Go To Guy Home Services Details Ipe Hardwood Deck Construction Methods

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Go To Guy Home Services has detailed the construction methods it applies to Ipe hardwood decking, a material whose density requires an approach that does not carry over from standard softwood framing.

Ipe is among the hardest species used in residential construction. The USDA Forest Service Wood Handbook, the reference work published by the Forest Products Laboratory, classifies the species as very resistant to decay and places its specific gravity at roughly three times that of western red cedar. That density is the source of the material's service life. It is also what makes the wood unforgiving to install, because nearly every step that works on softwood has to be reconsidered.

The work begins before any board is fastened. Boards are acclimated on site so they approach equilibrium with local humidity before assembly. Wood is hygroscopic, meaning it gains and loses moisture until it reaches balance with the surrounding air, and it changes dimension as it does. Material installed at a moisture content well above its eventual service condition will shrink after installation, and that shrinkage is what opens gaps between boards and pulls fasteners against the grain.

Cutting and fastening call for tooling matched to the wood. Ipe dulls conventional blades quickly, so carbide-tipped equipment is used to keep cut edges clean. The wood is too dense to accept a screw without splitting, so each hole is pre-drilled and countersunk rather than driven directly. Stainless steel hardware is used throughout, because Ipe contains natural extractives that corrode ordinary fasteners and can leave dark staining in the wood around the fastener head. A hidden fastener system leaves the visible field free of screw heads across the surface.

Structural detailing receives the same attention as the finished plane. Consistent spacing between boards allows for seasonal movement in both directions, since the same board that shrinks through a dry stretch will swell again as humidity returns. Cut ends are sealed to reduce checking, the fine splitting that develops when

end grain releases moisture faster than the surrounding wood. Because Ipe is considerably heavier than softwood decking, framing and joist spacing are laid out with that additional dead load accounted for.

These considerations carry particular weight in the Southeast. Georgia averages roughly fifty inches of rainfall a year according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration climate normals, and metro Atlanta summers combine that moisture with sustained heat. In late July the National Weather Service office in Peachtree City issued heat advisories for North Georgia with heat index values above one hundred five degrees. Warm, humid conditions accelerate the biological processes that break down wood, which is one reason naturally durable species and corrosion-resistant hardware see wider use in the region than in drier climates.

Shaded lots add a further variable. Tree canopy slows how quickly a deck surface dries after rain, extending the period during which moisture remains in contact with the wood and its fasteners. Metro Atlanta carries one of the higher urban canopy percentages among large American cities, which means a substantial share of local decks sit under conditions that keep them damp longer than an exposed structure would be.

The methods described come from a project that placed third in the wood deck category for projects between twenty-six and fifty thousand dollars at the 2024 National Deck Competition, held by the North American Deck and Railing Association.

"The material sets the method," said Kelly Crow, Owner of Go To Guy Home Services. "Ipe does not behave like pressure-treated pine or cedar, and a crew that installs it the same way will end up with a deck that moves. Every step from acclimation through fastening exists because of what the wood does on its own."

Crow noted that the reasoning extends past a single species. "Whatever goes on in the frame, the question is the same. What does this material do when it gets wet, what does it do when it dries out, and what does the structure underneath need to do about that? Answer those three and most of the decisions make themselves."

Crow is an Atlanta native who worked in home renovation, mortgage trading and finance before founding the company. He holds a degree in economics from the University of Georgia.

Go To Guy Home Services is a member of the North American Deck and Railing Association and a NADRA Deck Safety Ambassador, and holds Deckorators Certified Pro status. Homeowners named the company a Nextdoor Neighborhood Favorite in 2021, 2023 and 2024.

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Go To Guy Home Services

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