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selling bamboo

Even wood shoppers see that grass is greener

By Gary Glancy

The National Association for Home Builders (NAHB) recently cited a 50-percent increase in green-built homes since 2004, and bamboo's surge in popularity certainly parallels the NAHB's findings. However, retail success with the category is not limited to highlighting its green qualities, as product variety with bamboo continues to grow.

"We were selling bamboo as a green product, so when customers

are looking for a choice in that respect, we'd bring them over to the bamboo," said Gayle Selden, president of Ed Selden Carpet One in Tacoma, Wash. "Now we've started selling [consumers] when they're looking for hardwood flooring. We just show them bamboo as well, just like another species of wood, like oak or maple, as another look or idea."

Doug Katz, president of Pro-Sources in Long Island, N.Y., added that his stores do the same. "To me, bamboo fits into the category

of exotics, which has become very popular," Katz said. "People don't want the same floor their neighbor has. They want something that's unique or different. We organize our showroom by style, and we take [customers] over and show them the different, unique things that they're not necessarily going to see in every other house down the street."

Ann Knight, executive vice president and marketing director, Teragren, noted that her company markets bamboo's renewable quality, adding it is usually the one that tips the consumer to a purchase as opposed to being the primary selling point.

"The green story is secondary; it's a bonus," Selden said. "It's kind of like getting something extra with the product that you choose. But the majority of the time [the decision] is stylistic — it fits into the style of their home. It's a very contemporary look, and provides a more unique way to go with wood floors than a traditional oak."

The selling points

When it comes to selling bamboo, seeing is believing for Selden's customers. She features Teragren's



Besides showcasing visuals, such as this Natural Cork display, bamboo manufacturers also need to educate customers.

new Synergy offering on her showroom floor, a durable product that constitutes 40 percent of Teragren's business.

Judith Huck, owner of Classic Floors in Portland, Ore., dis-

plays bamboo in a green area near the store's entrance, and she said the "cleaner, more contemporary look" catches many consumers' attention.

As bamboo's popularity has grown, so, too, has its range of products and applications. Another leading manufacturer of bamboo, Natural Cork, recognizes that there is a wealth of competition out there from home centers and websites selling inexpensive bamboo flooring. The company said its specialty retailers can combat this with its offerings featuring various lengths, solid or engineered construction, smooth or handscrapped finishes and a wide range of colors.

"We have a very broad selection and some very unique products that will increase their chances of setting themselves apart from the competition," said Philippe Erramuzpe, COO, Natural Cork.

Another strong selling point now for bamboo is its durability, despite its reputation to the contrary. Because bamboo does not have a lot of graining to it, Katz said, it has been known to show scratches. "Of course like everything else you learn the hard way," Katz said, "where a consumer puts it throughout his



Teragren's new Synergy line offers several contemporary style options with color variations such as wheat, chestnut and java.

whole house and complains about scratching, and the manufacturer answers, 'Well, yeah, that's what bamboo does.' So we sell bamboo only from a supplier that will stand behind its product."

For Selden, it's critical to distinguish the quality products from the poor ones "because there's a lot of products out there that are not harvested correctly that are selling for inexpensive prices."

Education

Of course, in order to take full advantage of bamboo's appeal, retailers need to be well armed with every bit of knowledge available. Teragren provides a 50-page

binder with information about its products, in addition to streaming an educational video on its website. It also has a test with rewards to those who pass, as an incentive for dealers to get proper training.

"We do a lot of training," Huck said. "We ask the company representatives to come in and visit with us and just talk about its products — pros and cons, benefits, features — [to prepare for] people who are shopping for green products and know more than we do about the product because they've just studied it on the Internet. So we need to stay on top of it so that we're helping them learn correct information, because there are a lot of

misunderstandings out there."

Katz agreed that it's crucial for his staff to be as well informed about bamboo as all the other products his stores sell in order to manage expectations from consumers. "We consider our people not as salespeople but more like trainers," Natural Cork's Eramuzpe said.

And retailers like Selden know this will affect the bottom line. "The way we sell [bamboo] to our clientele is to have as much knowledge as we possibly can about the product," Selden said. "We try to go over all of the stories, including the green story near the end, to make sure to close them into the deal." [fcw](#)

news bites

► **Penn Wood Products Co.** has completed a major capital improvement plan to its 16-acre campus following an Oct. 9, 2006 fire. (The fire consumed one-third of a 400-foot-long building.) "Our employees and construction contractors have done an amazing job in turning things around in only eight months since the fire," said Newell Coxon, Jr., president. The new facility includes a 5,000-square-foot color library and lab, and a 10,000-square-foot sanding and finishing building. The new color lab utilizes Spectrophotometer technology for baseline color reference and quality controls. The adjacent specialty color lab accommodates handscraped and distressed processing for limited or one-of-a-kind specialized finishes.

► **Tony Simms** has been named sales manager for **The Wood Cellar**, an international marketer and exporter of specialty hardwoods and flooring. Simms has more than 20 years of experience in the construction industry. He is a state-certified general contractor and a member of the state, local and national home builders associations. Prior to joining The Wood Cellar, Simms served as sales manager with Falcon International Corp. in Miami. Simms will oversee product distribution in Florida, local and national accounts and staff training.

► **Ufloor Systems** has introduced **Pall Oil**, a high-solid, two-component oil for hardwood flooring. Pall Oil, a 98-percent solids content, combines natural liquid oils and waxes with a hardening component for rapid drying time. The oil-wax combination is designed to produce an open, diffusive surface finish that spreads easily with a roller or trowel while repelling water and dirt and resisting household chemicals. Pall Oil is suitable for the impregnation and surface improvement of sanded heavy-duty wood flooring, heavy-duty wood blocks and can be used in conjunction with floor warming options, according to the company.