

Virginia Vintage Dominion
Pine hardwood floor

What America is Walking On

Flooring Trends and Options // By Diana Bocco

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Flooring materials have become extremely diverse in the last few years. Years ago, the options were much more limited: vinyl, hardwood floor, or berber carpet were basically all a homeowner had to choose from. Now consumers are looking into products that were once reserved for walls or as decorative elements. According to Recycling the Past, one of the largest architectural salvage retailers in the U.S., “Whether you’re remodeling or building new, flooring is one of the central considerations in design. Finding the right flooring material and style is imperative because once installed, it can be costly to change.”

While looks are still the primary reason people choose a particular type of flooring material, experts emphasize the importance of also looking to practicality and personal needs. “The key elements to look for when selecting flooring are durability, beauty and longevity,” says Matt White, founder of Recycling The Past. “Unlike other design concepts such as window or wall treatments, flooring should be aesthetically appealing, highly functional and something you’ll be able to live with for a long time.”

Earth-Friendly Flooring

Tom Bresnahan of Arlandria Floors—one of the largest flooring suppliers in the Northern Virginia area—says that when customers come into his showroom asking for green flooring, they want to see materials that are environmentally friendly, products that come from a renewable resource, such as natural sisal, sea grass, cork and bamboo. “People who have these products installed in their home get great satisfaction for two reasons: they have a beautiful addition to their home and have acted environmentally responsible.”

While the initial cost of green flooring may deter some customers, the benefits of environmentally-conscious flooring far surpass the few disadvantages. And unlike homeowners of yesteryear, today’s environmentally responsible homeowners don’t have to sacrifice appearance and quality in order to save trees.

Recycled Rubber: Rubber flooring is one of the hottest trends in flooring today. Made from old radial tires using a special low-waste technique, recycled rubber floors offer durability (they’re easy to clean and can stand extreme temperatures) and versatility (many colors and textures to choose from, plus protection against slips and stains, and superior noise absorption). Its organic composition and low VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) emissions, which meet U.S. indoor air quality standards, make it one of the greenest options currently available.

Salvaged Lumber: In an attempt to preserve the world’s forests, many companies are now using salvaged lumber from old flooring, barn paneling, downed trees, and even railroad ties. Other companies, like renowned Recycling the Past, specialize in high-end salvage from historical buildings, including an 18th century french castle and a 19th century royal barn. While the use of salvaged wood started as an effort in support of responsible forestation, it has become a popular trend. “The quality of old growth lumber is simply not found in today’s market,” says White. “Our vintage flooring and other building materials can be used during the building phase or incorporated into an existing design to create unique, interesting focal points.”

Cork: Cork is one of the oldest green flooring materials available. “Aside from its durability, cork gives customers a na-



Natural ipe
hardwood floor

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Wicanders Original Harmony cork floor; swatches from Personality Collection and Motion Collection



Teragren Synergy Strand bamboo floor in chestnut color; swatches in caramelized vertical grain and natural flat grain

tural, warm look and is soft on the feet,” says Bresnahan. “With its unique look and feel, cork really sets itself apart from most traditional floor covering.” Cork can resist high levels of humidity better than wood (which makes it a great choice for bathrooms and kitchens), it’s naturally hypo-allergenic, and has exceptional insulating properties against temperatures and sound.

Linoleum: Linoleum, a vinyl look-alike made of all-natural materials such as linseed oil, wood flour, and ground-up cork, is making a comeback thanks to the popularity of the retro look. One of the many advantages of linoleum is that it doesn’t emit any gasses, making it one of the cleanest flooring options currently available. Linoleum is both hypo-allergenic and anti-static (repels dust and pollen), making it a great choice for people with asthma or allergies.

Bamboo: While it has the strength and durability of a hardwood, bamboo is actually a grass. “Bamboo is an incredibly durable floor, almost 30% harder than oak,” says Bresnahan. “This makes a perfect floor for high traffic areas such as entrance ways or kitchens. The disadvantages of bamboo are few, but one might be color. Bamboo mainly comes in natural and caramel, however some manufactures are putting out bamboo floors with a variety of color stains.” On the upside, bamboo is very affordable, easy to install, and can stand high

humidity and temperature variations better than any hardwood floor. Environmentally speaking, bamboo is a sensible alternative to hardwood because it continually regenerates itself. While most of the world’s bamboo comes from China, the actual species used in flooring is not eaten by pandas, so harvesting it does not endanger the world’s panda population.

Other Options: New environmentally friendly options become known every day. Palmwood, for example, is harvested only after coconut palm trees have stop producing and need to be replaced. FSC-certified woods guarantee that the wood comes from a certified well-managed forest that provides social, economic and environmental benefits to those involved.

Recycled glass tile made from post-industrial sources such as crushed airplane windshields has the look of porcelain for a fraction of the cost.

Some companies are even experimenting with unusual materials in hopes of finding “the next green development.” Such is the case of Abet Inc., a leader in high-pressure laminates since 1957. Abet produces Parqcolor, an industrial-strength laminated flooring material made from recycled coffee bags. The floor has the rustic fibrous look of coffee sacks and it’s exceptionally durable and resistant to humidity and temperature extremes.

Carpet: The Carpet and Rug Institute, together with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), state governments and non-governmental organizations, has implemented a program called Carpet America Recovery Effort (CARE). Through this initiative, the carpet industry is working to create ways to recycle and reuse post-consumer carpet, reducing the amount of carpet being burned or going to landfills. Companies such as Interface and Avalon are already selling carpet tiles made from recycled carpeting. “Rather than abandon over 30 years, and 250 million pounds, of vinyl backing already in the marketplace, Interface has made a commitment to recycle carpet backing,” says John Wells, president of Interface Americas.

“Year after year growth of our ReEntry program validates that carpet recycling is not only the right thing to do, but something that the marketplace is demanding as well. It is good business.”

For the Budget-Conscious

Carpet is still by far the best value for the dollar, says Bresnahan. “For the main living areas and bedrooms, carpet has always been an option for people looking for something less expensive.

“Choosing a fiber that’s stain resistant, such as treated polyester fiber, really doubles the value.”



Armstrong's Vinyl
Composition Tile (VCT)



Vintage fumed cherry
jatoba hardwood floor



Teragren Signature Colors
bamboo floor in walnut



Wicanders Identity Collection
cork floor in timide



Interface FLOR modular carpet tiles, which are made from recycled or renewable resources; swatches in Party Line Sparrow and Twill Ride in Laurel/Lime



Photos courtesy of Interface FLOR

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According to Amy D. Williams, Public Relations Director for INVISTA, the world's largest producer and marketer of premium carpeting fibers, consumers should look for a tight twist, which makes the carpet more resistant to crushing, matting and texture changes. "Good carpet should be durable and last beyond a few cleanings." Choosing a stain-resistant carpet can be another budget-friendly option. "Consumers should look for quality-branded products that will stand up to traffic and look better longer."

For the basement or kitchen, Bresnahan recommends Vinyl Composition Tile (or VCT), a great low-cost alternative that offers a design benefit. "These 12" x 12" tiles come in many different colors and patterns and can be installed in any pattern the customer chooses. Sheet vinyl is a wise and economical choice for bathrooms and also comes in many different patterns." For those looking for the hard surface look, laminates and vinyls offer more new colors, textures and designs than ever before.

What the Rich Walk On

Limestone, granite and concrete aren't just for building anymore. More and more home owners are choosing exotic materials to be used as primary indoor flooring, in an effort to be original.

On the top end of the spectrum are leather and hand-polished aluminum. Both are hard on the wallet at about \$4,000 for materials alone for a 10' x 10' room, plus the cost of installation (also in the thousands). They are difficult to maintain and require frequent touch-ups. Glass is another luxury option. Glass floor panels must be laminated and tempered (a process that strengthens the glass tenfold so it can be walked on safely), which is both expensive and time-consuming. They also need to be installed by a structural engineer, an additional substantial expense.

"Another hot trend is exotic woods," says Jeff Sillis, chief operating officer of Anderson Floors. "From red oak to maple and cherry, from walnut to hickory and exotic species like tiger wood and jaquitiba. In hardwood floors, you also have hand-scraped and hand-sculptured options." And for an even more exclusive look, floors can be uniquely personalized with ceramic or glass accents.

There is also a trend on using functional materials to please the eye and the feet. Blayde Penza, CEO and lead designer of Advanced Concrete Enhancement, has been working with decorative concrete (known to insiders as "flatwork") for over 30 years. He can make concrete look like pretty much everything, from antique stone to petrified



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wood. While many homeowners have reservations about using concrete indoors, it's mostly an unfounded fear. "Once they get past the concept that decorative concrete is dull, gray and uninteresting," says Penza, "a whole new range of creative possibilities opens up for them and the finished product is exciting and unique." Professionals use a variety of techniques (including etching and overlays) to give concrete a unique look. For those on a lower budget, cement floors can easily be painted or stenciled for a unique look without the designer price tag.

To accessorize an existing lavish floor, exotics rugs that can make a fashion statement are all the rage. "Area rugs are becoming more and more popular with the increase in wood floor installations," says Bresnahan. "Custom-made area rugs from higher end materials such as sea grass and sisal are a great option for customers who want something unique for their home. They can also tell their friends, 'I designed that rug.'"

Other luxury flooring options include marble, limestone, travertine and Burlington stone. Salvaged lumber can also be quite expensive, depending on its origin. Antique wood beams from castles or century-old barns can run up to twice the price of new hardwood floors.

For the Do-It-Yourselfer

Unless you're looking for high-end design or fragile options such as glass tiles, most floors can be easily installed with minimal instruction. Retailers such as Ikea sell laminated wood floor kits easily locked together like a puzzle, needing nothing more (not even glue).

More crafty homeowners can rent a pneumatic flooring stapler at a local hardware store (or buy your own DIY flooring kit for a few hundred dollars). Bamboo, laminate faux wood floors, linoleum, and even tile can be easily installed in less than a day. The savings of doing the work yourself can mean that you'll be able to afford more expensive materials because you're not paying for the Home Depot installer to do the work. At costs up to \$75 an hour, the savings can be substantial. Many hardware stores and warehouses, including Home Depot, offer DIY workshops in flooring.

All in all, consumers are looking to make better choices for both themselves and for the earth. Sillis believes the new emphasis on non-toxic, environmentally-oriented material and production is due in part to a new social conscience. "Since 9/11, Americans are more interested in remodeling and using natural products to build a safe haven. They are using more high-grade products. It reminds them of safer times." **NV**

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Following is a sample list of local carpet and flooring retailers:

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Arlandria Floors

1800 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria | 703.548.4848

Patrick's Carpet and Flooring

8649 Richmond Highway, Alexandria | 703.360.0041

Fairfax County

Best Buy Carpet and Rugs

1401 Chain Bridge Road, McLean | 703.749.0700

Clawes Carpet Inc.

Twinbrooke Shopping Center
9541 Braddock Road, Fairfax | 703.978.2603

Cyrus Rug Gallery

129 Maple Avenue West, Vienna | 703.281.6200

M & M Floors Inc.

1075 West Broad Street, Falls Church | 703.532.0225

McLean Tile and Marble

6827 Tennyson Drive, McLean | 703.734.7040

Image Flooring Center

2952-G Chain Bridge Road, Oakton | 703.255.6200

Quality Carpet One

Greenbriar Town Center

13063 Lee Jackson Memorial Highway, Fairfax
703.378.8700

Loudoun County

A&M Carpets and Rugs

703 | East Market Street, Leesburg | 703.777.7047

Abbey Carpet

1081 Edwards Ferry Road
Battlefield Shopping Center, Leesburg | 703.779.8181

Abbey Flooring & Design Center

22330 Sterling Boulevard, Sterling | 703.450.8182

Aliloo Oriental Rug Corporation

3 South Madison Street, Middleburg | 540.687.3048

Image Flooring Center

21750 Red Rum Dr. Suite 102, Ashburn | 703.858.7353

Quality Carpet One

44031 Ashburn Shopping Plaza, Ashburn | 703.726.0996

Prince William County

M&M Floors

9109 Euclid Avenue Suite 101, Manassas | 703.361.1416

Quality Carpet One

14043 Crown Court, Woodbridge | 703.491.4277

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