

Alternative coatings: know your oil and wax coatings

Oil and wax coatings have enjoyed a resurgence as popular alternatives to traditional high gloss solvent-based polyurethanes, modified oil finishes and waterborne polyurethane coatings. Trends in interiors show that consumers are seeking a natural look when finishing floors to complement the natural beauty of timber with trends for gloss levels moving to satin and matt in recent years. Flooring contractors should have oils and waxes included in their product and service offer and know how to apply these surface finishes as local market share continues to grow.

Prior to the use of polyurethanes or plastic surface seals, oils were the traditional finish of choice for timber flooring. In Europe, where the natural look for timber has been in demand for many years, oils account for a large proportion of commercial wood floor finishes and a high percentage of domestic applications where oils are best suited.

According to Giles Whittle-Herbert from Whittle Waxes, the alternative coatings market share in some countries in Europe is as high as 30%. The market for these coatings in Australia is considerably smaller but rising. Some contractors use oils exclusively. For example, Anro Floorcare, a floor sanding company in Melbourne, has used oil coatings exclusively for the last 11 years.

Flooring contractors need to make floor finish recommendations based on suitability to the job and should consider oils for finishing timber clad walls, ceilings and floors that do not have to carry heavy, dirty traffic, for example in domestic living spaces and commercial interiors away from main entrances.

Ongoing maintenance needs should also be considered when choosing to use oils which require ongoing reapplication with an annual reoiling recommended by penetrating oils distributor, Livos Australia. Oils do not require the major project of resanding, just ongoing, regular reapplication to keep a timber floor in top condition.

A well-known commercial project in Europe is Copenhagen Airport which has had penetrating oil applied to it for many years. The oiled timber floor at Copenhagen Airport is in the Duty Free, boarding gates and Passport-Immigration section of the airport, well away from the entrance. The floor has worn extremely well over the years with a constant rotation.



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