

Wellmade ushers in next-generation HDPC

By Reginald Tucker

Wellmade Performance Flooring looked to break new ground in 2017 with its waterproof, high-density plastic composite core (HDPC) innovation—a rigid core topped with a vinyl wearlayer. The technology made its debut on Wellmade's signature Nouveau vinyl plank collection.

"Compared to other rigid core materials, HDPC offers the advantages of being 100% waterproof, more resistant to heat and has greater density while being more flexible than others," Steve Wagner, vice president of sales and marketing, said. "These features allow Wellmade to produce products that perform better when exposed to moisture, can be more precisely milled for easier installations and the enhanced flexibility reduces the risk of damage to products and locking profiles during shipment and installation."

Wellmade is following up on that innovation with HDPC Opti-Wood, another waterproof offering featuring a real wood veneer. "Our waterproof HDPC Opti-Wood collections now include a wide array of décors in traditional engineered plank sizes and a new collection for wider, longer products in widths up to 7.48 inches and lengths up to 7 inches in hardwood and strand bamboo," Wagner said. "All are produced with Unclit/Unipush locking technology and attached pad for easy installation without glue, nails or added underlayment."

According to Wellmade, Opti-Wood eliminates one of the greatest challenges in wood flooring today—claims from damage to floors from spills and damp mopping. Opti-Wood products are warranted against damage from topical moisture and spills and safe for damp mopping.

Another noteworthy feature of Opti-Wood is its ease of installation. Opti-Wood's locking profile with pad attached offers a product that is easier to install and requires none of the added expense of glues and underlayments compared to traditional hardwood flooring products, the company said. Locking flooring with no glue, nails or added underlayment allows a novice installation professional to successfully install this product quickly and easily. What's more, Opti-Wood offers a solution to help ease the challenges of current shortages in

available labor for flooring installations.

The new product offering is also designed to provide dealers with step-up options that offer higher margin opportunities. "The best way to improve profitability is to help our customers and partners grow profitable sales," Wagner said. "Our HDPC Opti-Wood products provide dealers and distributors what they need to grow sales and improve margins in the



Wellmade's HDPC Opti-Wood line features a real wood veneer over a rigid core platform.

emerging market for waterproof hardwood flooring via stylish, on-trend products in traditional and wider/longer plank styles."

Opti-Wood also provides a buffer against competing engineered product categories currently subject to tariffs. As Wagner explained, "The risk of added tariffs has certainly created much discussion in the industry. These added costs will play into the consumers' ability to select the flooring they would like and determine if they can make a purchase now or must wait until they can afford what they want. The best buffer we can provide is to continue to produce high-quality products that offer style and value to the consumer."

Wellmade reported positive reaction to its HDPC technology among retailers and distributors alike. As evidence, Wagner cited the success the company has achieved through several national and regional programs currently in place for its HDPC vinyl, wood and strand bamboo offerings. Perhaps the best testimonials come from the company's wholesaler partners.

"Opti-Wood represents an excellent opportunity for our dealer base to increase sales while embracing a leading-edge rigid core flooring product," said Rob Tarver, president, Wanke-Cascade. "By adding a natural hardwood wear layer to its HDPC core, Wellmade has raised the bar for rigid core flooring. Opti-Wood is poised to compete with traditional hardwood while adding increased dimensional stability, moisture resistance and overall performance to the mix."

Adam Buckwold, marketing director at Buckwold Western, agreed. "The character-driven oak and hickory designs, coupled with low-luster, wire-brushed finishes are perfect for our market space. Add to that Wellmade's performance-oriented HDPC core, and these products should gain a lot of traction with our customers."

Innovations on the horizon

Wellmade is looking to build on the momentum generated by its HDPC technology and new collections. At Surfaces 2019, it plans to unveil an expanded offering of HDPC vinyl products. In addition, the spotlight will be on both new and expanded offerings across its Opti-Wood waterproof products in traditional and longer, wider products in hardwood and strand bamboo.

For Wagner, the sky is the limit. "The opportunity for growth with Wellmade HDPC products remains very strong," he told FCNews. "As consumers, dealers and distributors continue to recognize vinyl planks and tiles produced with HDPC are easier to install and perform better, the sales will continue to grow. In the exciting new category of waterproof HDPC Opti-Wood, consumers now have the option to purchase stylish hardwood flooring that has no seasonal gapping and no worries associated with spills and damp mopping. This high-performance flooring will drive sales growth going forward."