

Decor Score: Engineered hardwood is an option for wet area flooring

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We are adding a master suite instead of moving like we'd planned. I'd wanted the bedroom to be open to the bath with maybe a half-wall or archway between. Our contractor is trying to talk me out of it because of moisture problems. He says we'll have to tile the entire space, but we want a hardwood floor. What do you think?

Cool limestone meets warm cherry wood flooring that flows from a masterful bath into the adjacent bedroom. Photo courtesy of Dan Forer. A: I think your contractor hasn't done his homework. Otherwise, he'd be recommending engineered hardwood, which is designed to shrug off moisture problems so effectively, in fact, that engineered hardwood can be installed on concrete slabs on- and below-grade, even in basements where dampness is a given.

At the same time, this is real wood – as beautiful as any living room floor – just fabricated like plywood inside, which means that it's unaffected by moisture that might warp solid woods installed in the same location.

Michael Wolk, designer of the pictured contemporary bath, used engineered wood to great effect in the living area – as opposed to the "wet" area – of the bath. He wanted the "richness and warmth" of wood flooring to flow into the adjacent master bedroom.

Never mind that this bath is in torrid, humid Florida where air conditioning is ubiquitous.

"Wood has become a lot more popular here," Wolk reports. "We use a huge amount of stone – that's limestone in the wet area of this condo bath – but engineered wood offers stability with no maintenance problems."

Besides, Wolk says, "Wood is a perennial favorite. In good times and bad, you get a certain comfort with wood."

For more about the joys and advantages of engineered wood, go to www.hardwoodinfo.com, click on "Product Choices and Considerations" and look under "Flooring/ Baths." For more about Michael Wolk Associates' design work, go to www.wolkdesign.com.

Q: Spending more time at home, thanks to the economy, but loving it less?

A: Design maven Paula Berberian of Brewster Home Fashions has a list of budget-stroking pick-me-ups for your decor:

â€” Add an area rug for sudden color. Even a large bath mat or inexpensive outdoor rug will perk things up.

â€” Flip off harsh overhead lights in favor of lower, soothing lamplight. Use eco-friendly bulbs to also save on electricity.

â€” Wallpaper just one wall. Or jazz one up with peel-and-stick wall art like the playful Wall Pops Brewster (www.wall-pops.com) for about \$10 a package.

â€” Chuck the workaday desk for a brightly painted old kitchen worktable.

â€” Buy flowers. A vase of the real thing costs under \$10 and can make you feel like a million.

â€” Stencil a design on your kitchen cabinets. Berberian recommends a touch of gold or silver on top of warmer colors for inexpensive elegance.

â€” Hang mirrors to make everything sparkle and look larger.

â€” Drape patterned fabric over a tension rod in the kitchen window: cheap chic and no sewing.

â€” Light scented candles. Your home will smell rich and inviting.

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