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LAMINATE UPDATE 2004, by Jim Roberts

Spanish producer **Faus** has always been a leader in laminate styling and technologies, and the past year was certainly no exception. The firm introduced its Interplank technology at Surfaces last January. This ingenious process makes it possible for wood designs and textures to flow from one plank to the next in a self-aligning system. The firm introduced for different planks that will lay out in patterns that always match, allowing for more creative and realistic looks.

Until now, Faus has always supplied its innovative products as private label goods to a wide variety of other manufacturers. Now the company is poised to strike out with its own brand and a new U.S. manufacturing plant.

The firm has been gearing up for this new direction for some time now. It's invested \$50 million over the last four years to upgrade its production facilities in Spain, and now has three times the production capacity of just three years ago. It opened a training center in Los Angeles this year and will open others in New Jersey and Chicago by year's end. Regional technical managers were put in place for the East and West Coasts and the company is building sales service teams to train distributors and retailers in product introductions, merchandising and marketing.

In addition to all that, Faus has planned a whole batch of new innovations and features for introduction at Surfaces. Further technical advances in the embossed-in-register process should add more realistic looks and textures to a new series of products that follow the latest trends in hardwood flooring. Faus will also be working on new looks in stone and ceramic.

A new line of products with the Faus label could be available for the market in third quarter 2005. We'll know more about that next month.