

7th February 2017

French revolution...

As LVT goes through a major renaissance, French flooring manufacturer Gerflor has a jewel in the LVT crown at their Grillon factory in the stunning sun-bleached vista of Provence.

Set in the shimmering Provencal sunshine on the Route Taulignan in Grillon is one of Gerflors' factory in the south of France. On the map it's just north of Avignon and Marseilles with the Côte d'Azur and the dazzling turquoise blue of the Mediterranean a short drive away. It's a factory bathed in the ochre colours of the hot, steamy landscape that's synonymous with a plethora of fine food and exquisite wines. In fact, it's right in truffle hunting country. This fortified charming medieval village is set amidst farmland and vineyards and the 12th Century ramparts that almost 'cuddle' the town would have provided a protective glove against attack in years gone by.

The narrow streets with triple-arched vaulted sections lead (like many small French villages and towns) to a quintessentially French square which hosts the usual cafés and bars. A place to reflect, people watch and let the world go by.

The low-lying sun whitened buildings of the Gerflor factory that produces their exquisite LVT Creation products is just a small disturbance on the landscape, almost as if they wanted to keep it from blotting out the views of the surrounding panorama. Like most industrial areas in the south of France there's a blanched, searing white look to the exterior. It does in its own way, add a certain degree of charm to its immediate locale. After all, they're not producing nuts and bolts, but luxury vinyl flooring that's both innovative and leading the charge in terms of design.

For more than 70 years and in more than 100 countries, Gerflor is recognised as an expert and a world leader in its field thanks to technical, decorative and eco-responsible added-value solutions specific to each market application. It's been a path of development and unsurpassed growth and a maxim that's all-too abundant at the Grillon site.

Gerflor's Creative Director Gino Venturelli commented, "There's a new renaissance abounding for LVT in decoration, allowing all the classic materials to sublimate the aesthetics thanks to the contribution of creativity. The combination of these factors creates a fantastic economic and creative future for LVT...and in particular our Creation 55 and 70 range of products produced at Grillon".

He went to add, "Basically all vinyl is trending right now. In fact, I wouldn't even call it a trend, I would dare to call it the big dog on the block. Original, well thought-out vinyl designs are on a march, becoming one of the most popular and sought-after floors on the market. This is in large part due to the newest luxury vinyl designs. With wood looks, natural stone looks and more, luxury vinyl comes in totally waterproof options and technology is now much better than ever offering a look that no one would guess is vinyl".

Every LVT design begins with an idea, a flash of inspiration, from which the Gerflor teams squeeze every drop of potential to create a unique product. There are numerous different stages that each type of flooring has to go through before finally hitting the shelves? It's an exciting journey and one that takes 12 to 18 months each time a new product is launched.

In the flooring world, the "big idea" can be aesthetic or technical. Be it a new design or an innovative installation system, with a dash of ingenuity and plenty of hard work any idea can spark a revolution! Any new flooring project is first and foremost underpinned by teamwork, with the marketing and design teams working hand-

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in-hand to come up with tomorrow's interiors. The Gerflor designers glean their inspiration from a variety of sources, including interior design exhibitions and trade shows, design colleges or discussions with their architect peers. Ideas germinate from a variety of different sources. The Design Centre and the Marketing Division pool their respective findings to identify emerging styles and trends. Based on these findings, the creative team then develops new designs and gives them the Gerflor look and feel. Little by little, the designs are whittled down until only the very best remain i.e. those liked by their customers and that meet their subsidiaries' demands. It is at this stage that Gerflor start to think about the format: roll or LVT. This decision is governed by the type of design, the product category and the manufacturing process.

Once the design has been finalised and the range has been built, it's time to launch production, albeit in small quantities. Gerflor then produce samples to enable the Research & Development team to test the product. These samples are totally identical to the end-product in that they have all their different layers, their installation system is operational and their surface is grained. This is followed by feasibility tests, resistance exercises, analyses of the types of subfloor on which the flooring could be laid and any installation plans. It's at this juncture that the product's quality and technical features are put through their paces. They then install the flooring in real-life situations to see the end-product in action and check it responds correctly when being installed and used. This phase alone lasts at least 8 months. It's a hugely stringent process for each type of flooring, as they have to overcome a host of hurdles before finally making it into the Gerflor collection. When the 'green light' is finally given and production is launched, it is safe in the knowledge that the end result will be a product that offers the perfect combination of aesthetics, technical prowess and quality...even after months of use.

The needs of numerous commercial sectors initiated the development of high-performance LVT. The successful combination of aesthetics and performance has made LVT a high-demand cross-over product for either commercial or residential applications. That's quite an accomplishment and dual market applications continue to catapult LVT to double-digit growth year after year. Domestic manufacturers hold to high-quality manufacturing processes using 100% vinyl. The photographic reproduction processes used by Gerflor for LVT are extraordinary. The ability to replicate real hardwoods and stones using advanced photographic technologies is the foundation of luxury vinyl flooring systems. There are four distinct layers fused together to produce the final product: a resilient vinyl backing, a vinyl colour layer, a photographic film layer, and a urethane or aluminium oxide top layer. The protective top layer (also called the mil layer) is very important to the durability of the product. Quality products will have as high as a 40 mil layer. Commercial applications can successfully utilise 20 mil or above. LVT products can replicate any natural material with exact detail: travertine, slate, woods (every species), concrete, and even bamboo.

Vinyl is one of the few building materials that can be fully recycled. As a result, Gerflor's Luxury Vinyl Tiles are not only luxurious but extremely environmentally-friendly too. From the way they are manufactured, right through to being recycled at the end of their life. From adopting environmentally-friendly manufacturing processes to recycling end-of-life materials, Gerflor's recycling schemes have been specifically designed to ensure its floor coverings generate a minimum amount of waste.

The post manufacturing waste recycling scheme which has been rolled-out in all of Gerflor's European manufacturing sites, ensures that almost 100% of manufacturing waste is recycled. This waste is re-used to manufacture the inner layers of new floor coverings as well as other new products such as shoe soles and flowerpots.

The stunning new LVT Creation ranges manufactured in the Grillon factory have been winning awards on a Pan-European basis. It's a testament to their dedication, design and commitment to top-end manufacturing. Making and rolling LVT is like making 'pasta'. Mind you, very clever 'pasta' indeed. The factory floor where Gerflor make their LVT Creation flooring is a whirring, humming mix of huge machinery that's constantly turning to produce the levels of production that are required. It's a bright, cheery environment that has no place for

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complacency. There's no doubt that alongside all the computer controlled quality testing, the human eye is still beaming over the production process to ensure the required quality is always there. The factory floor is like NASA on steroids... in a 'high techy' kind of way. The levels of cleanliness are on the point of being surgically clean. No mess, no clutter and above all no danger. Safety is paramount at all times.

The three ranges manufactured at Grillon include; Creation 70, 55 and the new Creation 30. Gerflor's Red Dot Award-winning Creation 70 which has four new designs in Dryback now includes two new mineral designs and two new wood designs, providing the perfect solution for the heaviest commercial footfall. The Creation 70 CLIC System has also been enriched with both planks and tiles delivering eight exciting new designs in tiles and a new XL format in planks 20.4x123.9mm with 10 new designs. All these designs are also available in a Dryback construction. Product construction delivers a 6mm thickness and comes with 0.70mm wear layer making it the perfect product for high traffic applications.

Designed for medium traffic areas for light commercial use is their Creation 55 range. The Creation 55 is a perfect match for moderate traffic areas in commercial environments including offices, hospitality, restaurants, reception areas, boutiques and also housing. It has a 0.55 mm wear layer and is now available in 61 designs with 7 different sizes in tiles and planks. The factory in Grillon produces some outstanding colours choices which are available across the range; including everything from Vintage Oak through to the evocative Spicy Grey Blue. It's a design and colour palette aimed at delivering eye-catching solutions that are 'on trend' and that can dovetail into any creative-led environment. 2016 has also seen Gerflor abound with a set of enhancing technologies to make the 'on-site' fitting much easier, as Creation 55 now also encapsulates all of Gerflor's installation systems by embracing the Dryback (glued), the Interlocking system (CLIC) and the looselay X'Press products. Gerflor has also made a smart step to reorganise the ranges, integrating common designs between Dryback, CLIC System and X'Press, whilst adding brand new designs for the CLIC system in tiles and XL plank formats, together with adding increased X'Press solutions.

The final product in this 'LVT trio' is Gerflor's Creation 30 which is a brand new design-orientated, luxury vinyl tile flooring available in three installation types and perfect for a myriad of residential and housing applications. Creation 30's impressive palette of 56 designs includes exclusive flooring designs and showcases three leading decorative trends: traditional and creative wood, mineral and textile effects. Creation 30 tiles and planks have a durable 0.30mm wear layer and a polyurethane PUR+ protective surface for lower maintenance, easy cleaning and lasting good looks. Slip resistant, they are available in 11 alternative grained finishes, 18 different tile and plank sizes and 31 matching, decorative skirtings - 23 wood and 8 mineral designs. Eco-friendly, Creation 30 is 100% recyclable and sustainably manufactured using environmentally-friendly materials and processes to the highest international standards at the Grillon ISO 14001 certified production site.

In short, the Creation range provides the cutting-edge, design-led, sustainable solution for most contract and residential uses.

So, with the LVT world full of new flair and an abounding renaissance in the air, French flooring and interiors specialists Gerflor look like they're on the cusp of their own revolution in terms of bringing new and exciting LVT designs to the market...and all manufactured in the Provencal sunshine. Can't be bad!

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