

Uncovering The Latest Trends Underfoot

(NAPS)—From setting the right mood to creating a strong style statement, there's no question that the floor is the single most important visual element in a home.

To help you find a way to put your floor to work for you, here's a brief look at some of the latest trends in flooring.

Hardwood Trends

Hardwood continues to be the fastest-growing segment in flooring due to its long-lasting durability and rich look. According to current home sale reports, an investment in hardwood floors pays off when it comes to the overall value of your home.

Lighter colors, longer and wider planks, and enhanced finishes are just a few of the style elements trending this year. Highly detailed wood grain surfaces are also in fashion as people seek to bring more natural, unfinished looks into their home.

Distressed, weathered, wire-brushed, soft-scrape, even "demolition-style" surface treatments are popular these days. Sun-bleached blondes, driftwood-inspired gray-browns and other matte finishes in white oak, walnut and maple varieties are gaining ground by making imperfection a design element.

Eco-friendly reclaimed wood sourced from historic buildings, factories, truck decks, mills, farms, food crates and other materials is another great option offering loads of character and unique, organically created surface textures that also easily mask scratches and wear.

Technology is also playing a large role in the category, offering machine-created finishes that are scratch, stain, moisture and humidity resistant. One new surface treatment even helps clean the air. Activated by light, titanium dioxide on the surface of the floor works like a living tree in your home. This natural purifier breaks down pollutants such as formaldehydes, which can be present throughout a home, and converts the toxins into harmless molecules.

Hardwood plank sizes are also changing in width and length. Wider planks are contemporary looking and give smaller rooms the illusion of a larger space. Longer boards, sourced from older trees, are increasingly popular for their pleasing look and structural integrity.

Coinciding with the durability trend, bamboo continues to grow in popularity for its diamond-hard surface and ability to perform in wet environments. As it is a reed that grows in water, bamboo is the only naturally sourced hard flooring that is moisture resistant. That makes it a great choice for kitchens and wet rooms.

Carpet Trends

Carpets today have come a long way from basic natural fibers such as wool and cotton. Synthetic alternatives offer some of the softest, most luxurious, easiest-to-care-for and affordable flooring surfaces in history.

New enzyme treatments in carpets create a moisture barrier



Photo courtesy of Artistic Tile

According to trend scouts, floors today are warm and inviting, innovative and often eco friendly.

between the carpet and the padding underneath, extending life span and enhancing appearance.

Completely eco-friendly carpets have also made an appearance. One manufacturer launched a carpet line made from 100 percent recycled plastic. The new synthetic fiber is affordable, durable, and soft to the touch.

Along with ever-popular shades of beige, sales of gray carpets are surging. To add some spice and avoid monotony, some manufacturers are presenting carpets with peppered bits of color against a neutral background. The new presentations help to hide flaws while adding dimension to rooms. Patterned carpets are also gaining ground, offering floral, diamond and winding vine looks.

Area Rug Trends

Area rugs are all about color, pattern and texture, and this season everything is coming up soft, warm and cozy. As with the hardwood category, a growing trend in soft surfaces is nature-inspired looks such as tree bark and stratified rock. You can even get a rug with a rippled surface that looks like a pond that a stone has been thrown into. Another eye-catcher is a shimmering rug that achieves a metallic look with finely woven nylon fibers that sparkle when struck by light.

You might not think sustainability when you think of area rugs, but think again. The ultimate in eco-friendly fibers—recycled paper—has made its way onto the floor in the form of a soft, cozy shag rug.

For those who want to customize the look of a room, one company offers interchangeable solid and multicolored square rug panels that can be interconnected through a Velcro backing. Consumers can buy the affordably priced 16x16-inch squares at their local flooring store and assemble them on their own.

This appears to be part of another emerging trend—low cost. Many are bypassing expensive heirloom pieces in place of more affordable rugs that make bold fashion statements and can be replaced in a season or two.

Tile Trends

From ancient Greece to current day, tile is as practical as it is glamorous. Tile trends today include aluminum, porcelain

planks that you'd swear are weatherworn hardwood, and microthin ceramic tiles. Tile is the low-maintenance option among hard-surface flooring materials—and ceramic and porcelain are excellent choices when it comes to longevity and value. Low porosity makes most sealed tile resistant to moisture, stains and bacteria, and thus uniquely hygienic.

Wood looks and natural stone treatments in ceramic tile are on the rise as consumers seek to bring the outdoors in. Porcelain planks made to look like hardwood floors can be placed where hardwood cannot go, including bathrooms and even pool decks. In addition, tile can be eco friendly, containing a high percentage of recycled materials.

Giant tiles, spanning two feet or more across, are becoming increasingly popular as they cover more surface area with less interruption of grout lines. In addition to clean lines and an ability to add dimension to small spaces, these tiles are easier to keep clean.

Some companies have presented microthin ceramic tile that can be laid over existing flooring, thereby reducing installation time and costs.

Resilient Trends

Luxury vinyl tile (LVT) is both affordable and easy to maintain. New technology lets LVT replicate the high-quality look of hardwood, granite, marble, slate and other materials. Color variations and even surface texture offer design elements that originated in nature. Unlike natural materials, however, LVT is very durable and quick to clean.

LVT is an excellent choice for wet environments such as bathrooms and kitchens. It is one of the easiest flooring materials to install, softer underfoot than other hard surfaces and warmer than tile and stone.

A chart topper when it comes to eco friendliness, cork is naturally antimicrobial, antibacterial, waterproof, a great insulator and extremely warm and comfortable to walk on. It repels dust and is even fire resistant. Plus, cork today is available in a rainbow assortment of colors, textures and new factory finishes to keep it durable.

Laminate Trends

Advancements in digital imaging technology let laminate—a photographic image fused beneath a protective layer—realistically mimic many materials. Today's laminate flooring is versatile and cost effective whether you want a custom look or want to adopt the look of another type of flooring.

Learn More

You can find facts and practical tips on every flooring category including the pros and cons; floor trends; varieties and styles available; things to consider before purchase; maintenance tips; and how to prepare for installation from the experts at the World Floor Covering Association at www.wfca.org and the blog FloorTalk.wfca.org. In addition, you can find the names and locations of reputable flooring retailers near you by visiting www.wfca.org.