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Style & Design reveals the latest and greatest in hard & soft surfaces and total home trends. Coverage begins on page 29. Shown here is Karndean's new Korlok.

Building on a legacy

AVALON INVESTS IN SYSTEMS & SPACE AS IT PREPARES FOR THE FUTURE

BY AMY RUSH-IMBER

[Cherry Hill, N.J.] Nearly 60 years in business and 14 stores in three states, Avalon Flooring, based here, is on a mission to keep its legacy strong well into the future.

President and CEO Maryanne Adams has been with the company for 29 years and stands firm on keeping founder John Millar's vision alive as she guides the stores into its seventh decade of retailing.

Avalon is employee-owned by Millar's design, Adams told *FCW*. "He wanted people to love, nurture and keep it going," she said. "People want to be a part of something bigger."

Today, Avalon has taken a holistic approach to preparing for its future, and that includes a rebranding of the stores; moving to a 100,000 square-foot warehouse here in Cherry Hill; adding corporate office space for HR, purchasing, accounting and operations; and, creating a new software system with its partner Dancik. As well, it turned its focus on its 360 associates — two-thirds of whom have worked for Avalon for more than 10 years — to make sure that company culture continues for decades to come.

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Top 50

U.S. SPECIALTY FLOORING RETAILERS

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Maryanne Adams

Supporting players

Underlayments can enhance performance, appearance

By Teresa O'Dea Hein

Underlayments can often seem like unsung performers, similar to extras in a movie, acting in the shadow of attractive stars to enhance the overall production.

But these hard-working cast members deserve greater recognition because, depending on the products involved, underlayments can reduce sound transmission, provide moisture barriers, act as an anti-fracture layer, support flooring by masking substrate imperfections and enhance comfort.

PERFORMANCE & PEACE OF MIND

With hard surface flooring, underlayments are a must, noted Jim Wink, vice president, sales and marketing at Foam Products Corporation. "The noise absorption and moisture vapor protection are critical; therefore, accessories like underlayments can be sold at 50 to 75 percent margins," he points out. "Underlayment products should be the retailer's most profitable category."

Rob Kuepfer, president of Vinyl-Trends, said that the company's Eternity SG and Easystep EG products create an opportunity for a customer to feel good about their purchase. "With zero VOC and real hardwood sound, they can provide better margins and peace of mind."

Added Randy Dye, president of Leggett & Platt, "The consumer relies on the retail sales associate for their expertise. The acoustical benefits of underlayments should be explained to consumers and sold as a package."

Additionally, contractors who use proper surface preparation products will be able to complete flooring installations faster with fewer issues, according to Eric J. Kurtz, LEED Green Associate and market manager for hardwood, resilient & surface preparation systems, consumer & construction business unit at Bostik Inc.

Jay Conrod, Laticrete product manager, said the company "concentrates

on product advancements that will attract installers. That positions our dealers as the go-to resource for distribution and creates return customers."

Offering the retailer's point of view is Josh Lipford, sales associate at Costen Floors in Richmond, Va. He reported that the dealer offers a standard underlayment and also an upgraded alternative. "At least 95 percent of customers go for an underlayment," Lipford said. "It's a good benefit for the customer and it's good for the sale."

WHAT'S NEW?

Plenty!

MP Global Products introduced a new airflow technology called "VentiLayer" that's designed to help keep concrete subfloors drier. "We've added a strong, flexible 3D matrix to our traditional recycled fiber underlayment that elevates the pad, and promotes ventilation to evaporate water vapor instead of trapping it to the surface of

the subfloor," explained Jack Boesch, director of marketing.

"Combined with the R-value of the fiber pad, the air space created by extruded and shaped polymer fibers provides an added insulation layer to keep the overlying floor warmer," Boesch said.

Last summer, Leggett & Platt introduced an underlayment called Whisper Step that "solves the dilemma on how to provide acoustical benefit and also be substantial enough to support interlocking luxury vinyl flooring," Dye said. "Whisper Step is 62 pounds per cubic foot. Plus, while the acoustical benefit is great for the homeowner," he added, "the installer also gets the advantage of a product quick to install because it lies flat when unrolled."

In the past year, Laticrete added Strata_Mat XT to its portfolio, reported Conrod. "Designed specifically for ceramic tile and dimension stone installations, Strata_Mat XT serves as an uncoupling layer and vapor management layer that accommodates moisture from beneath the tile covering, while still providing the requisite support and load distribution," he said.

Laticrete also added Fracture Ban, a high-performance, pliable, lightweight peel-and-stick membrane designed for use under thin-bed adhesives for hard

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surface installations. Conrod noted that its peel-and-stick design expedites a quick, dependable turnaround. “Strata_Mat XT and Fracture Ban are positioned as time-saving products due to their fast-drying technology and easy usage,” he added.

DriTac is unveiling two new underlayment systems: DriTac 8302 Double Impact for wood plank and floating floor installations, and DriTac 8301 Impact for resilient floor installations. Both zero VOC products provide enhanced sound control properties with improved footfall sound performance, reported Wade Verble, vice president of business development, and offer a safeguard seaming system with a built-in vapor barrier and anti-crush technology.

“DriTac’s Total Sound Reduction System allows retailers to sell a fully comprehensive, solution-based system that adds to the bottom line,” Verble said. The system includes a layer of approved flooring adhesive on the underlayment’s top and bottom, rounded out by the finished flooring on top. “The result is superior sound and moisture control properties, less risk and a lifetime warranty,” he said.

Bostik’s new range of self-leveling underlayments, patches and specialty underlayment products now span a



DriTac’s Total Sound Reduction System of underlayments and adhesives helps retailers add value to the sale.

full range of price, speed, toughness and levels of surface finish, according to Kurtz. “UltraRamp is one of the easiest ramping products on the market and can be used as a wear layer; UltraFinish Pro is a premium patch with an ultra-smooth finish and quick cure.”

Offered Kuepfer, “We added a hardwood underlayment with a silicone coating. We are also working on some new underlayments for luxury vinyl tile (LVT) and wood plastic core (WPC).”

Most VinylTrends underlayments are made of polypropylene crosslink foam zero VOC blend, and they also market an ultra-low smell rubber, Kuepfer noted. Their underlayments also feature the SealGuard 3 ½-inch-wide lip and tape system for seam protection.

Foam Products Corporation has been producing a high-density polyurethane rubber underlayment for the past 15 years to absorb noise, Wink said. But they’ve made it more environmen-

tally-friendly. “We reduced petroleum oil additives by using soy-based polyols (Agrol), and added recycled granulated rubber tire, greatly reducing the number of tires going to landfills,” he said.

Loxcreen’s new Prova Flex-Heat features a deep locking channel design suitable for multiple sizes of heating cables and is 6mm thick to aid in transitions up to higher surfaces like hardwood, explained Julia Vozza, marketing manager, professional distribution. Furthermore, the exclusive Vapor Management and Shear Stress Control systems provide unsurpassed quality in anti-fracture and uncoupling.

WHAT’S NEXT?

At Laticrete and across the industry, Conrod predicted, “We expect to see advancements with the combination of underlayment products, such as sound attenuation, waterproofing and crack isolation reduction in thickness with higher performance ratings, as well as combinations with sound attenuation, waterproofing and uncoupling with floor heat.”

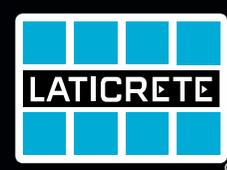
MP Global Products also offers a credit card-thin heating panel called “QuietWarmth” that can be installed directly on an underlayment to warm the overlying floor, Boesch said.



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