

The Ultimate Pool Table Buyer's Guide

By All-American Recreation





Foreword

For many people,

buying a pool table can be daunting. There are so many styles and so much conflicting advice from people who speak authoritatively, but don't really qualify what they're saying with evidence. I've sold both furniture and pool tables for many years, and All-American Recreation has been making pool tables under the name of American Classic since 1972. In over 40 years we've learned a few things about the right way and the wrong way to make pool tables.

When potential buyers begin looking for a table there are a few things they should consider beyond price. Some people buy pool tables as a piece of furniture to fill a spot, much like a grand piano. I've been in numerous homes that contained a baby grand, but sadly, no one in the home could even play Chopsticks.

As a pool table salesman, nothing gives me greater satisfaction than knowing that the beautiful piece of furniture will also be a well-used precision game table, too.

That said, first we start off with who really qualifies as an unbiased authority of what makes a quality pool table. Billiard Congress of America (BCA) has long claimed that title, by organizing and standardizing the sport and recognizing competitive champions. Modern billiards still follows their lead. Below, you'll learn the BCA standards for what makes quality billiards playing conditions. These are the standards American Classic pool tables are built to, ensuring that you have an elegant piece of furniture and five-star gameplay conditions--the best of both worlds.

- Jerry Schiltz
All-American Recreation

Part One:

**Pool Table Playing
Specifications**

When it comes to the game of pool, no one person or organization carries more weight than the BCA. BCA equipment specifications dictate table size, table bed height, pocket openings and measurements, the playing bed, cushions, pool balls and cues.

Size

Though table sizes vary, the playing area should always be twice as long as wide. For example: 3 ½' x 7', 4' x 8', and 4 ½' x 9'. The area should be measured from the cloth covered nose of the cushion rubber to the opposite cushion rubber.

Table Size	Room Size		
	A - 57" Cues	B - 52" Cues	C - 48" Cues
7' - Playing Area: 39" x 78"	12'9" x 16'	11'11" x 15'2"	11'3" x 14'6"
8' - Playing Area: 44" x 88"	13'2" x 16'10"	12'4" x 16'	11'8" x 15'4"
9' - Playing Area: 50" x 100"	13'8" x 17'10"	12'10" x 17'	12'2" x 16'4"

The table bed height is measured from the bottom of the table leg and should be at least 29 ¼” in height but no more than 31”.

In measuring the pocket mouth, begin measuring at the tip of the cushion where direction or angle changes into the pocket. The mouth of the corner pocket should measure a minimum of 4 7/8” to a maximum of 5 1/8”. The mouth of the side pocket should measure a minimum of 5 3/8” to a maximum of 5 5/8”.

The Playing Surface

The playing surface, commonly referred to as the bed, must maintain an overall flatness within $\pm .020$ ” lengthwise and $\pm .010$ ” across the width. Typically tables are sold with 3-piece slates, and all joints should be within .005” after leveling and shimming. The bed must be covered with a billiard fabric, made primarily of wool, and properly stretched to avoid unwanted ball roll-off (rolling to the left or the right).

The BCA dictates a slate thickness of no less than 1” attached to a wooden frame or liner no thinner than ¾”. The playing surfaces should be secured to the liner with screws or bolts.



Cushions

Cushions should react so a ball shot from the corner pocket at the proper angle towards the opposite side travels and in turn reflects off a cushion on all three sides and at least kisses the fourth cushion.

To put it in the BCA vernacular, “The speed of the table cushions should be such that placement of a ball on the head spot, shooting through the foot spot, using center ball English, with a level cue and firm stroke, the ball must travel a minimum of 4 to 4 ½ lengths of the table without jumping.”

Balls and Cues

Pool balls should be a perfect sphere weighing between 5 ½ to 6 oz., with a diameter of 2 1/4”.

Generally, pool cue tips should be no wider than 14mm. The weight of the cue should not exceed 25 oz. The cue length should be at least 40”.



Part Two:

Construction

Every manufacturer believes their tables to be the finest. Besides being a precision game table, pool tables are also a piece of furniture. As with most pieces of furniture, the construction materials used in the manufacturing and the structural designs vary considerably. Much of the debate over what is best or adequate is subjective.



It can be extremely useful for one to be familiar with the different materials commonly used in furniture construction. Whether you are shopping on a budget or you want the ultimate in luxury, this half of the guide will hopefully point you in the right direction.

I will attempt to help you decide what designs will work for your needs and, most importantly, your budget.

Well-made furniture doesn't have to be expensive and many of the manufacturer's secrets are hidden under the finish. Good furniture should remain sturdy over a long period of time. Everyday use should be considered when selecting furniture; businesses, dormitories, or where young children subject it to rough usage might dictate more forgiving construction.

Historically wood had been the most commonly used material in furniture making prior to the 20th century. The wood products used in modern furniture manufacturing are solid wood, particle board, medium density fiber (MDF), and plywood.

To explain the diversity of wood materials used, it's important to understand why solid wood is often substituted--in a word, "expense."

Solid Wood

In the milling of 1" thick lumber planks, the process begins with trees cut to lengths between six to twelve feet. There is substantial waste when converting a round tree to a rectangular board. Envision a square inside a circle--when making planks from trees, everything outside the square is wasted.



In the process of producing the desired plank of wood, every time the saw kerf (the cut made by a saw in a piece of wood) travels down the rough plank, another centimeter is wasted. To achieve a 1" plank thickness, the mill starts with a bit less than 1.5" to allow for slight warping and some planing, which wastes yet another ½" to 3/8" of wood. In short, the waste is greater than the yield to produce a finished 1" plank and the piece of furniture hasn't even begun.

If the final product includes details such as dental work or scalloping and is made from low-yield woods like walnut or cherry, the waste factor can increase by 100 to 200 percent.

In pool table construction, solid wood can be a solid piece of wood or several smaller pieces glued together. Solid wood legs constructed from smaller pieces might ultimately be stronger than a single piece because they do not have a cross section of rings that could split over time.



Hardwood solids are cut from the trunks of deciduous hardwood trees. Asian hardwood, also referred to as rubberwood, comes mainly from Southeast Asia. This wood is as strong as maple and is often referred to as Malaysian Oak because of its durability and strength.

The trees are native to the Amazon, transported to England, then eventually brought to Malaysia (thus the name Asian hardwood). The trees are used to produce latex for 25-30 years prior to being cut down for furniture construction. The ecologically-friendly tree farming spawned the name rubberwood.

Plywood

Another wood product used is furniture-grade plywood. It is more stable than regular plywood and more efficient than solid wood. Plywood creates an exposed, visually attractive, finished surface to achieve the same look as solid wood. This frugality translates to savings on down to the end user.



MDF (Medium Density Fiber Board)

Medium-density fiberboard (MDF) is less likely to warp than solid wood or plywood. MDF is an engineered wood product formed by breaking down hardwood or softwood residuals into wood fibers, combining it with wax and a resin binder, and forming panels by applying high temperature and pressure.

MDF is denser than plywood. It is made up of separated fibers, but can be used as a building material similar in application to plywood. It is stronger and much denser than average particle board. MDF does not contain knots or rings, making it more uniform than natural woods during cutting and in service.

Typical MDF has a hard, flat, smooth surface that makes it ideal for veneering, as there is no underlying grain to telegraph through the thin veneer as with plywood. MDF is an excellent substrate that is very smooth, stable, and flat, and offers superior design flexibility.

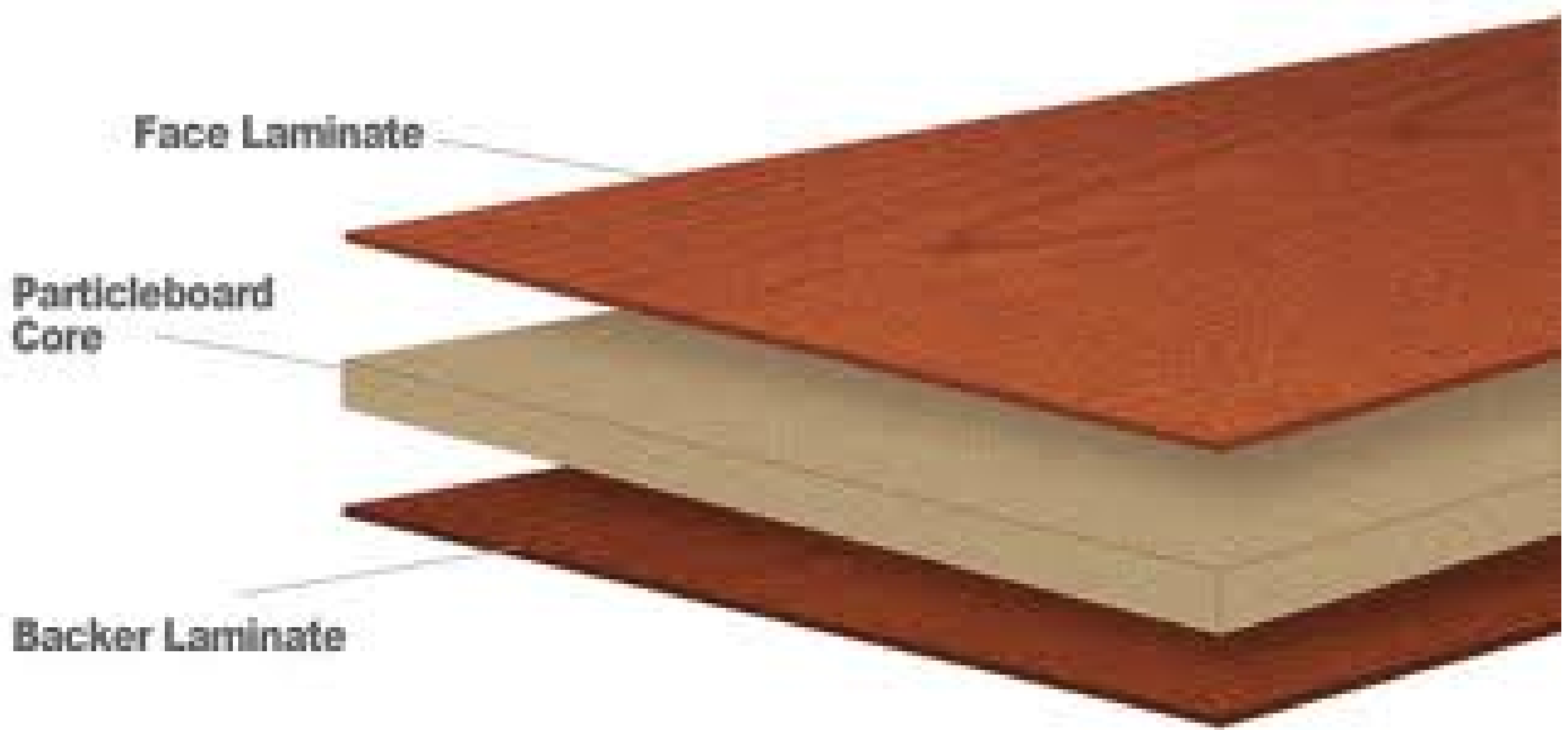
MDF is generally very affordable and often just as durable as solid wood. Furniture made with MDF can imitate the look of real wood while meeting the budget requirements of most families.



Veneer

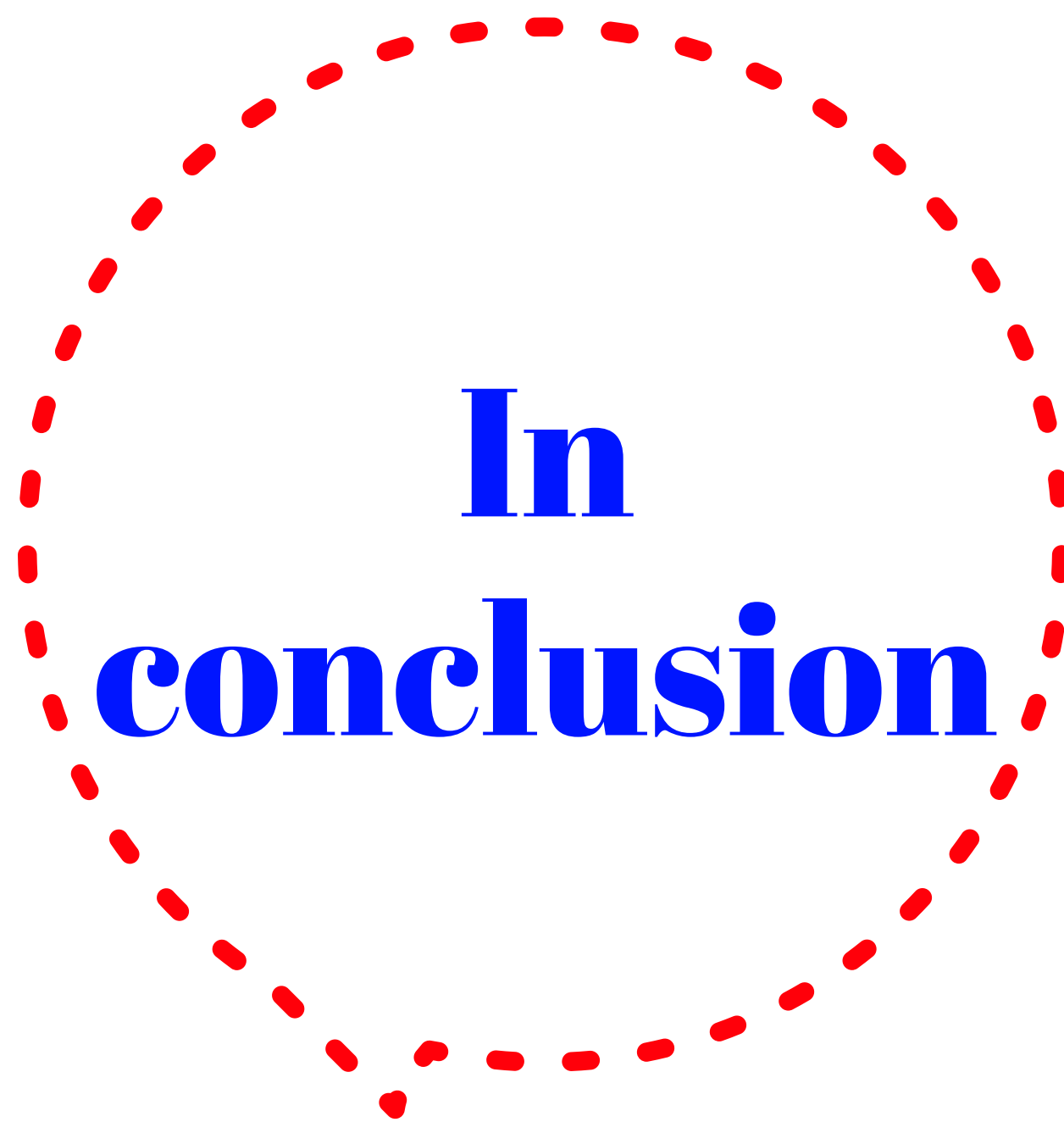
Veneer is a thin layer of solid wood and can be more expensive than solid wood if harvested from an exotic tree like eucalyptus, cocobolo, anegre, burled walnut, beech, teak, ash, ebony, imbuia, etc. In woodworking, veneer is a thin slice of wood, usually thinner than 1/8", usually glued onto particle board or MDF to produce flat panels for cabinets, parquet floors and parts of furniture. In the case of some low-yield exotic woods, veneers are the only option for using them in furniture. Veneers can also be a considerable cost saver for both manufacturer and furniture buyer.





Laminate

Laminates are layers of paper impregnated with melamine resin. A laminate is usually permanently assembled by heat, pressure, welding, or adhesives. Most laminate is actually very scratch resistant and can add durability for a home with active children while adding a real wood look.



Not all pool tables are created equal

but that doesn't have to be a bad thing. With American Classic, you have choices that fit your budget, your needs, and your tastes.

Come in to our St. Paul store today to see our selection for yourself. Or visit us at AllAmericanRec.com.

We look forward to seeing you!

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