



HAUTE PLANK

EUROPEAN HARDWOOD FLOORING

Why the "Value Engineering" Reflex is Costing Projects More

The Real Lifecycle Cost of Flooring Decisions in Commercial Projects

Executive Summary

Cutting flooring budgets looks like savings. The balance sheet says otherwise.

→ **Lifecycle costs dominate.**

Installation is only a fraction; maintenance, refinishing, and replacement drive the real spend.

→ **Performance failures multiply.**

Weak cores, surface-only finishes, and color inconsistencies create callbacks and rework.

→ **Reputation suffers.**

Floors are touched and judged every day; when they fail, so does client confidence.

→ **True value comes from consistency.**

Specs that hold from project to project protect budgets, schedules, and brands.

The cheapest project is the one you don't rebuild.

Introduction: The Myth of Savings

Value engineering began as a way to improve performance at lower cost. Somewhere along the line, it became shorthand for downgrading finishes. At the end of the day, cutting flooring budgets may look like savings; but the lifecycle math tells a different story, and architects and designers often pay the hidden cost in diluted design intent, added CA hours, and reputational risk when the floor fails.



The Hidden Costs of "Cheaper" Floors

Lifecycle Costs

While the bid sheet shows the install price, investors and developers think in terms of full lifecycle cost: maintenance, refinishing, replacement, and downtime. Materials and installation are only a small part of that total; most costs accrue after turnover. [NWFA's lifecycle analysis](#) of 18 flooring types shows the same pattern, with maintenance and replacement driving the majority of spend.

Performance Failures

Downgraded material shows up in very visible ways. Filler cores flex under load. Surface-only finishes wear down in half the expected time. Color variances in lots between specification and delivery means the approved sample isn't what's installed. These failures guarantee warranty claims and compromise design intent.



Downtime and Delays

Average RFI cost: \$1,080

Average time per RFI: 8 hours

Typical large project: Hundreds of RFIs

When flooring budgets get cut midstream, the fallout lands in Construction Administration: extra RFIs, resubmittals, and change-order oversight. Under [AIA B101](#), CA tasks such as submittal reviews, clarifications, and site observations are part of the architect's basic services, so VE ripples typically hit the design team unless carved out as Additional Services. RFIs carry measurable cost and time: a [CMAA/Navigant analysis](#) found **8 hours** per RFI and an **average cost of \$1,080** each, with large projects accumulating hundreds.

Brand Damage

The floor is the only surface every occupant touches daily. If it fails, the building feels cheap, no matter how strong the architecture. Failures become complaints and NOI pressure for owners, and a lost case study for architects.

The Long Game: From Finish to Asset

Opening day ends the savings. Returns come from years of performance: profit, retention, reputation. Flooring belongs on the asset side, not the finish list.

Inconsistent specs create operational and financial risk. Portfolio-wide, those risks compound. When architects tie flooring to capital allocation, lifecycle ROI, and sustainability reporting, they stop defending taste and start shaping the business case.

When an architect can walk into a VE meeting and frame flooring not as a finish, but as a capital asset tied to NOI, they stop defending design intent and start influencing business outcomes.

For contract context when substitutions appear mid-project: [AIA A201 §3.4.2](#) requires owner consent after evaluation by the architect and via a Change Order/CCD; i.e., you will be asked to evaluate alternates. [AIA A701](#) provides the pre-award substitution path during bidding. Use performance criteria to keep the Basis of Design intact.

Case Scenario: Hospitality's High Cost of "Value Engineering"

In hospitality, these lifecycle dynamics move from theory to bottom line fast. Consider the following scenario.

Project A: The Early Refinish

A hotel developer swaps a wide-plank engineered floor with a marine birch core and full wear-layer treatment for a cheaper composite-core product during final budgeting.

- **Upfront:** The downgrade trims roughly 12% off the flooring package at bid.
- **First 18 months:** High-traffic areas near the lobby and F&B spaces show premature surface wear. Color variation between lots is visible under D65 lighting.
- **Corrective action:** Sections of the lobby are pulled out of service for refinishing ahead of schedule. During this window, 40 rooms tied to that circulation path are taken offline.
- **Financial impact:** At \$260 average daily rate (ADR) and 75% occupancy, the property loses roughly \$7,800 per day in room revenue, plus food and beverage drop-off from reduced foot traffic.
- **Additional cost:** The early refinish adds labor and materials that wipe out the original bid savings—and brings the next replacement cycle closer.
- **Operational impact:** Guests post negative reviews during the disruption, hitting RevPAR (revenue per available room) well beyond the repair period.

Project B: The Spec That Held

The same property holds the original spec with a stable core and through-wear-layer finish.

- **Upfront:** No discount taken.
- **First 18 months:** Finish and color fidelity hold as expected; maintenance remains routine.
- **Financial impact:** No unscheduled closures, no room nights lost, no early refinishing labor.
- **Operational impact:** Guest ratings stay consistent; common areas retain their design intent and performance.

Takeaway: In hospitality, "value engineering" on flooring doesn't just show up in maintenance budgets; it shows up in RevPAR, ADR, and guest perception. The bid sheet may reflect a lower number, but the balance sheet tells a different story once rooms go offline.



What Specifiers Can Do Differently

Reframe VE as Finance

The quickest way to lose a VE debate is to argue aesthetics against cost. The winning move is lifecycle math, claims history, and operational risk: the same language developers and contractors use.

Ask the Questions Nobody Else Asks

- What's the lifecycle cost model, not just the bid? (Use [NWFA LCCA](#) as a neutral reference point.)
- How does the alternate perform across one lease cycle?
- What's the failure history of this product class?
- Who absorbs the CA time when alternatives force resubmittals? ([RFI time and cost](#) are not trivial.)
- If the floor fails, what's the remedy timeline and who funds downtime?

Spec to Protect the Basis of Design

Specify performance, not just brands. Define what the floor must *do* and *prove*: core type, finish system, stability tolerance, color tolerance to the approved submittal (ΔE), and the EN/ASTM tests it must meet. When a substitution shows up, [AIA A201](#) puts you in the evaluator's seat; your criteria give you the basis to accept or reject it.

VE is a financial argument. The specifier who arrives with lifecycle math and failure rates isn't defending taste—they're protecting the client's balance sheet.

Conclusion: Flooring as Strategy, Not Surface

Flooring has never been just another finish. It's the material most used, most judged, and most photographed. In VE meetings, that reality often gets lost. Bring it back with data and performance criteria. You protect your design, your reputation, and your client's return, and you elevate your role from specifier to strategic partner.

The next decade will reward firms that see finishes as capital decisions, not commodities. Those are the projects that hold their value, and the reputations that grow with them.



Haute Plank: Turning Specs Into Strategy

The challenge is clear: value engineering has become shorthand for cutting quality, and the hidden costs land on architects, owners, and end users. Haute Plank was built to change that outcome.

Marine-grade birch stability core.

Constructed for dimensional memory that holds wide planks flat under load and seasonal humidity shifts.

Advanced adhesion QA.

Each layer is scanned twice with x-ray technology to confirm bond integrity before finishing and again before shipment.

HP Titanium and Titanium Ultra finishes.

Treatments penetrate the full wear layer rather than sitting on the surface, delivering measurable abrasion and impact resistance.

Color fidelity.

Formulas are memorialized; production is anchored to the approved submittal, not batch-to-batch "matching," with ΔE targets verified for each lot.

European sourcing.

All material inputs and processing are located within Europe for consistent supply and repeatable quality.

For specifiers, this translates into a defensible Basis of Design. The data, verification, and performance proof are in hand: ready to support lifecycle arguments in any VE meeting.

Next Steps

- **Request Performance Data:** [Contact Haute Plank](#) for project-specific specifications, test results, and lifecycle documentation to support your next VE discussion.
- **Get Spec-Ready Language:** We provide performance criteria and technical specifications you can use to protect your Basis of Design.
- **Join the Conversation:** Follow [Haute Plank on LinkedIn](#) for insights on specifications, lifecycle costs, and industry trends.

Sources Referenced

NWFA Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) overview and detailed comparison PDF

AIA B101 (basic services include CA) and AIA CA guidance

AIA A201 §3.4.2 (post-award substitutions require owner consent)

AIA A701 (Instructions to Bidders; pre-award substitution process)

CMAA/Navigant RFI study (avg. ~8 hours, ~\$1,080 per RFI)

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