HUGGINS WOOD FLOOR SPECIALIST

SPECIFIER GUIDE: PREVENTING WOOD FLOORING FAILURES

FEBRUARY 2026 | NORTHEAST & COLD-CLIMATE PROJECTS

Content

Every project responds differently to the dry, repetitive stresses of mid-winter, and by late February many floors begin expressing deeper mechanical symptoms that weren't visible earlier in the season. In this edition, we're highlighting three NWFA-documented issues that commonly emerge as winter dryness peaks and flooring assemblies undergo maximum contraction.

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Mid-Winter and Wood Flooring Behavior

Mid-winter is when the indoor environment reaches its lowest humidity levels of the year. Forced-air heat runs continuously, radiant systems push warm, dry air upward through the assembly, and the accumulated effects of months of shrinkage begin to influence how the floor feels, moves, and sounds.

The NWFA identifies this period as a high-risk window for structural and mechanical symptoms — particularly noises, joint behavior, and movement at transitions. Hollow sounds, filler displacement, and loosening of T-moldings are three conditions that specifiers frequently encounter in February, each tied to changes in dimensional stability, substrate conditions, or mechanical tension.

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About Huggins Wood Floor Specialist

Huggins Wood Floor Specialist, led by Joe Avila, focuses exclusively on designing, installing, analyzing, and rescuing high-performance wood flooring systems in demanding environments.

We collaborate with architects, interior designers, specifiers, builders, and developers to:

- Prevent problems before they occur through strategic specification guidance
- Diagnose failures using NWFA standards and moisture-mapping methodology
- Provide clarity when clients notice winter-related symptoms and expect answers
- Recommend assemblies, materials, and finish systems suited for real-world climate conditions

Our work across Manhattan penthouses, historic estates, high-rise luxury residences, and architect-driven custom homes positions us as a trusted partner when winter reveals stresses that were hidden all year.

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Hollow Sounds

What it is

“Hollow” or “drummy” sounds occur when the floor no longer transfers energy uniformly to the subfloor, causing footfall noise to resonate differently across the assembly.

What It Looks (and Sounds) Like

- Distinct hollow tone in specific locations
- Areas that feel slightly “soft” or unsupported
- Sound changes when walking across a room
- Increased resonance near perimeters, HVAC areas, or doorways

Flooring may look stable but sound inconsistent due to movement beneath the surface.

Why it Happens

Common mid-winter contributors include:

- minor adhesive voids becoming acoustically noticeable as boards shrink
- contraction exposing unevenness in the subfloor
- boards pulling away from adhesive contact due to dryness
- environmental shrinkage creating small gaps under the flooring
- reduced friction between flooring and subfloor

These conditions do not necessarily indicate installation failure, but they do reveal stress within the assembly.

How Huggins Helps

We perform acoustic mapping, subfloor analysis, and moisture review to determine whether the condition is environmental, structural, adhesive-related, or movement-driven.

For specifiers, we guide adhesive selection, spread patterns, subfloor tolerances, and environmental considerations to reduce hollow-sound risk in future designs.

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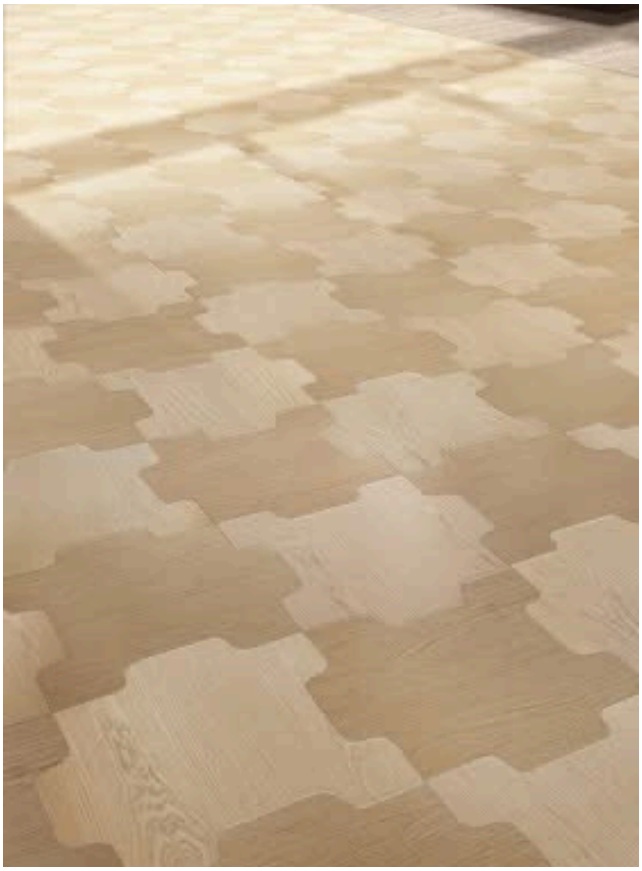

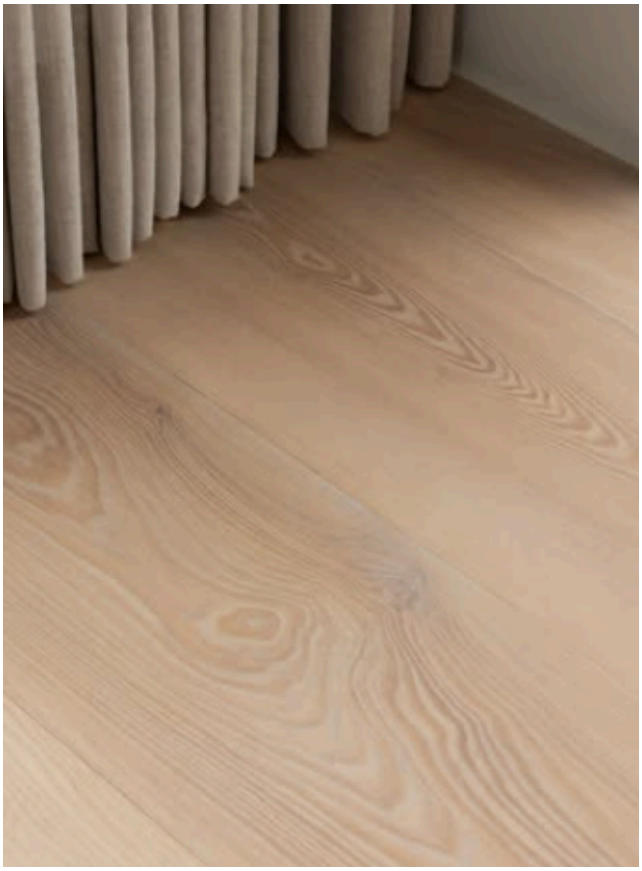

Filler Popping Out

What it is

Filler popping occurs when seasonal contraction pulls material away from joints, leaving visible voids or chipped filler in gaps.

What it looks like

- small voids in board joints
- chipped pieces of filler along edges
- filler particles appearing on the floor surface
- increased visibility under low winter sunlight

Clients frequently interpret this as a finishing error, but the NWFA categorizes it primarily as a movement-related issue.

Why it Happens

Key contributors include:

- contraction that exceeds the elasticity of the filler
- inconsistent joint widths caused by uneven shrinkage
- boards releasing tension from summer expansion cycles
- filler applied too thickly during finishing
- low-humidity environments stressing joint material

Filler behaves differently than wood, so seasonal movement exposes its limitations.

How Huggins Helps

We identify whether filler issues result from environmental dryness, movement amount, filler type, or finish sequencing.

For specifiers, we recommend materials, application expectations, and environmental controls that maintain joint aesthetics through winter.

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T-Molding Loosening

What it is

T-moldings bridge transitions between surfaces. In late winter, boards shrink significantly, reducing pressure beneath transition pieces and causing movement or looseness.

What it looks like

- slight rattling or clicking at transitions
- movement when stepped on
- separation from track or adhesive
- visible gaps around the molding

Often, only the client notices the subtle shift because transitions are high-traffic, high-contact locations.

Why it Happens

Typical causes include:

- contraction of the field reducing lateral pressure on the molding
- shrinkage pulling flooring away from the transition assembly
- track-based systems losing engagement as wood gaps widen
- adhesive-bonded moldings releasing under dry conditions
- uneven subfloor movement at thresholds or doorways

These symptoms are seasonal mechanics, not necessarily installation defects.

How Huggins Helps

We evaluate the transition's installation method, engagement, and environmental conditions to determine the precise cause. We also help specifiers select transition assemblies, expansion allowances, and installation techniques that maintain stability through severe winter contraction.

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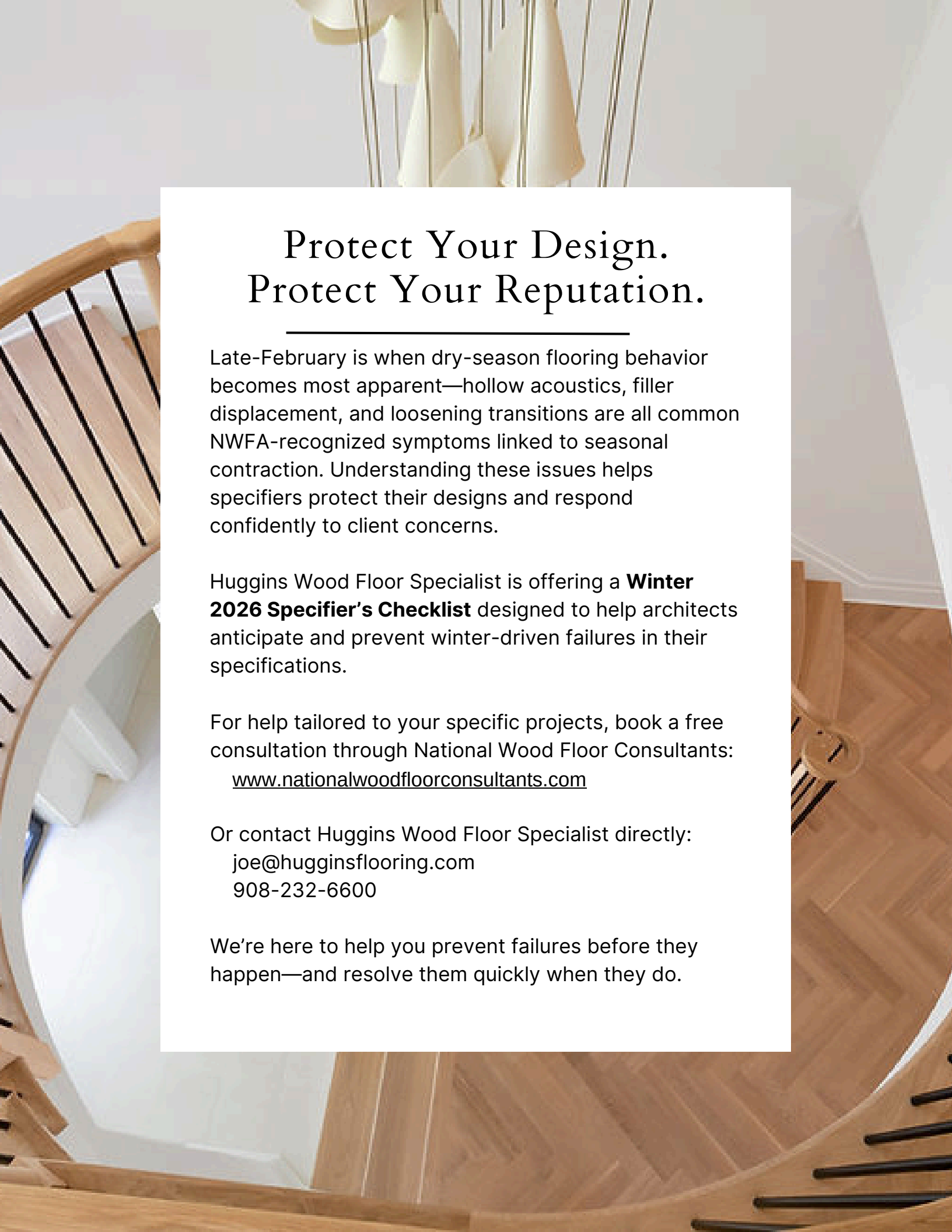

Protect Your Design. Protect Your Reputation.

Late-February is when dry-season flooring behavior becomes most apparent—hollow acoustics, filler displacement, and loosening transitions are all common NWFA-recognized symptoms linked to seasonal contraction. Understanding these issues helps specifiers protect their designs and respond confidently to client concerns.

Huggins Wood Floor Specialist is offering a **Winter 2026 Specifier's Checklist** designed to help architects anticipate and prevent winter-driven failures in their specifications.

For help tailored to your specific projects, book a free consultation through National Wood Floor Consultants:
www.nationalwoodfloorconsultants.com

Or contact Huggins Wood Floor Specialist directly:
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We're here to help you prevent failures before they happen—and resolve them quickly when they do.