reveal the category's latest technical advancements aren't contained to wood visuals. With seven new rectified porcelain tile introductions, the line's embossed-in-registration, built-in edge protection, moisture resistance and 30-year warranty are enough to garner attention.

Meanwhile, Formica has recently transitioned its high-gloss technology to its tile offering with Reflex, an 8mm-thick plank in a 24 x 42 brick format focused on replicating high-end polished granite.

Notable work

Shaw's new Majestic Grandeur tile line does more than show off the supplier's latest achievements in surface texturing and beveling; it demonstrates the mill's willingness to get out in front of emerging technologies. The collection is one of the first to go to market with Valley Innovation's new 3G locking system. Utilizing a flexible tongue, the locking innovation allows installers to simply fold a plank into place with a similar ease and motion of closing a door.

"Our LockPlace system, which is essentially the 3G system, was created to create the lock," said David Wilkerson, vice president of marketing for Shaw's hard surface division. "It's a much easier, more efficient product to install."

—Raymond Pina

Mirror-finish sales hot from the get-go

By Raymond Pina

Mirrored-finished laminates (also known as piano-finished), introduced by Armstrong last year and heavily reinforced by its competitors at Surfaces 2008, are a hit. Not only are these new looks flying off the shelves, they fetch upwards of \$3.99 per square foot at retail.

"Mirrored finish is a home run; it's awesome," said Ken Freedman, director of sales at Faus Group. "It's a beautiful product and it's done a great job already for us. We're getting a lot of business with it."

High shine was not always a favorable characteristic for laminate flooring. In fact, as recently as two years ago such a product would be deemed as "plastic looking." However, newer, less automated machines in Chinese plants — coupled with the latest in printing and paper technology — are allowing for the first clear representation of high-gloss finishes in laminates.

"Up to now most of the mirrored products were made in China," said David Wilkerson, vice president of marketing, hard surfaces, Shaw. "They have the technology; it's very specialized. Only recently are U.S. manufacturers even trying the high-gloss products because there is some new technology involved. It's not handmade, but it's much more labor intensive. It's a slower process. It doesn't lend itself to a high-speed operation like most U.S. manufacturers have."

The costs associated with such hands-on production and shipping finished product across the Pacific automatically slots mirrored among laminate's high-end goods. Consumers unwilling to pay three or four times the amount for a similar authentic hardwood floor view the laminates alternatives as a bargain, according to Ken Peden, COO, Kronotex USA.

"Consumers might not spend their money on traveling but they're still going to