

Bamboo flooring makes the switch from fad to fashion

■ The durable, environmentally friendly wood now comes in many styles and colors. And it's only slightly more costly.

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One of the biggest trends in flooring right now is bamboo.

Bamboo floors have been around for about 20 years, says Tim Baker, owner of Naffco Carpet and Blinds, but they've only become popular in the United States in the past five years. This year, they entered the realm of a trend.

"We did five times as many this year as we did five years ago," Baker says.

"It's nowhere near the oaks and cherries, which are our mainstays," says Melissa Johnson of Bast Hardwood Floors. "But there has been a significant surge in bamboo in the last two years."

And as clients request bamboo, manufacturers respond with options.

"Five years ago if you came in for bamboo it was like, 'I hope you like this color, I hope you like this thickness and I hope you like this width because this is all there is,'" Johnson says.

Now, she says, every week she gets a stack of information on new bamboo products. Flooring comes in a variety of colors and cuts, and bamboo is being used to make stair parts and cabinets.

Untreated bamboo is cream-colored. A caramel color can be created by steam-heating the bamboo to darken the sugar compounds in the fiber. Bamboo can be installed with either a vertical or horizontal grain. Either way, patterns can be conversation pieces.

"When you see something like that where it's an unusual pattern, it makes people want to get down and touch it," says interior designer Jay Tenuta, who has used bamboo in the homes of several clients.

Bamboo costs a bit more than other wood products. Oak starts at about \$6 to \$7 a square foot, and bamboo is about \$7 or \$8 a square foot.

Bamboo floors are being marketed as more environmentally responsible than woods such as oak and cherry.

Unlike those trees, which can live for hundreds of years and take

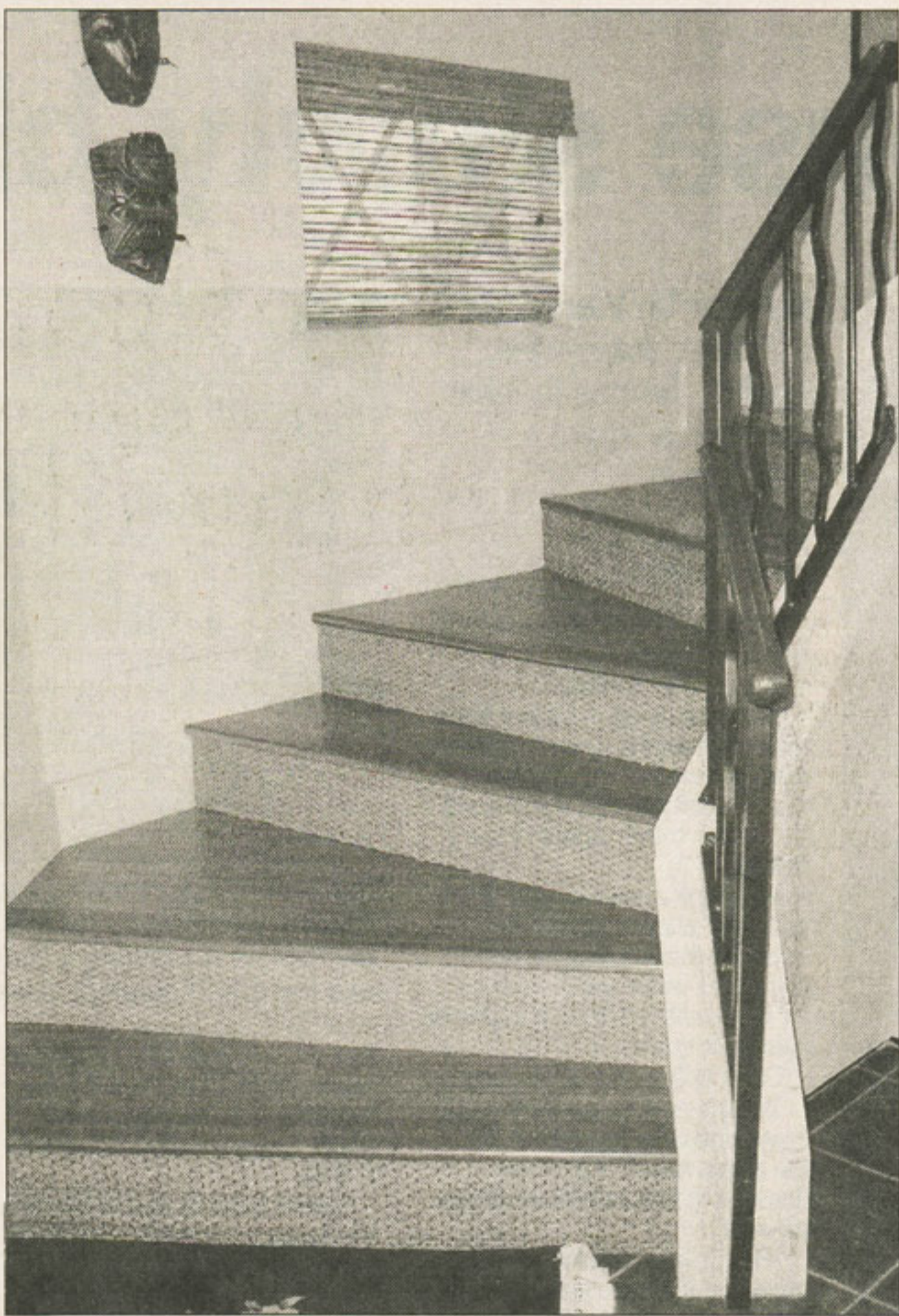


Photo by JANET ZINK

George and Susan Liu installed bamboo floors throughout their Hyde Park home. They like the look, both in their formal and casual areas, as well as the environmental aspects of the wood.

decades to reach maturity, bamboo is a grass that grows quickly and lives only five to seven years.

Most of the bamboo used to make planks for floors comes from China, Baker says. During their brief life span, the plants can grow 90 feet.

"They use the tips for chopsticks," Baker says. "Down at the bottom, the hardest and widest part, they use for flooring."

Bamboo flatters a variety of design styles. People with modern houses

choose it because they think oak or cherry is too traditional, Johnson says. Baker has customers who select bamboo if they're going for a natural look, perhaps topping the floor with a sisal or sea grass rub.

Tenuta has used bamboo floors with both traditional and casual decor. In the traditional home, he found that gold trim and shimmery silks worked well with the rich cream color of the bamboo.

"It's a beautiful product," he says. "And it's a durable product."