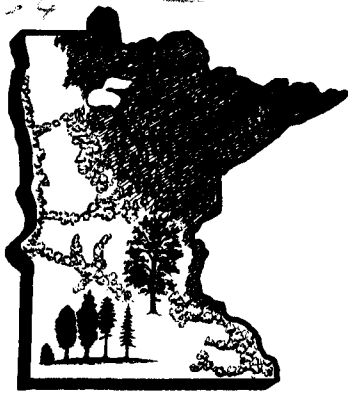
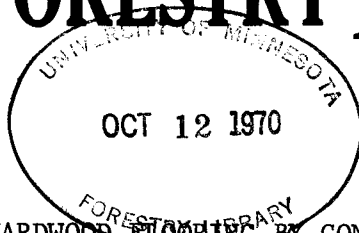


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MAINTENANCE AS A FACTOR OF USE OF HARDWOOD FLOORING BY CONSUMERS
IN THE MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL METROPOLITAN AREA

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Hardwood flooring has always been an important wood product in homes of this locality. Although it is still being abundantly used, other types of flooring materials are found in rooms where hardwood flooring was formerly used.

It has been suspected that the type of finish being applied, together with the maintenance chores involved are important considerations in consumer choice between hardwood flooring and competitive products. This suspicion was aroused because manufacturers of competing products have been using "ease of maintenance" as their advertising themes.

In order to determine consumer preferences of the various hardwood flooring finishes currently being applied by contractors in this locality and consumer reactions to maintenance chores, a survey was conducted during the 1964 Northwest Builder's Show in Minneapolis. The experiment was carried out by completing an interview schedule with respondents selected at random during the eight days of the show. Respondents included both homeowners and non-homeowners from whom 150 interview schedules were completed; 125 were homeowners, 30 were not. Of this group, 44 stated they intend to build or buy a new home within the next two years and 20 were considering such action. Of the homeowner group, 15.2 per cent (19 of 125) indicated dissatisfaction with their hardwood flooring with 9 out of 19 stating that various maintenance problems were the reasons for their dissatisfaction.

One of the questions asked the respondents was to rate four 2 ft. by 4 ft. floor finish samples. These samples were prepared by a flooring contractor and were of clear red oak selected for uniformity of color. The following finishes were applied: 1. penetrating sealer, 2. polyurethane, 3. lacquer and 4. lacquer sealer under varnish (gymnasium floor finish). Contractors generally select a finishing system in which two coats can be applied during one trip to the jobsite. They normally use only the one system and the determining factor seems to be speed of drying, especially for the first coat. Although the other three systems are being used by various contractors in this locality, penetrating sealer is not because it must be applied, wiped off and allowed to dry before a second coat put on.

Some of the selected respondents at the Builder's Show were accompanied by husband, wife, mother or adult child, in which case all were asked to rate the finish samples so that there were 198 adult ratings made. These consumers were asked to rate the samples for each finish and a rerating was made based on appearance plus advantages, and finally short statements of disadvantages were shown and a final rating made based on appearance, advantages and disadvantages. Statements of advantages were taken from information on the various finishes in the National Oak Flooring Manufacturer's Association Hardwood Flooring Handbook. No information on polyurethane was in the handbook so this information was taken from an article in the July 10, 1960, Forest Products Journal. The statements of disadvantages were gathered mostly from floor laying contractors as a result of complaints from their customers.

A study of the ratings in the table below reveals that based on appearance, the lacquer was preferred by the highest percentage of the consumers. After a showing of the statements of advantages, many switched to penetrating sealer and a few to polyurethane. After the

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disadvantage statements were shown, penetrating sealer lost some of its preference to polyurethane. This change in preference was no doubt the result of the statements of advantages which brought out such maintenance considerations as: "doesn't chip or scratch," "wears well without excessive waxing," "practically immune to spots and stains," and to such statements of disadvantages as: "needs waxing often," "shows scratches," "wears away more rapid" and therefore must be refinished more often" and "difficult to patch so worn spot doesn't show." There was only negligible difference between male and female rating in regard to maintenance problems.

Table - Consumer Preference of Flooring Finishes

Finishing System Used	Rating Based On:		
	Appearance Only	Appearance Plus Advantages	Appearance Plus Advantages Plus Disadvantages
1. Penetrating Sealer	15.8%	48.0%	39.5%
2. Polyurethane	8.5	18.7	28.3
3. Lacquer	49.0	23.7	22.2
4. Lacquer & Varnish	21.7	4.5	5.0
No Response	5.0	5.0	5.0

Consumers were not given information regarding costs of the various finishes but were asked: "If the builder would give you your choice (of finish) how much would you pay to get your choice, \$25 or less, \$50, \$75, \$100, \$150 or more?" Only 31 respondents stated they would not pay extra to get their choice, 144 would. Thirty-two stated they would pay \$25 or less, 27 would pay \$50, 14 said \$75, 31 - \$100, and 9 said \$150 or more.

This survey indicates that serviceability and "ease of maintenance" are important considerations in consumer choice of flooring material. It appears that less hardwood flooring is being used because of such maintenance chores as refinishing, repairing and waxing of the finish. This has been confirmed by a recent U. S. Forest Service Study, ^{1/} which states: "The difficulties, real or imagined, of installing hardwood flooring on concrete slabs; and the opinions of architects, builders and homemakers regarding the relative ease and cost of maintaining different types of floors appear at this stage to have a major effect on markets for hardwood flooring."

Other surveys have shown that people like the appearance of hardwood flooring. ^{2/} If they could be convinced that quality finishes which require less maintenance are available, hardwood flooring would likely regain lost prestige. Many consumer opinions regarding "ease of maintenance" could well be the result of imagination created by promotional schemes by finishes available for various conditions of use and another program aimed toward general and floor-laying contractors, encouraging use of better quality finishes even at higher costs, if necessary, would be a worthwhile project for the flooring industry. A high percentage of the consumers of this survey indicated they would pay more to get their choice which shows that the consumer is willing to pay extra for what they consider better quality.

The availability to the builder and homeowner of other flooring products, all of which are under constant development and improvement, means that hardwood flooring needs similar attention. More consumer research as well as product research for flooring and finishes is needed. Such an intensified research effort on hardwood flooring should help maintain its important position in the flooring market.

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^{2/} Martens, David G., Initial Flooring Preference Survey Shows Hardwood in High Favor, Reprinted Article from Flooring Magazine.



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