kite
FLOORING

GUIDE TO BUYING A WOOD FLOOR

Introduction

Hi, and welcome to Kite Flooring.

At Kite, we do things differently from other flooring retailers.

This means 1) transparent pricing (so not fake sales), 2) products with provenance (we'll tell you exactly how your floors are made and the oils used to protect them, 3) a curated range (we only sell floors that are the best of the best) and finally 4) we actually fit floors, so can give technical advice.

If you're thinking about a new floor our advice is to normally start the process around 12 weeks from when you need it. This will give you plenty of time to source the floor, but you will also have a far better understanding of your final budget (if you're working on a renovation).

In advance of that, we've put together the following guide to provide budget, design and technical advice, so you can plan your project.

Then as soon as you're ready to discuss flooring, please book a consultation with either myself or one of our team, and we can find you the perfect floor.

Ed Grant

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CHOOSING A FLOOR

You want a wood floor but don't know which to choose.

There are almost limitless options with wood flooring, but as we generally don't buy flooring every day, it can be confusing. Our advice is to think along two lines; **Design and Quality.**

Chevron

Design

Broadly, there are three design aspects to your wood floor; **Shape, Colour and Texture.**

Firstly **shape,** parking the more niche options, wood flooring generally comes in a Plank, Herringbone, or **Chevron.** Planks come in almost any width, from 90mm up to 300mm, Chevron and Herringbone in small, medium or large sizes. Normally, customers start by looking to social media, magazines or Pinterest for inspiration. If you're not sure about which shape to go for, we can almost guarantee you will end up with a straight plank floor. **Patterned floors are c70% more expensive, from a subfloor, supply and fit perspective, so you have to really want one!**

In terms of colour, dark floors make a space feel cosier, and light floors more spacious and airy. Mid-tone floors, such as yellows or raw colours, are more versatile and work in any space. These floors tend to work best if you don't have a specific design style in mind.

Our top tip is to always look for a general colour, not a specific one; wood flooring is a natural product so you get colour variations across the planks.

Also think about the 'grade' of wood; with knots, with no knots, or something in the middle. Cleaner grades look more modern, character grades more rustic.

Finally, think about **texture.** Floors can be heavily brushed or distressed to give them a reclaimed feel. They can also be light brushed or smooth. Like the shape, this comes down to design style. Good quality distressed floors will transform a room, but because there are more treatments on the wood, they will always be more expensive. Pay particular attention to how the knots have been filled. We regularly come across clients who have bought a rustic floor online, only to discover the knots have been poorly filled.

Thickness is something that people often ask about as people often ascribe more value to thicker floors. Remember, the majority of wood floors are cosmetic floors (..they sit on top of a subfloor). Thickness, therefore, doesn't matter, provided you have a sufficient oak top layer to sand the floor (say $^{2}/_{3}$mm plus). (NB: We do think about thickness where people want flush transitions, from wood into tile, and the thickness of the floor has to be adjusted accordingly).

Herringbone

Plank

Quality

When we first started our journey, we assumed all oiled floors were the same, but this couldn't be further from the truth.

A well-made wood floor, with high-quality oils, will last generations and perform well in a busy family environment. A poorly made floor won't.

Our advice is always to check which oils have been used on the floor. If the manufacturer doesn't know, they're probably using cheap oils. Also, check how the oils are applied; the floors must be roughed up between coats, to ensure the oils sit deep within the wood structure. At Kite, we use oils from a manufacturer called Ciranova (basically, the BMW of wood oils).

The quality of milling is also important. Good quality floors will slot together well, with no gaps. This is especially relevant with patterned floors (we would advise against buying a patterned floor, like Chevron online).

To make an accurately milled floor, you need well-maintained machinery that is serviced regularly. In the quest for ever-cheaper pricing, this maintenance is something that is often overlooked, leading to problems with flooring onsite. It's also possible to cut corners in other aspects of floor production, such as the glues that hold the oak top layers down, and not controlling the atmospheric conditions in the factory - (if moisture gets into the oak top layers during production, you can often have problems with the floor).

At the beginning of Kite, we worked with cheaper floors that are typically sold online, and had problems, especially with oil quality, delamination (when the oak top layers came away from the ply core), split grains and also lippage (when there were noticeable differences in heights between the planks). Our top tip would be to look for brands that professional floor fitters work with; fitters fit up to 60 floors per year, so they know what works best (contractors only 3 or 4). Wood floors are not for everyone, especially those on a budget. If you're struggling to make the numbers work, opt for a laminate rather than a cheap wood floor. There are some great, matt finished laminates on the market, which whilst they don't have the depth or texture of a wood floor, they're significantly cheaper, and very hard wearing.

Finally on cost, which is always the elephant in the room. Of course, wood flooring can be expensive. When you factor in accurate milling (so how the boards are cut), good quality timber (so the boards aren't ugly) and multiple coats of high quality oils, a good quality wood floor will never be cheap. **If your project cannot afford a good quality wood floor, our advice is, never buy a cheap wood floor.** That's when we see the most problems (and is when we're often contacted by customers who need help). Our advice is go with a Premium Laminate over a cheap wood floor; you get a lot more floor for your money.

How much should I budget for my new flooring?

OK, so this is one of the most common questions we get asked.

So rather than being cagey about pricing (which seems to be the way in our industry), we thought we would try and answer it. Pricing up a flooring project is not straightforward, but broadly, there are three variables; your floor, the subfloor and the fitter.

Firstly, your floor.

1. The Platform

If we just focus on engineered wood flooring, there are two main factors - **The Platform and The Finishing.**

When we say The Platform, we mean the actual timber. If this is an engineered product, it will have a timber veneer (often oak), and then a core (layered or solid). The raw materials will come from a range of sources but 'European Oak' is a pretty common reference. Obviously, Europe is a big place, but on most floors, there is very little transparency about where the timber actually comes from. The most common supply chain is European Oak, shipped to the Far East where the platforms are pressed and then back to the European Market. Plank flooring made in the Far East will often be 190mm wide and 1.9m in length. Why? Well these dimensions fit perfectly into a 20ft container.

Flooring platforms can also be made in Europe and these floors are more customisable, so can be made in different widths and lengths. Both supply chains will use different grades of timber. Cleaner grades with fewer knots are more expensive. Rustic floors are the cheapest because you can use the whole of the tree.

From a cost perspective, Far Eastern platforms will always be the cheapest, despite shipping costs, as they are made in larger quantities.

But is there a difference in quality?

At Kite, our more cost-effective floors are Far Eastern platforms. And they can be great. **But you don't have as much control over the production process.** This means colour variation within batches (so don't rely too much on your samples!), different knot filling strategies, and subtle changes in the plank structures (such as bevels or the tongues and grooves).

And for many clients, that's absolutely ok. At Kite, if we do use Far Eastern platforms, unlike many of our competitors, we do the oil finishing in Europe. This gives you more control over the final product than a pure containerised floor.

2. The Finishing

The second factor you should consider is the finishing. This is the treatment that is applied to the surface of the floor to 1) protect it from everyday family life and 2) change its appearance to achieve a design style. Finishing can either be lacquered, oiled, or even unfinished.

All methods can produce great floors. But each has its advantages and disadvantages. A lacquer is like a protective paint. This means it's a very strong surface treatment. Scrape it, and it's hard to repair, but the surface can be very strong so very little maintenance is required. **Try to avoid cheap lacquered floors, as they almost always have a fake sheen.**

At Kite, we generally sell oiled floors. These are either UV oiled, which is a surface treatment that runs under a UV light and dries instantly. Like a lacquer it's super strong, but again it's a surface treatment. The production process on these floors is very quick, so costs are low. On the other hand our premium oiled floors actually dry into the timber.

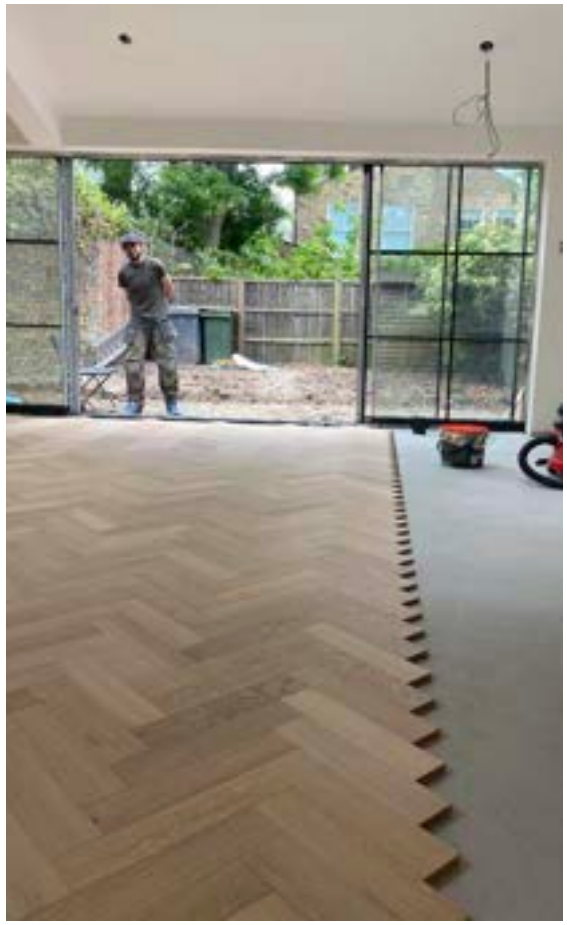
At the high-end of the market, you can have different treatments that are combined to give a floor a design aesthetic. These include brushing with wire brushes, smoking (in chambers of ammonia), bleaching, multiple coats of oil, hand scraping, the list goes on and on. The more processes a floor goes through, the more it costs (we have a floor range where there are 8 processes to achieve the final finish).

Other factors that vary the price of your floor include the grade (less knots is more expensive, than rustic), shape (herringbone and chevron have more wastage than plank), wood species (Elm, Ash Douglas Fir?), and the origins of the timber (we do a genuine reclaimed range that's spliced onto an engineered base).

Our engineered wood flooring ranges start from £60. These are typically Far Eastern platforms, finished in Europe with two coats of High-Quality UV oil (we use a brand called Ciranova). You can buy cheaper floors online, but you generally see variations in colour between batches, poor knot-filling strategies, and oils that can scratch easily. Don't expect much customer support from these retailers as well.

For cleaner grades on Far Eastern platforms expect to add around £20 per m^2, for each grade up. Prime grades, with an invisible UV oil, cost £100 per m^2.

European platforms start at around £95 per m^2, for straightforward UV oils, in a Rustic grade, and this can double for perfect grades, with several treatments. Less common wood species such as Elm or Ash, are only available in bespoke options.



3. Next Your Subfloor

Remember, almost all our floors are cosmetic, so they sit on top of a structural base. There are many different types of subfloor, but the most common are floorboards, ply, OSB (the boards like Weetabix), concrete or tiles.

To fit any form of solid flooring, the subfloor must be:

Level As flat as possible, with no dips or raises.

Sound No movement. You don't want a squeaking subfloor, as once you fit your new floor, that noise won't go away

Dry Wood floors and moisture are not a good combination. This is especially relevant if you are laying a new screed. Or if you are fitting a floor in a basement flat with a history of moisture issues.

There are some quite strict guidelines on each of these factors, that are set-out in the British Standards (which are effectively the rules that govern floor fitting).

These standards are super conservative, but if you follow them, you won't have any problems with your floor.

Subfloor preparation involves the cost of materials and labour. This could be as simple as stapling a layer of ply, if your subfloor is chipboard, or a 3mm skim of quick drying levelling compound if you have a new screed. It could also involve using quick drying mortars such as Ardex to fill deeper holes. Smoothing compounds can also be used, and DPMs (Damp Proof Membranes) that suppress moisture. And sometimes a combination of several strategies. Occasionally, the subfloor will be so uneven that surface strategies cannot be used. In these cases, you either have to remove the subfloor and level the joists, or create an entirely new subfloor on top of your existing uneven one.

Certain floors are more forgiving on uneven subfloors than others. Plank flooring can be glued and nailed to ply. It will then take the shape of the subfloor, but you can have a successful installation, on a slightly uneven surface. For Herringbone or Chevron, which we recommend is fully glued, the subfloor must be level.

It can all get very technical. And expensive. But it's really important to factor in these costs, to ensure you have a successful installation.

4. Your Fitter

Once you have prepared your subfloor, the floor has to be fitted.

Generally, it's better for whoever is fitting the flooring to prepare the subfloor. This avoids awkward situations where a contractor has prepared a subfloor, and then the person fitting the floor isn't happy. It's quite common for a client to have paid money for subfloor preparation in this situation, so things can get awkward. Floors are mainly fitted Glued or Floated.

So how much should you pay for floor fitting? The truth is, just like not all floors are equal, not all fitters are equal.

Fitting a laminate in a new build, with a perfect subfloor, is straight-forward. Fitting a Herringbone, with a two-block border that runs around a kitchen island, is not.

The way we price our fitting works is we work out what a fitter needs to support their families and then balance this against buying the proper tools, insurance, van and a labourer (for when things get heavy). We also then factor in delays (when they can't work because windows don't turn up etc), the occasional holiday (everybody needs one), and for when a nightmare happens (when vans get broken into!). In London, this means certain rates need to be paid. But this can be different outside. There can also be some flexibility on larger projects. Smaller projects can be expensive.

At Kite, we make a margin on our fitting teams, because we 1) carry out all the pre-site surveys to ensure the projects are ready to go when the teams turn up (this includes screed tests, and laser level tests), 2) arrange for all the materials to be onsite exactly when they're needed, 3) coordinate schedules to manage delays and 4) work with specialist parquet floor fitters, who often have qualifications, such as NVQs.

This means we are normally more expensive than if a contractor or a local tradesperson fits the floor. On larger building or renovation projects, it can therefore make things more straightforward if we just supply the floor. And, if you are fitting a straightforward plank floor, outside London, you may also find a local contractor who will be cheaper.

On more technical installations, it can be better to use a professional fitter.

To help you budget for your project, we've prepared the below table with five costs that you will more than likely need in your flooring project. Note, these are just the main costs, and are based on a typical residential project of 40m^2, in London and the Home Counties.

		Laminate	Engineered £	Engineered ££
1	Product	£36.00	£65.00	£110.00
		Perfect	Basic Levelling	Ply and Levelling
2	Subfloor	£0.00	£27.00	£50.00
		Flooring Floated	Plank Glued	Parquet
3	Fitting	£48.00	£54.00	£60.00
		Underlay Standard	Wood Glues	
4	Accessories	£8.00	£10.00	
		Skirting (remove and refit)	Scotia Beading	
5	Skirting	£30.00	£15.00	

Costs per m², or per m (for skirting) and Inc VAT. These costs are the main costs for budget purposes only. Other costs could include, the removal of existing flooring, moisture suppressing (DPM), block borders with parquet, stair cladding, and heavy item charges.

So, for a Laminate floor, on a perfect subfloor, with scotia beading, you may end up paying around £122 per m², for the entire project.

For a premium engineered parquet floor, with significant levelling, costs could be £260 per m².

As we explained before, you may find more cost-effective solutions by simply purchasing the product through Kite.

But you also have to balance this against how technical the installation will be, and if your contractor can deliver this.

The truth about floor pricing

Shhhh, we're going to let you into a secret in the flooring world.

Most floors sold online are always on sale. Literally, always. Whatever time of the year, Spring, Summer, Autumn (you get the idea). Many of the larger online-only companies we track don't have a single product listed on their website that is not on sale – 'Spring Sale', 'Last Chance Offer', 'Special Offer', 'Jubilee Weekend Sale', 'Father's Day Special'. The list goes on and on.

We have great sympathy for online marketing executives in this sector. At their Monday morning sales meeting, their boss will ask, "What's the plan guys?". "How about a new sale? Isn't it World Book Day this week?" Or "Let's try a countdown clock on our website".

The Flooring Secret...

This strategy is possible because wood flooring is an opaque product to price and you can't always tell the difference between products by looking at samples. We can show you a 190mm wide, engineered oak floor that is £40 per m^2. We can also show you one that is £100 per m^2. These may look identical, but one will last a generation. The other an afternoon. The differences are in the oils and how the product has been made.

The flooring industry will say a product has an RRP (recommended retail price) of £100, as per our example above, and then sell it for £40, with a massive 'Spring Savers Bonus' of 60%. But the reality is it's a £40 floor, and will never, ever have been sold for £100. People buy this narrative because they, i) don't buy floors every day, ii) don't know anything about flooring and iii) everybody (me included), likes to think they're getting a deal, even if they're not.

Whilst this method of selling is effective, it's dishonest. At Kite, our customers know exactly what they're paying for, and we're completely transparent about how each product is made, and how it's priced. Here we explain 6 factors that affect the price of your floor.... And note, 'end of season sale' is not one of them. It's wood floors. Not dresses.

The grade of wood

By this, we mean how rustic the floor is, so whether it has knots, and how large the knots are. Rustic floors will always be cheaper because you can use the entire tree. Prime floors (those with no knots) will be expensive. You can also buy floor grades that are priced in the middle, between Rustic and Prime grades.

Oils and the manufacturing process

This is a big one. Good quality oils mean a floor can withstand whatever family life throws at it. But note, it's not just the oil type, it's also the quantity used (how much per m^2), how many coats, and how the oil is applied. A well-made floor will be textured with brushing machines between coats to ensure the oils sit deep within the wood structure. Cheaper floors will cut corners on the quantity of oil, the number of coats, and how the oils are applied.

A well-run manufacturing plant will also have regularly serviced machines that accurately 'mill' the floors. There will be sufficient staff on the production line to spot defects, and the climate in the factory will be tightly controlled to ensure moisture does not get into the layers of flooring. These floors will perform well and fit together tightly (so no unsightly gaps).

The number of processes

The more treatments on the wood, the more it will cost. Example treatments include smoking, band sawing (horizontal brushing), vertical brushing, staining, bevel distressing, and the list goes on and on. The more treatments you do, the more the floor costs. Note, UV oil floors are the quickest and cheapest to apply as the floors are placed under a UV light and the finish dries instantly. Some stains take days to dry, and this pushes up costs.

How common the shape of flooring is

More common shapes (we call them platforms) are cheaper because manufacturers mass-produce them. The most common width of flooring is 190mm width planks, so you will tend to see cheaper pricing here. Expect to pay more for very wide or very narrow planks. Herringbones and Chevrons also come in standard sizes; and deviate from this and things get expensive. Patterned floors will be more expensive as there are more cuts and packaging needed to deliver a smaller area.

Where the wood comes from

At Kite, we work with both French and Asian Oak products. The Asian floors are cheaper and tend to be the more common widths. French Oak is better for bespoke orders, as we can make it in widths from 140mm up to 300mm. With good quality oils, both will perform well, but interestingly, they react to the oils differently.

In terms of environmental credentials, wood can be FSC certified (which will mean it will be more expensive). However, just because timber is not FSC certified, it does not mean it's from the back of a wagon! Non-registered products we sell would still be certified by the EUTR (ttf.co.uk/sustainability/eutr). Sustainability and wood flooring, like pricing, has plenty of grey areas, but that's a topic for a later date!

How much wood is in the product

Thickness is something people often use to ascribe value to wood floors, and it's true; floors with thicker oak top layers i.e. more wood, will cost more. But remember, these floors are cosmetic, so sit on top of a structural floor. Thickness is therefore under your feet, so not worth paying for. Our most common thickness is 15mm, with a 4mm top layer. This thickness is structurally sound, and also gives you at least two sands on the floor. We would only recommend a thicker floor if you were looking to transition the floor into a very high tile line, or a thinner floor with a low tile line.

So, in summary, when choosing a wood floor, look at each of these factors, to evaluate whether you're getting fair value. If you're buying a 190mm width floor, in a natural oak oil, from Asia, that is a rustic grade, with no reference to the type of oils, it will never, ever be £100 per m^2. If you're buying a 300mm width, french oak floor, with grey oils that's been smoked and stained, it will be expensive.

The truth about samples

‘Natural Variation’. ‘Flooring is a Natural Product’. ‘Due to the natural variation of wood products, images should only be used as a guide’ etc. etc.

You’ll find something like this in every flooring retailer’s terms and conditions. For somebody buying their first floor, they probably won’t think about this too much. Until the floor turns up. And it’s not like their small sample. And it doesn’t match their Pinterest board.....

Like every flooring business, this has happened to us. And it’s a pretty rubbish situation, as somebody has paid for a product, and they’re not happy. Unfortunately, as a flooring business, you cannot remove the variation clause from your terms, as there are some very good reasons why it exists.

To explain why this is the case, to help smooth your flooring journey and to set expectations, we’ve written the following blog.

Within floors, the colour can vary. Massively.

If you look at the image below, these two planks are from the same rustic floor. The same floor! If you choose your floor based on small samples, you could choose a dark sample, and think you’re buying a dark floor. You could also choose a light sample. But the reality is both colours are present. Scroll to the right and put the colours together and the whole floor blends in. We always tell people to always look for general colours rather than specific ones, and this is the reason. Images can also help. But look closely. You will almost always see variation - Esther Rustic (Newington Range).

Two planks, different floor

Nope, the colours blend

Colour variation can be minimised by going with less rustic floors, stronger oils and stains, and specifying certain wood platforms. At the very high end of the market, you can also use control samples. But colour can still vary. And all of these variables increase the cost.

This is one of our mega floors, in a clean grade, stained and bleached, with very little variation – A Mega Floor.

Where does the wood come from and where is the wood platform produced?

Like every other product in life, those produced in large quantities cost less than bespoke orders. In every wood floor, there are broadly two main parts of production, the manufacturing of the wood platform, and then the finishing (the application of the oils or lacquers to protect it).

In the flooring industry, many of the mass-produced platforms are made in China or Eastern Europe. Even if it's accredited timber, with organisations like the FSC, to run an efficient production line, the batches used of the raw materials have to be changed. There are other variables as well, such as how long the floor is stored before and after finishing etc. and none of these are controlled by the retailer and all these factors cause variation (if a retailer tells you they can completely control the production process across mass-produced floor, they are lying).

At Kite, our more premium platforms are manufactured in Europe. With these, there is more oversight and quality control. It's even possible to use control samples, at the very high end. But the challenge is, that because of these extra processes, they cost more. And not everyone can pay that premium.

What is the finishing strategy?

At Kite, we generally sell oiled floors (oiled vs. lacquered is a separate discussion). Our UV-oiled floors have an oil applied that dries under a UV light. It dries instantly and is a very quick and cheap process. This straightforward treatment is a great way of protecting the floors. It, however, doesn't stain out variations in wood. We do sell more premium floors that are bleached, stained, oiled and here, colour variation can be reduced (you can learn more about these floors here – Bespoke Floors). But, if you buy a UV-oiled floor (and they are always the most cost effective), expect some colour variation.

Embrace the variation!

So what should your plan be? Well, our advice is to try and embrace the variation! This lack of control may be hard for clients who are micromanaging every aspect of their build project. But the truth is, unless you have deep pockets, you cannot control the exact colour of your floor, only the general colour. And all the time you spend comparing tiny samples and shades is pointless, because the final floor could be a different colour.

Also, remember, floors change colour, either through sunlight (UV light will always change the colour of wood floors), or through the lighting in your home. So, try not to be too precious about it. At Kite, we've had clients question the colour of our floors on delivery, but without exception, after they have been fitted, they grow to love them. And a few months after fitting, they can't understand what the fuss is about!

What can you control?

Rather than focusing on a specific colour, focus on the quality of oils (do they use a premium brand of oil?), the quantity of oil applied and the number of coats, the knot filling strategy (bad filling can make floors super ugly), and are the floors good to fit (trust companies that fit floors more than businesses that simply buy containers, Kite is a CHAS accredited fitting business).

But what if you just can't let it go....

OK. So this is not specific to Kite. Every flooring retailer has these challenges (hence why the variation clause is in every T&Cs). But there are some folks out there who just can't get their head around not controlling the exact colour of their floor. And whilst we try to explain it will be ok after the floor is fitted, they still struggle. That's ok. For most people, our advice is to buy a more premium European made platform, with deeper finishes, but these floors can still vary from sample to the final floor. If you want to have complete control over colour, the only thing to do is to fit an unfinished product, and then professionally apply the oils on site. But guess what? This is a lot more expensive, as you end up paying double labour (to fit and then to finish). You're also limited on the type of finishing you can do.

Or buy a tile

So, there you have it. The truth about samples. Embrace the variations and don't obsess about small samples. Worry about the things you can control (like oils and filling strategy). Or buy a more expensive floor. Almost all our clients love our floors, regardless of variation. And we are sure that you will too.

LET'S GET TECHNICAL

There's more than one way to fit a floor; why it matters to your project.

Many people don't know you can fit a floor floated, glued down or nailed. Here we discuss how to choose the best strategy.

As a family, we occasionally try to have a conversation over dinner. So, the other evening, I recently posed some questions to my 7 and 4 year old.

"Is there more than one way to bake a cake?" – "Yes, most definitely," came the reply. "How about eggs, is there more than one way to cook them" – "Yes, poached, scrambled and fried." "Is there more than one way to fit a floor?" – "Daadd, we really don't care how a floor is fitted..."

And it's true. Nobody cares how a floor is fitted....if it's fitted well.

But, trust me, they do care if it's fitted badly.

So, before you fit your wood floor is fitted... agree your fitting strategy with your contractor, as this can have a big impact on the outcome of your flooring project.

There are two main ways to fit a wood floor

Floated or glued – there's a third, 'nailed' but it's pretty rare for us to do this, so we won't go into too much detail here. Note, also, laminates are always floated.. so no decision there!

A floated floor involves joining the edges of each board together and then simply 'loating'the floor on top of an underlay, which in turn sits on top of your base floor. Your base or subfloor is the structural floor that sits beneath our floors (which are normally cosmetic). In many houses/flats this is 18mm plus thick wood, and sits on joists. In kitchen extensions, it is often concrete.

For floated, there is no glue that sticks underneath the floor to the base floor, but the weight of the floor holds it in place. Most of our engineered wood floors are tongue and groove floors, which means to join them together, the tongue has to be glued into the groove with PVA glue. Some of our laminates are 'click systems', so no PVA glue required, and you can also get engineered wood products in "click systems". PVA is pretty damn strong, so whether it's 'click' or 'T&G', from a fitting outcome it will make no difference to you as a consumer... although click systems can be quicker to fit.

For a glued down floor you bond the bottom of your boards directly to your base floor. The tongues slot into the grooves but you do not glues these in. You cannot glue a floor to everything; you have to have a flat surface the glues will bond to. For Kite, we work in a lot of Victorian houses. Typically, they will have floor boards, so to glue a floor here, you have to fit 6mm ply on top of the floorboards, and then bond to this. Technically, you also shouldn't glue to particle board or OSB board), which is a cheap form of base floor sometimes used by builders. Again, the strategy is 6mm ply.

Floated floor

Glued floor

So. which should you do?

At Kite, we don't just want to sell you a floor. We want to help you have a perfectly fitted floor, and this means advising on the fitting side, even if we don't fit. We know there are other blogs on the internet on this topic, but they generally list the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods... but don't actually help a consumer (or somebody with no flooring expertise) to actually make a decision. In other words, they don't explain why it actually matters how you fit your floor!

We think it comes down to five questions.

1. Is your floor a patterned floor, such Chevron or Herringbone, or straight board?

There are some contractors that will float a patterned floor. We don't advise it, and our fitters will always glue it down. There is far less tolerance for unevenness with a patterned floor, so if it's not glued down, and the subfloor isn't perfect, you will get a poor outcome from your fitting. It is also far easier to fit a patterned floor glued down; you can set up the flooring lines, without them moving during fitting. Examples of patterned floors can be found in our Kent Range.

2. Is your subfloor uneven?

The majority of floors in the UK are fitted on a floated basis. The advantage is it's easier to do, and marginally cheaper (you don't buy glues but an underlay instead). The disadvantage is if there is any unevenness in your base floor, the floor can creak. The bible for floor fitting in the UK is something called the British Standard – BS 8201:2011. Here they specify a flat floor as having a flatness tolerance of 'a maximum of 3mm gap showing under a 2m long straight edge'. So, you're pretty unlikely to get creaks if the floor can meet this condition. This is a pretty conservative viewpoint, along with most of the other standards, but it's a helpful starting point.

If you are levelling the floor (such as in a building project) or you are in a new-build property where your base floor is super flat... floating will be ok. If you're working with a more uneven base floor, then you can still float, but it's pretty likely you will get some creaks.

3. Will you be annoyed by creaking in your floor?

If you have unevenness in your subfloor, there's the chance you may get creaking. But will this actually bother you? Many people don't even notice, and think it's part of the character of a wood floor; those creaks will not damage the floor.

As flooring geeks, we can tell when a floor is glued; it has a more solid feel to it when you walk on it... but really only people in the trade notice this. If you're the type of person that will notice creaks, and there is unevenness in the subfloor, then glue the floor down.

Many contractors (our fitters included) prefer gluing floors, as it is deemed a superior way of fitting a floor. The floor in a floor fitters house, will always be glued down, as guess what, they are annoyed by creaking floors!

4. What is your contractor comfortable doing?

Speak with your contractor. Generally, they have a preferred way of doing things, and ultimately, it is they who are responsible for completing the project, so they should be comfortable with the strategy. But, if you have an uneven floor, and the contractor wants to float the floor, be aware, they may install a floor that creaks!

5. Do you have an underfloor heating system?

If you're having underfloor heating, check if it is water based or electric? With water based systems, you generally enclose the system in a screed. When you fit the flooring, to glue the floor down, you have to apply a thin layer of levelling compound, so there is a base floor that is super smooth to glue to. If you float the floor, you can simply use an underlay that is compatible with underfloor heating. With electric systems, the strategy can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, so make sure you check their installation guidelines (if you float on an electric system, you often don't need underlay). Glueing on an electric system can get complicated, so speak to us about this.

Of course, fitting is just one aspect of the flooring journey. You also need to decide on the product.

Do I need a professional floor fitter?

Fitting a floor can be easy. It can also be hard. At every step of the process, from floor selection to subfloor preparation, to the cuts, to spotting defective boards, to managing challenges like skirting or kitchen units, there are decisions to be made, and actions to be taken. Make the right decisions, and you'll get the perfect floor. Get it wrong, and you won't.

What do we mean by a professional fitter?

Whilst there are NVQs and City and Guild Courses on floor fitting, it's less common for fitters to have professional qualifications in the way other trades might have (perhaps, one of the challenges we have in the sector). Instead, fitters tend to train each other. But how do you as a consumer know if they're any good?

Well, customer reviews are a good place to start reviewing pictures of their previous work (most fitters are very eager to share these). If possible, try and visit one of their previous installations, and review the quality of their work. But also judge them by the type of questions they ask when surveying:

- Do they discuss the different floor fitting strategies – glue down, floated, nailed and the advantages or disadvantages of each?
- If they propose floating the floor, do they test the condition of the subfloor with a spirit level?
- Do they explain how best to flow the floor throughout the property?
- If you're going for a patterned floor, do they recommend glueing it to the subfloor, and do they explain what subfloor preparation is required?
- Do they discuss how the floor transitions in the property will be managed – and which door bars will be used?
- Do they test for moisture in the floor, with a professional moisture metre?
- Do they have a well maintained and tidy van, with the right tools for the project?

From our experience, professional fitters fit a lot of floors and are in high demand. Our teams might fit 60 floors a year. A standard tradesman, with flooring as a side hustle, might fit for 4 or 5. This means they generally make the right calls more often. Their finish is also better.

So do you need a professional floor fitter?

At Kite, our view is sometimes you do, sometimes you don't and it comes down to the following:

1. The type of product you're working with

Laminate click systems are easy to fit, so can often be fitted by contractors. Shorter straight planks, with tongue and grooves, can also be straightforward, but there are still basic mistakes we see when contractors fit these products. If you're working with a premium oiled floor, or extra long planks, we would always go with a professional. The same would apply to patterned floors such as Herringbone or Chevron.

2. The level of finish you want to achieve

If the property is your forever home, and you're buying a premium floor, then you will want the perfect finish. If you're on a budget or are relaxed about the final finish, then you can cut corners.

3. The amount of flooring to fit

Professional floor fitters work quicker than contractors – especially when they are paid by the m^2! Our prime fitting teams, on average, work twice as fast as contractors we know. If you're on a tight timeline or want to minimise disruption to your home, this should be factored in.

4. Any technical work?

Technical work is where professional fitters come into their own. Examples of this could be stair cladding, access hatches, subfloor levelling, and removal and refitting of skirting or undercutting, such as in bay window areas.

But here's the catch... Professional fitters will (and should) always be more expensive than a standard contractor.

Why is this? Well to deliver the best finish, they'll need the latest, well-maintained tools. If they work in the residential space, projects will be small, taking three or four days rather than extended periods of guaranteed income. As they work on a self-employed basis, they will often be delayed or rescheduled; so will need to earn sufficient income to cover quiet periods. They'll also need to cover holidays (which very few take), and the unexpected (theft from vans, is one current challenge our teams face). Supply and Demand also play a part – for technical floors like Chevron or Herringbone, like many other sectors in the country, there's a war on talent. Finally, you can't fit floors forever, it's hard work on your knees... so much like professional footballers, you have a career. Just with less money. But just as much job satisfaction.

Professional fitters are not right for every project. But if you're looking for a high-quality finish on your wood floor, and want that floor to perform over many years, then we would always recommend spending a little more money to achieve this.

What do I need to know if I am having herringbone fitted?

Instagram is great. We love it. The reason? Because through images and text you can answer the most important questions in flooring and they all start with a 'Why'? Why should you have a Herringbone floor? Why should you pay for a professional fitter? Why do oils matter? Most of us have heard of the 'power of Why...' and Instagram nails it.

But where Instagram is not so good is dealing with 'How', and for flooring that's just as important. This guide isn't intended to be a DIY article, as unless you're a DIY expert, fitting parquet is best left to professionals. However, we still think it's important to understand the process; you can then make an informed decision on the best fitting strategy with your contractor.

We glue our Herringbones down

As we dealt with in a previous blog, there are two main ways of fitting a floor; floated or glued down. To give a more secure fit, and also make it easier to hold an accurate line when fitting, we glue Herringbones down with wood glues. This means the subfloor (so the structural part of the floor..) has to be a surface you can bond to. Normally, this is flooring grade plywood or a self-levelling compound. Our most common fitting strategy for floorboards is to staple 6mm ply, when a subfloor is concrete, we use levelling compound.

Note, we don't glue directly to OSB boards or particle boards (cheaper forms of composite wood that contractors use to make subfloors).

Subfloor is key

At Kite, we're based in East London, so we're experts in Victorian Houses (lucky us). Many of these have a subfloor (or floorboards) that look like a roller coaster. For the perfect Herringbone floor, your subfloor needs to be flat and ideally level. There are two ways of correcting this; you can i) remove the current floorboards, repair all the joists, and then fit new boards, or ii) level across the top of your uneven subfloor. The first option makes sense if you're embarking on a larger building project, but if you're just doing flooring, or the current subfloor is structurally sound, then levelling across the top makes sense. Sometimes we get lucky, and no levelling work is required, but in Hackney, this is very rare.

So what do we mean by levelling up?

No, this is not the latest Tory campaign slogan (well actually it is).

In flooring terms, our team will start by stapling 6mm flooring grade plywood boards to the subfloor. Onto this, they will then pour a fast-drying levelling compound, but as levelling compound is like water before they do this, they'll seal any gaps between the ply, with either silicone or expanding foam. The levelling compound dries quickly, so, within 24 hours, you'll have a subfloor ready to go.

Start by stapling 6mm ply...

Use ply across the entire area...

Use silicone in the gaps to avoid leaking

Then primer so the compound will grip...

Then pour the levelling compound...

Plenty of it...

When the compound is dry the floor can be fitted

And now for the fitting

Teams will start by setting a line out so that the rest of the floor can be fitted against it symmetrically. Often this will be in a hallway, so the line will run down the middle of the hall with even cuts on each side. It can also be down the centre of a room. Set your line out well, and everything will work, get it wrong, and your floor won't look balanced. The floors are tongue and groove, so each Herringbone plank will be slotted into the next, forming the arrow pattern. Curves and walls will be dealt with by cutting down the planks to the appropriate size (you have to make a lot more cuts with Herringbone floors than plank).

So where do things go wrong?

Problems mainly come down to the subfloor. If you try to fit on an uneven base, you will get movement and gaps in the floor. Have a perfect subfloor and things become easier. We also see floors where the line hasn't been set out at the beginning correctly, or the tongues haven't been properly fitted into the grooves. Finally, as this is a glue down floor be very careful with moisture; if you have residual moisture in concrete screeds or floorboards, it will cause problems. Make sure moisture levels are tested with a professional moisture reader before fitting.

Unlike laminates, these floors are projects for professional fitters (you can read about when you need one here). So if you're considering a Herringbone floor, and your contractor doesn't cover the things we mention here, be wary.

We need to talk about underfloor heating

"Is your flooring compatible with underfloor heating" is one of the most common questions we get asked at Kite. And almost always, the answer is "yes". Most engineered wood floors are compatible with some form of underfloor heating, but the tricky thing is that not all floors are compatible with every system.

So the correct question should be,

"Is the floor I want, compatible with the system I want?"

And the answer to that question is not always "yes".

At Kite, we talk a lot about fitting strategy (there's more than one way to fit a floor), but with heating systems, it's even more important to plan things out from the beginning. Our nightmare scenario is when a customer orders a non-refundable, bespoke floor, and then we discover it's not compatible with the underfloor heating system they have fitted. Oh dear. So, how do we avoid this?

1. Is the system water-based or electric?

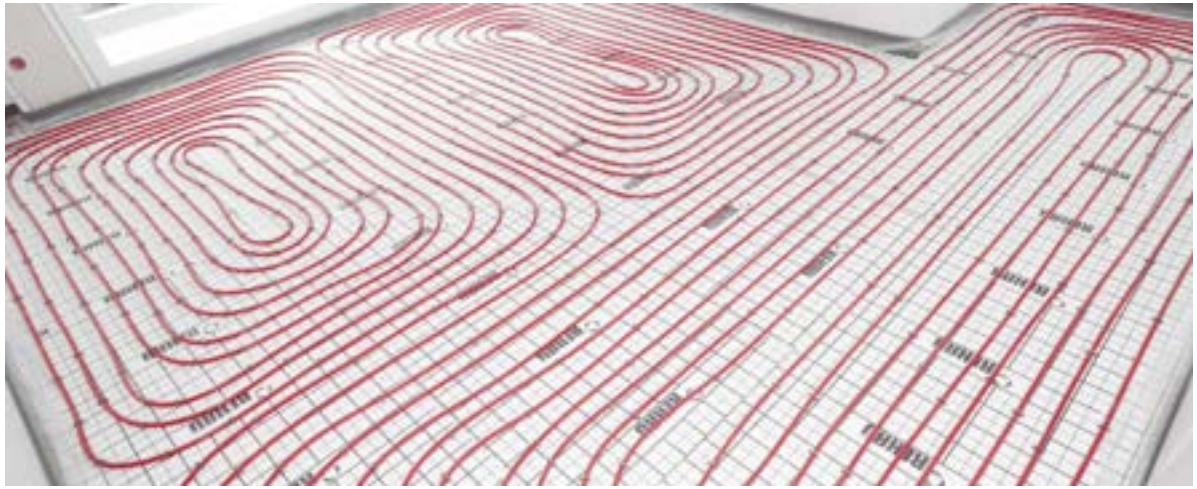
Broadly speaking, there are two types of underfloor heating systems, one with pipes (water-based), and one with wires (electric). We won't go into which is better, but whichever system you go for, you must, must check your fitting strategy works.

Water-based systems, that are set in a screed, are almost always compatible with wood floors. However, electric systems, that aren't part of the structure of the building, are commonly designed for floating floors (planks that are not fully bonded to the subfloor). This works fine with plank flooring, but parquet, such as Herringbone or Chevron, has to be glued down.

There several electric systems that are foil-based, and you simply cannot glue floors to them. An example of an electric, foiled-based system would be this from Warm Up – Heating Matt Range. This means they are not compatible with parquet. There are electric systems that are compatible with glue-down floors; these are often the ones used with tiles – Sticky Matt. Always, always, check with the technical teams at your underfloor heating company, as to whether your floor can safely be fitted, before ordering the system.

We need to talk about underfloor heating; wood flooring, heating systems and how to get it right

A foil based underfloor heating system These are not compatible with glue down parquet flooring



2. Is the system within the subfloor floor or on top (an overfloor system)?

If the system is within a screed, it will be more structurally sound than if it sits on top. Remember, for us to safely fit a floor, the subfloor should be level (less than 3mm deviation across a 2m rule), and sound (so no movement). Regularly we come across water-based systems that sit on top of the subfloor, such as Wundertherm. These are cheaper and easier to install than structural systems. However, often these have been loosely fitted onto chipboard, so there is movement and creaks.

If you have chosen a plank floor, fitted floated, then normally it can be made to work, although there may be floor bounce, if the system isn't flat. But glued-down parquet is much harder.

The manufacturer recommendation is to apply a quick drying levelling compound across the system, and then glue to this, but if there is movement in the subfloor, cracks appear. And even if no cracks appear, it's expensive, as the compound has to be 1) flexible to heat changes, so a premium product, and 2) deep to avoid cracking. You may think you're ending up saving money, but when we send you the levelling bill, you'll think again. At Kite, we've tried other solutions, but fundamentally, if the subfloor isn't structurally sound, you shouldn't be fitting a glued down product.

And again, this is not ideal, if the customer has bought a bespoke glued-down floor, and the system has already been fitted!!

As a business, we're now trying to avoid fitting parquet to these types of systems, and are strongly recommending plank floors, fitted floated. But we also know sometimes clients have their heart set on parquet, and the systems have already been fitted!

3. A single heat source

As we've explained before, wood is a natural product, and when it dries out it shrinks, and when it picks up moisture, it expands. This means, if you're using an underfloor heating system, it must be under the entire wood flooring area, not partially underneath, as one area will expand and contract more than the other.

The solution to this is to put a break in the floor, covered with a door bar, but that doesn't look good. So when designing your system, make sure you think this through.

4. Before, after and during fitting...

Before floor fitting, for most water-based systems, a commissioning process must take place, whereby the systems is gradually turned up, and then down. The guidance from the British Standards is as follows, but every system may be slightly different;

12.6.4 Precautions prior to laying where underfloor heating is to be used

Once the screed is dry to a maximum level of 75% RH, or 65% RH for floors directly bonded to the screed, the underfloor heating should be commissioned in accordance with the underfloor heating manufacturers guidelines where available.

Where no guidelines are indicated the following protocol should be followed:

Heating up. The flow temperature should be heated to a specific temperature as follows:

1) Day 1: 20°C

2) Day 2: 30°C

3) Day 3: 40°C 4, Day 4: 50°C or the maximum planned operating temperature. This should be maintained constantly for a minimum of 7 days.

Cooling Down. The flow temperature should be cooled to a specifc temperatire as follows:

1) Day 12: 40°C

2) Day 13: 30°C

3) Day 14: 30°C

4) Day 15: The underfoor heating should be switched off.

This process almost always takes our customers completely by surprise (it is bizarre, that the companies that actually fit these systems never seem to mention it to their customers... but hey, we're just flooring guys.

The reason for this is you cannot fit a wood floor on a heating system, and then simply crank it up to the max, because then the timber reacts to that shock. This process also helps with the drying of the screed, another one of our fitting challenges (read our Blog on this). A couple of days before the fitting starts, the system must be turned off, then turned up gradually after the floor is fitted.

5. Speak to the technical teams

Almost all underfloor heating manufacturers have technical teams that are super helpful. Before ordering your system, give them a call, and check through everything, from the type of materials, fitting strategy, and also how to commission your system. The worst that can happen is you'll find out you're on the right track, or they could easily highlight something your contractor, architect or project manager missed.

We've had several situations where we've arrived to fit a floor, and something is wrong with the underfloor heating. This then sets off a rubbish chain of events involving blame pointing and ultimately costs.

At Kite, we try our best to give great advice, but we're not the project manager for your build. So, make sure, whoever is, checks your final strategy.

So there you have it, five things to think about with underfloor heating systems and wood floors.

Whether you buy through us or anyone else, remember, the most important question is not, "is my flooring compatible with underfloor heating", it's....

"Is the floor I want, compatible with the system I want?".

Happy Project Planning.

An overfloor system where pipes wrapped in foam sit on top of the subfloor

What's underneath matters

We've talked about subfloors previously, and we've also talked about fitting strategies (glued or floated). But what we haven't flagged is, more often than not, there is a layer between your wood floor and subfloor. It's the filling in your flooring sandwich, and as with sandwiches, what you choose makes a difference.

Remember, you only get one shot at this – you can't change your filling once the floor is down!

Float wood floors directly onto foil, electric underfloor heating system

Floated Floors

Here we're talking about underlays, and, believe it or not, there are many different types.

I had no clue about underlay before we started the business, and it's the same with most of our clients. Yet, the quality of underlay can make a real difference, and the costs, when set against your flooring budget, often make it a no brainer to upgrade.

Underlay can be used to smooth a subfloor, improve sound proofing, increase heat insulation and create a moisture barrier. Our typical use case for premium underlay is when a client wants less heat loss (think basement flats..) and the subfloor is uneven. Uneven subfloors and floated floors are not a good combination; there's always a risk of creaks or bounces. To fix this, clients can opt to level the floor with a levelling compound, but that's expensive. Alternatively, they can use a thicker underlay, which is the next best thing.

Levelling out the subfloor

At Kite, we use a 5mm underlay product made from recycled tyres and cork. We've used this product over some pretty uneven subfloors, and the floors have moulded to a perfect fit, with very little creaking or movement. By contrast, we see far more creaks and bounces with thinner products. To upgrade, on a standard flooring project, you'd end up paying around £200 extra, so it's definitely worth the extra spend.

What about sound proofing?

In many flats, leases will stipulate 'a premium underlay' must be used for timber floors. Good underlays will have a specification sheet that lists performance, and what you're looking for is the Db reduction. This relates to footstep sounds on your floor, and a higher Db rating will mean you'll hear less footsteps beneath your floor. Our entry level underlays have a rating of 17Db, premium underlays can be as high as 28Db. If the underlay doesn't have a spec sheet steer clear; when you come to sell the flat, a specification sheet is evidence you've complied with the lease.

Heat insulation

On the specification sheet, you'll also see a Tog rating. This is a measurement on how effective your underlay is at insulating heat; the higher the tog rating, the less heat will transfer through your floor. For wood floors, underlays can have tog ratings of anywhere from 0.3 to just over 1.

Blocking moisture

Damp is the nemesis of the wood flooring, and we discover it pretty regularly on our travels across East London, especially in basement flats. A Damp Proof underlay is a low cost tool to protect your new floor against moisture, but note this doesn't fix a damp problem, it merely stops damp getting to your floor.

What about underfloor heating?

Of course there are situations where you need an underlay that transfers heat instead of insulating against it. Normally, this means a very thin underlay, but on some electric underfloor heating systems, you float the floors directly onto them. Our advice is to always check with the heating manufacturer. They are almost always very helpful, and will advise on the best build up strategy.

Glue Down Floors

You cannot glue a floor to most underlays. So, what happens if you want a Herringbone floor (that has to be glued down), but you need sound proofing? This is a common scenario for us in new build developments or leasehold flats with strict leases. Here, if the subfloor is floor boards, typically, 6mm ply will be stapled, and then a special underlay made of rubber and cork is glued to the ply, with the flooring glued to this. There's a lot of glue, and a lot of material involved, but it gets you the floor you want, and complies with the lease.

So, there you have it. A lesson in what you can use between floors. It's probably not something you thought you would ever have to think about. But it's really important when choosing a floor. Get it wrong, and you'll be thinking about it a lot. And you won't be able to change your flooring sandwich.

Happy project planning.

Wood glues and an insulating underlay

How to reach flooring nirvana; six essential terms and conditions you cannot ignore

Ok, maybe we've been a bit strong there. But, unlike many other purchases, with flooring, whether you buy through us, or any other retailer, terms and conditions matter. We spend a great deal of time convincing people to read them. But every now and then somebody doesn't. And then it has an effect on their dream home.

Buying a floor is not like from ordering from ASOS.

Why? because once a floor is fitted, it's fitted. You can't pop into your local Post office and send it back. The consequences of installing the wrong or faulty floor are dramatic, and stressful.

It is not like ordering your new iPhone?

Why? because it's a natural product. This means you get faulty planks in good batches and this applies to all our floors, whether they are premium floors from France, or products made in Asia.

How To Reach Flooring Nirvana; Six Essential Terms and Conditions You Cannot Ignore

On the fitting side, we're often reliant on our clients to project manage. We love our clients dearly, and we try to help them as much as possible, but the reality is many of them haven't managed building sites before.

We never, ever want to fall out with people, but flooring projects always come at the end of a long building journey, which means stress levels can be off the scale.

To help you reach flooring Nirvana, we've put together a list of some of our key terms and conditions. A full list is available on our website – Terms And Conditions.

1. The Installers Responsibility (Supply only)

Every flooring retailer in the world will have a policy that states the installer is to be responsible for fitting the correct floor.

Our wording is as follows:

"It is the installer's responsibility to carry out a final inspection of the floor prior to installation to ensure the colour, grade, quality, manufacture and finish are acceptable. On average, 1% to 2% of our boards may have a defect on them. This can vary from a crack, to a slightly raised knot. Please, please, make sure the product is checked with the end user, before it is fitted."

Our wording goes on, but the bottom line is that once the floor is fitted, you can't change it or make a claim. This all sounds very dramatic. And in truth, it is

Check the floor before it is fitted!

We recently had a client who installed the wrong floor after a batch of flooring was delivered with too many knots, and it was heartbreaking for everyone.

As a small business, you have to stop the liability somewhere, as the costs of replacing floors can get scary.

So, the simple strategy is to make sure you or your installer check the floors before they're fitted. If we're fitting the floor, we have more control, but we ask our clients to be onsite the first day of installation. If this is not possible, please ask us to send pictures.

If you're on holiday, and this is actually when we have most problems, please make sure your installer has clear instructions on the type of finish you are expecting.

2. The rip out into the unknown (Supply and fit)

At Kite, we're passionate about fitting floors. This doesn't make for an easy life, especially in old houses. In fact, the majority of flooring businesses simply supply floors. But fitting floors is in our DNA; we don't feel you can give great advice without knowing how to fit.

At Kite, we work with a lot of old properties, and if we're removing old floors, such as carpet, tiles, laminates, solid floors, or even skirting, there is always an unknown lurking beneath.

This is really tricky for customers to get their heads around, because they want an exact price before we start work. But that's not possible. These additional costs, can include extra subfloor work, such as securing floor boards, filling in holes, or levelling work. The worst case, is when we discover a floor so uneven that structural work has to be done. Damp can also be discovered, especially in basement flats. We always try to talk through the different scenarios with clients prior to removing floors, but sometimes, even we are surprised.

So, if you have a rip out on your project, please prepare for the unexpected.

3. You can't fight chemistry! Dry times and humidity.

Wood is a natural product that picks up moisture, so site conditions have to be stable for fitting. This means no excess humidity or excessive temperatures; a Relative Humidity (RH) between 40% and 65% and a temperature of between 18 and 22 degrees are ideal conditions. If we are laying on a concrete screed, the moisture content must be less than 4% (if we are using our Tramex moisture tests).

We have a survey team that inspects properties prior to installation, and it's binary. The site will either pass or fail. And if the site fails, we have to delay, which is never fun when kitchens and decorators are booked to come in afterwards.

Please don't use this for your subfloor!

Factors that cause high RH readings, are windows not being fitted, heating not being on, and plastering being done late. Moisture content in screed will be affected by humidity, the type of screed, airflow in the property, the depth of screed, and whether the underfloor heating system has been commissioned (it must be turned on and off gradually before we fit a floor). We have had scenarios where the heating is off, the windows aren't in, and the screed simply does not dry.

"We've used a special type of screed" is a comment we often get from builders, but, if the drying conditions aren't right, the product will not dry.

4. 'Our builders will sort the subfloor'

This is another phrase we hear often. There are very strict guidelines within the British Standards 8201 around what is allowable in subfloors (which is the structural surface we fit our floor to). As we're the ones fitting the floor we're inevitably strict on these conditions (and if you're builder isn't fitting he can be slightly.....lassaiz faire...).

Whilst we've already covered that the floor must be dry, it also needs to be;

- Solid, so no movement or squeaking. It's very common for contractors to use particle board or OSB panels for the subfloor instead of plywood. For glue down flooring, such as Herringbone, this is a no no; it does not have the same stability. Structural Plywood securely screwed down, must be used, or a levelling compound if the floor is concrete.
- Flat, with no dips. The golden rule is that there must be less than 3mm deviation across a 2m rule. It doesn't necessarily have to be completely level, as long as you know that's how the floor will be after your new flooring is installed.
- Clean and clear; no leftover tile adhesive, dust, or debris. Also, heavy items, such as furniture or tools removed.

There can sometimes be a little wiggle room in these rules, if we're told in advance, but one of the messiest conversations we have to have is when a client has paid a builder to prepare the subfloor, and it then fails our test.

If in doubt, get Kite to do the subfloor.

5. Other trades on site

We get it. Your project is delayed. Costs have overrun. You're paying for rental accommodation elsewhere. The kitchen company is booked for a certain date. Other trades are always pushing to get things completed so they can move onto the next job. Ahhhhhhhh.....

Flooring always comes at the end, so stress levels are at their highest. But you cannot fit a floor if people are walking on it. This may sound obvious, but when you are gluing a parquet, especially Herringbone, the slightest movement will throw the whole thing out, and you have to redo it.

And then who pays for that?

At Kite, we try and be as flexible as possible, and there are scenarios where we can work around other trades if we have prior notice, but the default position is we need a clear site. If our fitters turn up, and that's not the case, we have to charge cancellation fees.

6. And finally, Transition or Door Bars

Where you have a floor running into another surface, you almost always have to leave an expansion gap; the wood will expand when it picks up moisture in humid months, and shrink when you turn on your heating. At Kite, we try to keep door bar use to an absolute minimum, and our profiles are the thinnest on the market, but we still have to use them.

We do get clients who request "flush finishes," where the timber is fitted tight to a surface. We also get clients who request metal door bars or metal inlays. Common scenarios where this is requested is where the wood runs into patio doors, full length windows in modern apartments, or transitions into tiles in open spaces.

These transitions are possible, but any special requests must be flagged with us well in advance of the installation, and ideally for a second time on the first day of installation.

Miscommunication is so easy on our projects, especially as we often confirm them months in advance. Once a standard expansion gap is left, and the floor is fitted, it's very hard to rectify.

So there you have it, our six most common terms and conditions, that if you read and action them, you'll have a smooth installation. Don't read them, and we may fall out. And we really, really don't want to do that.

If you want to read our full terms and condition **click here**

Happy Project Planning.

Want your project to be on time and on budget?

Hello, refurbishment projects! We know at some point you'll have 'Fit Flooring' listed in your project plan (probably towards the end). But here's the cold hard truth. Sometimes, for reasons we'll explain, you can't fit flooring.

And when you can't fit flooring, your project delays, and it's no fun for anyone.

So, we've written a blog, listing several common challenges that delay fitting and/or cause cost creep.

The good news? All these themes can be managed, provided you plan for them in advance.

Moisture levels in concrete

This is our biggest challenge, as moisture levels are almost never tested by contractors. Chemistry tells us that wood floors don't like moisture and unfortunately, concrete can take a very long time to dry, especially when the property is not sealed, and the screed is deep. The industry guidance is 1mm per day, but if the property is not sealed, it can be the case that the screed will simply not dry at all. For all our projects we professionally test the moisture levels with a Tramex meter, and if it's above 4%, we can't fit the floor.

If you have underfloor heating, moisture levels can also be reduced by 'commissioning' your system (provided it is concrete screed, and not a quick drying levelling compound). This is the process of turning on the system, and then gradually increasing the temperature, leaving the system on for a few days, and then gradually turning it off again. All underfloor heating manufacturers will have a slightly different process, so check with them, they'll always have technical guidance. If the system hasn't been commissioned, we almost always find the moisture levels are too high to fit flooring.

Readings of over 4 are very common when the property hasnt been sealed or the underfloor heating system hasnt been commissioned

In this property the skirting was removed

and rising damp was discovered which can be treated

Get the rip out done early

This is not always possible, but if you're removing an existing floor, tiles, or skirting boards, it's best to do this in advance of the fitting. To achieve the perfect floor, you often can't finalise fitting strategy until this is done.

On rip out, you may discover the subfloor is more uneven or unstable than expected. You may also discover moisture issues, especially in basement flats or old properties. If these are discovered early, additional costs can be minimised, and factored into your budget. If you can't do the rip out until the day of fitting, allow for a contingency in your budget.

If we're gluing a floor down, it must be level... and we mean level.

In a previous blog, we covered fitting strategy; whether you should glue or float a floor. If we're going the glue down route, the subfloor must be completely flat and structurally sound. With concrete screeds, it is very rare for them to be finished in this condition, especially when they have been open to the elements.

We almost always then have to apply a levelling compound, with the costs associated with this. This also raises the height of the subfloor by c3mm, which can cause challenges with doors. Where there are floorboards, you must staple sheets of 6mm ply, but if the floorboards are very uneven, thicker ply can be used, but no thicker than 9mm, then stapling no longer works. If the floorboards are very uneven, ply can be fitted, and levelling compound applied on top (we cover this in a previous blog on Herringbone floors). Note, the level of tolerance listed by British Standards for a glue down floor is 3mm across a 2m rule. At Kite, we sometimes take a view when it's at 5mm, in very small areas, but if it is more than this, the area will need to be levelled.

Examples of particle board none of which you can glue floors to

You cannot glue floors to everything

We've already covered floorboards, but another common scenario we come up against, is when a subfloor is OSB or particle board – again with a glue down floor, we cannot bond directly to this, so ply needs to be fitted. Alternatively, make sure your builder uses ply for the subfloor, rather than cheaper forms of wood.

Other contractors

When we fit floors we insist on a clear site, with no other tradespeople working. We realise this feels like a big ask, but there are some pretty good reasons. Firstly, floors, once glued, take a while to settle, and if you walk across them, before this has happened, they move, and create unsightly gaps. The floor then needs to be refitted. We've had this scenario a couple of times, and it's not ideal for anyone involved.

Our teams are super-efficient, so it's best to let them have a clear run. On completion of works we'll always take extensive photos, to show you the finished floor. In the event the property is still a building site, we recommend the floor is then covered using a professional Correx material; there is nothing worse than a contractor dropping a tool on your newly fitted floor.

Not one of our better days when we turned up to fit a floor here

Anything sitting on the floor?

If we're fitting a new floor, it may seem obvious, but there can be nothing sitting on top of it. This applies to heavy furniture, but also appliances, free standing radiators, and toilets. If these items are flagged in advance, we can almost always plan, but it's far trickier if we discover them on the day of fitting. We can recommend a good plumbing service, that will remove plumbed in appliances, but as with all these themes, this needs to be planned.

So, there you have it. 6 challenges you can now plan and budget for, which will help make your project run smoothly.

Of course, if you have any further questions on project planning, just let us know.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR FLOOR

Use of a natural soap and a maintenance oil will keep your floor looking great.

So, you've just had a new wood floor fitted. One of the next questions people always ask is, "How do I maintain it?"

Firstly, here's what not to do (and that's probably most important). **DON'T USE DETERGENTS.** They're really bad for your floor, and can leave marks.

Secondly, is your floor an Oiled Floor or Lacquered floor. Make sure you know, as there are different strategies for each.

Oiled Floors

Cleaning

The floors should be cleaned regularly (say every two weeks). This should be with a natural wood flooring soap, so no detergent, and should be applied with a little water, and then lightly mopped (don't use too much water). It's possible to buy wood flooring soaps in supermarkets, but our recommended product is from Ciranova (just google their flooring soap), as this is from the same company who makes our oils. Regularly cleaning like this is one of the most important things to do to keep your floor looking healthy.

Maintenance Oil

One of the benefits of an oiled floor is that it can be refreshed with the use of oils. If you want to keep your floor the existing colour, you can rub in a maintenance oil, every say 18 months to 24 months. Again, our recommended oil is from Ciranova and for almost all of our floors, the matt version applies, but always test it out before you start rubbing too much in. We use Ciranova oils on our sample boards, as it keeps them looking fresh, when they get bashed around on site visits. It's also great for light scratches; but deeper scratches may require a different strategy, such as the use of filler or if very deep, the plank will need to be sanded.

Anything else to think about?

Whilst the oiled finish itself is stain resistant, it doesn't mean you can leave everything on the floor. Things like drinks, food, kids toys etc. will stain the floor, so make sure you clean up the mess when it happens. Our floors should resist most liquids for a few hours.... but if you leave oil or wine on a floor for a weekend, it will mark (and this is the case for any wood floor!).

Lacquered Floors

These floors require less maintenance. As they cannot be oiled, it's just a question of regular mopping with a wood floor cleaner that is suitable for 'varnished floors'. Do not use maintenance oil on these floors, as the oils just stays on the surface of the wood (it isn't absorbed).

We recommend the Bona products, and they have a very helpful spray mop, that regulates the amount of product applied to the floor. Of course you can also try other lacquered floor cleaners (we always recommend testing the cleaner on a small area first).

THE TEAM

CONTACT US

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