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Carpet Seaming: Manufacturer and Installer; Synergy and Synthesis

If there is one thing that probably causes more unnecessary grief and concern among consumers who have recently purchased new carpet is the visible appearance of the carpet seams. What's more, these concerns can be exasperated in those instances when an installer who is asked to comment about what appears to be less than stellar seaming craftsmanship incredulously responds by either finger pointing at the carpet manufacturer's product or retreats to installer speak about what the consumer got in regard to a quality installation being as good as it gets. In these cases, the installer typically has no formal training or certification and the seam results are in fact about as good as they can get in their hands. Once their work is done and the consumer has had the opportunity to admire their newly installed carpet they might feel something inside their stomach akin to swallowing a torque converter.

While our industry makes no attempt to claim that proper seaming techniques results in invisible seams, there is no question that correct seam placement, proper carpet trimming methods, acceptable pattern matching when needed, and adequate seam sealing is what determines the apparent nature of carpet seams. With the exception of seam placement, the onus here is on the guy who is holding the row cutter

It is not too uncommon for a dealer or installer to call the manufacturer out of genuine concern to obtain any tips or recommendations they have about seaming a certain carpet, be it a style manufactured with a tufting shift, step-over stitch or straight row construction. And while some of the tighter gauge carpets in these categories take a little more time and effort to trim for seams, these products are in almost all cases designed so they can be trimmed using the row-cutting method. Occasionally, an installer may opt to use another trimming method for their seams. These methods, which include trace cutting, straight-edge cutting, double cutting and serpentine cutting, remove from the installation success formula the ability of the installer to avoid cutting into yarn bundles and tufts because their randomness trimming path does not take advantage of the gauge row space between the tufted rows. As a result, yarn bundles beneath the carpet's primary backing are plowed into every time the cutter crosses over a tufted row in its path, causing them to quickly fray. Seams trimmed using these methods are soon very apparent by the telltale fuzzy-appearing pile yarns.

In short, the row cutting procedure, which is arguably the easiest trimming method to make seams, is accomplished by scribing (and thus opening) the gauge row (the rows spaced between the tufted rows running in the carpet's lengthwise direction across the carpet's width). Scribing a row, which should not be confused with the scribe cutting A.K.A trace cutting method, can be accomplished by using several type instruments ranging from a comb, blunt end screwdriver, the nose of a cushion back cutter, a quilt sewing needle, to a precision-tooled row finder. Using these scribing tools and placing them in the gauge row and running them in a reciprocating fashion down the carpet's length the gauge row will open sufficiently to allow for the placement of a row cutter (or cushion back cutter if this device is the installer's preference). It is important that the installer trim the gauge row in a very consistent manner so that they allow for the correct gauge row spacing between the tufted rows at the seam. Failure to do this will create either a wide valley at the seam (too much gauge row spacing) or a pairing of tufted rows and/or similar colors (too little gauge row spacing).

An installer might find that because a certain carpet is more tightly constructed than other carpets, it may not be as easy to find the gauge row. An example here could be a 1/10th gauge carpet versus a 1/8th gauge carpet. Another example would be the difference between finding the gauge row in a carpet designed with a tufting shift versus one with a straight row. In these cases, the gauge row can be found by inserting the carpet's core beneath the carpet so it will drape over the core (in the same manner a core is used to make hand-sewn seams). This causes the tufted rows to open-up (grin), revealing the gauge row spacing.

Today's carpets are designed using heaping parts of new styles, new fibers and technologies. But the focal point of the manufacturer remains the same, to produce aesthetically pleasing carpet designs and colors using the highest quality and most durable synthetic materials. This is only part of the success formula. Every effort must be made by the manufacturer to assure that the carpet that arrives at the consumer's home meets, and hopefully exceeds their expectations. From this point, it becomes the responsibility of the installer to carry the torch further by turning a beautifully designed and constructed roll of carpet into a beautifully installed floor covering. Suffice to say that no matter how much pride and emphasis the manufacturer places on satisfying the end-users of their carpets, if the installer does not place equal emphasis on the quality of installation they provide. This is especially true with slipshod seaming efforts. And when this occurs, a once beautiful carpet takes a face plant. And the installer's inability to properly trim the seams because he failed to take the additional time and effort to account for the tufting shift in the carpet has been known to cause the consumer's to take on a "shift" of their own in regard to their floorcovering desires.

Although each carpet manufacturer offers their own unique carpet designs, when it comes to tufting constructions, be it straight row or shift, it's all pretty much nuts and bolts. Good looking, soundly made seams are obtainable whenever an installer is willing to take the time and effort to do so.

The carpet industry survives and thrives on a series of vital partnerships. One of these partnerships is the one between the manufacturer and the installer. Without the installer, the very best carpets would be nothing more than rolls in inventory. To help strengthen this partnership, manufacturer's offer in-house installation training and certification programs such as our own BeauTech program. Trainers used for these programs are some of the very best installers to ever pack a power stretcher and run a row. Installers who recognize that their trade requires a varied mix of art, skill and science are the individuals who are sincerely interested in obtaining the most up-to-date, in-depth training in order to keep current with today's ever changing technologies. And, by attending these installation training courses, are the same individuals who play a big part in turning the dreams and hard earned dollars of today's consumers into reality.

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