

# Picking the Right Flooring Installation Contractor Can Save Time, Money and Headaches

**J**ay Harvey has a unique insight into the world of flooring installation. A 30-year veteran of the flooring industry, he first began installing floors during summers when he was in high school. He parlayed that experience into a job at Fishman Flooring Solutions, where he is currently regional manager for Georgia. He recently shared his thoughts with *Floor Trends* on the best ways architects, designers and retailers can work with flooring installation contractors.

### **What things should architects, designers, retailers and others look for when engaging a flooring installation contractor?**

**Harvey:** The fundamental thing to remember when

hiring a flooring installation contractor is that one size doesn't fit all. In other words, very few flooring installers, if any, are expert at installing every type of flooring product.

Look for two things in an installation contractor. First, have they been factory trained or certified to install the flooring product that is specified? Second, can they demonstrate that they have kept up with the latest installation systems and products through training and continuing education? Reputable installers should freely share this information, which is also available from flooring product manufacturers.

### **What does a strong working relationship between an archi-**

### **tect, designer and/or retailer and a flooring installation contractor look like?**

**Harvey:** Communication and trust are the most important factors. From the very beginning of the relationship, there should be open communication among all parties involved in a flooring installation project. That requires candid discussion about things like timing, budgets, problems and expectations in order to avoid surprises that can add time and expense to the project. I learned a long time ago that communication is a two-way street and it's just as important to listen to others as it is to offer opinions.

As for trust, it's important that architects, designers and others trust that the flooring installation contractor will

provide the best installation possible and the best solutions to any problems that might occur during or after an installation.

### **Based on your experience, do you think architects, designers and retailers understand the principles of properly installing a floor? What is the basis of your answer?**

**Harvey:** They certainly understand the basics of flooring installation given the large amount of information that's available online and elsewhere.

But there's a big difference between having that knowledge and applying it to remediate a flooring problem under time and budget pressures. That's where a good flooring installation contractor brings significant value. There's almost no conceivable problem that a good installer hasn't addressed many times. That experience saves both time and money when issues occur.

### **How important is early planning to the successful installation of a flooring product?**

**Harvey:** It's often said that a failure to plan is a plan to fail. That's certainly true



Jay Harvey, Fishman Flooring Solutions.

with a flooring installation, where there are so many considerations for a project to be done right. Things like the scale, scope and budget for the project. The condition of the slab. The expectations of the end user.

A valuable and often underused complimentary service provided by some major flooring distribution firms is access to their architect, designer and facility, or ADF, team members. These are trained professionals, who can develop plans for the successful execution of every aspect of the flooring installation process, saving time, money and frustrations for everyone involved.

ADF consultants add value because they are knowledgeable about the complete flooring system and not just one or two products. They can recognize potential problems with slabs and offer advice on the best products and procedures to remediate them. They understand the range of flooring products and where each works best. They can also ensure that all of the products necessary for the installation arrive at the job site at the right time and in the right sequence. ADF consultants are an asset to everyone involved in a flooring installation.

### **Can firms like yours facilitate relationships between architects, designers and retailers and your flooring installation contractor customers?**

**Harvey:** Absolutely. An ideal time to do this is during the flooring specification process. That's when architects and designers, who have a relationship with Fishman, often add the contact information for someone on our ADF

team. Then the ADF consultant can match the specified flooring product with an installer, who has experience with that type of floor.

At Fishman, we don't recommend one flooring installation contractor over another. But we will provide architects, designers and others with a list of those we see as the best contractors in a given area or region and they can choose from among them. Our goal is to provide a list of local contractors with the right experience.

### **What are some of the most common causes of failed flooring installations?**

**Harvey:** The two most common failures, from my perspective, are moisture issues and incorrect use of adhesives and patches. Failed flooring installations can be very costly, which is why experienced installers are so important.

### **There is a constant flow of new flooring and flooring installation products into the marketplace. How is it possible for anyone from the architect to the designer to the flooring installation contractor to keep pace with these new product introductions?**

**Harvey:** Frankly, the number of new flooring products is both good and bad news. The good news is that the state-of-the-art of flooring installation just gets better and better with innovations. The bad news is that it's tough to be familiar with every new technology or product. That's why flooring product distributors and their ADF consultants are so important to the process. It's their

job to understand the value of the new products they distribute and how to use them.

### **How would you characterize the training available to flooring contractors and installers today? Based on your experience, what percentage of installers takes advantage of this training?**

**Harvey:** The training today is very good and available through manufacturers, distributors and non-profits like the Certified Flooring Installers. This is not only classroom training, but hands-on as well, which often includes training at job sites.

Unfortunately, the availability of training isn't the issue. I'd say that only 10 to 15% of the installers participate in training today. That's the industry's Achilles heel. The best flooring contractors require their installers to participate in training, which is one reason why they're in such demand in today's marketplace.

### **If excellent flooring installation contractors are in such demand, why aren't there more of them?**

**Harvey:** Very few young people today would even vaguely consider becoming a flooring installer or a flooring installation contractor. And vocational schools don't offer basic installation training.

People don't realize that compensation for flooring installation is extremely competitive with other blue collar jobs, like plumbing or auto mechanics. A good flooring contractor, who is eager to learn and work hard, can earn \$100,000 a year or more.

### **How important is managing the expectations of the end user with respect to a flooring installation? Is there a role for the flooring installation contractor or ADF consultant in that communications process?**

**Harvey:** Managing expectations is extremely important throughout the entire flooring installation. The best way for an installer to delight end users is to understand their expectations from the beginning, which can be done by asking the simplest of questions. In return, end users need to understand the different types of flooring and what to expect from them, how they are installed and how they must be maintained to ensure the best return on the flooring investment. That information can be conveyed directly to the end user by the flooring installation contractor or an ADF consultant or through the architect or designer. The ultimate goal is not to meet expectations, but to exceed them.

### **What are the two or three most important pieces of advice you would give an architect, designer or retailer with respect to working with a flooring installation contractor?**

**Harvey:** Hire someone who specializes in installing the type of flooring that's specified. Check references and ensure that the contractor is up to speed on the latest installation products and techniques. Look to establish long-term relationships with the best installation contractors, because they can be hard to find. **ft**