

Decor Score: New acrylic-infused hardwood can take almost any damage

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: I really like the looks of hardwood in a kitchen, but my husband thinks it's too "fragile." We do have two large dogs. Besides, I love really dark floors - we used onyx stain on the hardwood in our living room and it's smashing! Would you suggest a laminate or a tile (both dark) for our kitchen?

A: Get ready to be surprised: I'm going to suggest - ta-dum! - hardwood for your kitchen. In the first place, tough new polyurethane finishes make floors virtually impervious to the slings and arrows of household use, whether or not you have claw-footed dogs (learn more at www.hardwoodinfo.com).

HARDWOOD FLOORING - Black and red and shiny all over, new acrylic-infused hardwood flooring puts a permanent gleam underfoot in a kitchen. CNS Photo courtesy of Peter Rymid. In the second place, there are even newer - and, it's said, tougher - finishes that make hardwood resistant to dings and dents and also disguise any gouges and scratches that occur. You're looking at that new finish in the photo we show here. An infusion of liquid acrylic (through a process proprietary to Armstrong Hardwood), it creates a high-gloss surface over color that goes completely through the flooring, so scratches and other damage scarcely show.

In this kitchen, maple floors have gone black and shiny and impervious enough to merit the 35-year warranty offered by the manufacturer (see more at www.armstrong.com; New Premier Performance).

Q: My wife's family is all from Spain and they have some nice Spanish-style furniture, specially a kind of desk that once belonged to her great-uncle. I think it's called a bargueno. I would like to give her one for our anniversary, but don't know where to look. Can you help?

A: You've asked the right question at the right time: I am just back from FARCAMA 2007, the 27th fair created to promote the crafts of Castilla-La Mancha, held every autumn in Toledo, Spain.

There, I was delighted to find not just one, but several manufacturers who included traditional barguenos (aka varguenos), or portable writing desks, in their offerings. Still crafted by hand as they have been from the 1600s on, barguenos were the communications center of wealthy Spaniards' and Mexicans' haciendas. Behind fronts decorated with inlaid ivory, silver, metal statuary, and colorful painted designs, the many drawers and cubbies included secret drawers and hidden spaces for stash like, one assumes, daggers, land deeds, and dangerous love letters.

You can still find old barguenos in museums and antique stores - in the last century, they enjoyed a great revival in California and the Southwest - and they cost the treasure of Sierra Madre! In fact, so do the newly crafted barguenos I saw at FARCAMA 200, but they come with the heart and soul of the maker. For example, El Bargueno Toledano, which started in 1836, is said to be the last company in Spain making authentic reproductions, and its owner, the last family member involved. Each of his barguenos takes up to three months to make and paint by hand; hence the \$14,000 price tags (www.elbargueniotoledano.com).

Barguenos are also available on this side of the Atlantic. For example, Mexican manufacturer Alfonso Marina showed an elegant version at last month's furniture market in High Point, N.C. One place to see the line: www.chianelli.com.

Your wife is a lucky woman to be getting such a classic, classy desk. No danger, I'll wager, that she'll even use it to write e-mails!

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