

Good Homes Interior-design course

PART 16 – CHOOSING THE RIGHT FLOORING



'When putting together a scheme, the type of flooring you choose has a huge impact on your room's overall look. With a variety of styles available, from wooden floorboards to plush carpets and up-to-date glass or vinyl tiles, there's a material to suit every taste and budget. If you're likely to change your flooring every few years, a cost-effective laminate or rubber option may suit your needs, but if you're designing your dream kitchen, a floor made from good-quality oak or hard-wearing natural stone will last a lifetime.'

Deborah Drew

Deborah Drew (above), presenter of BBC TV's *DIY SOS*



A neutral floor covering is a good investment as it will co-ordinate with any decorating scheme. Sisal Basket Gold carpet, £35.95 per sq m. Crucial Trading.



▲ **Choose the right material for your room.**

Clockwise: Burford carpet, £39.44 per sq m, Fired Earth; Vintage Dark Oak board, £24.99 per sq m, Quick-Step; Sardinian Sandstone tile, £52 per sq m, Fired Earth; Pebble vinyl tile, £39.95 per sq m, Harvey Maria

CONSIDER YOUR NEEDS

- ★ **Will your floor need to withstand wear and tear? Hallways and kitchens will need a more hard-wearing covering than a bedroom or living room.**
- ★ How much cleaning and maintenance will the floor require? If you have pets or your room has a door leading to the garden, choose a material that can be easily cleaned. Remember that some natural stone floors need regular sealing to keep them stain resistant.
- ★ **If you want to use tiles, check whether this is possible. Some tiles or flagstones are too heavy for floors above ground level. The sub floor must also be level and damp-proof. A tiler will be able to advise you.**
- ★ Does your floor need to be waterproof? Ceramic tiles and flexible flooring are sensible options for kitchens and bathrooms.

Which type is best?

Different rooms in your home need different types of flooring – a pale blue carpet may look stunning in a bedroom but will be totally impractical in a family living room. However, too many contrasting surfaces and colours throughout your home will make the spaces appear broken up and therefore feel smaller. Try to keep your choice of flooring in a linking area like a hallway or landing plain and neutral, so it will always co-ordinate with the rooms leading from it.

Hallways & stairs

These areas get more use than any other room in your house and as they give visitors their first impression of your home, flooring here has to be



Wood is a low-maintenance choice for entertaining areas.
Ash solid wood flooring, from £50.60 per sq m, Junckers

durable and attractive. Invest in high-quality materials and check with your retailer that the product you want is suitable for heavy traffic. Whatever type of flooring you choose, it's worth fitting it on the stairs and landing for continuity and a smarter look.

Living & dining rooms

Comfort is a key consideration when choosing flooring for your living room. A popular option is carpet. Wool loop piles in neutral shades work with most colour schemes. Living rooms often double up as dining rooms or playrooms, so flooring should be versatile enough to meet various demands. One solution is to divide your room into separate zones and use different flooring for each, for example, a soft carpet in your seating area and a wood or laminate at the dining end of the room. To make this work, choose flooring in similar tones so it blends seamlessly. The other solution for a multi-purpose room is to choose a resilient product and use it throughout. Dark floors are a key look for living areas at the moment. Wenge is a big trend for wooden floorings, while chocolate colours are a popular choice for carpet. When using a dark floor, keep your walls or furniture light to prevent it overpowering your scheme.

Kitchen & bathroom

Bear in mind that food and water spillages are inevitable in these areas, so a stain-resistant, waterproof option will stay cleaner for longer. Choose from vinyl, ceramic or porcelain, as well as sealed natural slate, travertine, limestone and marble flooring. Natural stone tends to



'There are several points to consider when choosing flooring. To control noise, you may want to fit exposed staircases with runners. Bear in mind plumbing access when laying ceramic tiles in a bathroom – if leaks occur, the floor may have to be come up. For frequently used areas, hardwood floorboards are a good option. To prolong the life of your carpet, use rugs and runners to protect the pile.'

Choose a quality carpet as an investment. Silk white damask, £55 per sq m, Ryalux



be softer than ceramic alternatives and will need sealing to prevent staining. For a tough floor that will last and is easy to care for, choose porcelain tiles or, for something a bit different, look for toughened glass designs, available in a range of colours. Many tiles come in different sizes and you can ask your supplier to show you a selection of floor-laying patterns. It is possible to have a wooden floor in both a kitchen and bathroom, but make sure you choose an appropriate wood. Hardwoods like oak or maple are made to last and for bathrooms, flooring made from bamboo is the most resistant to water damage and warping.

Bedrooms

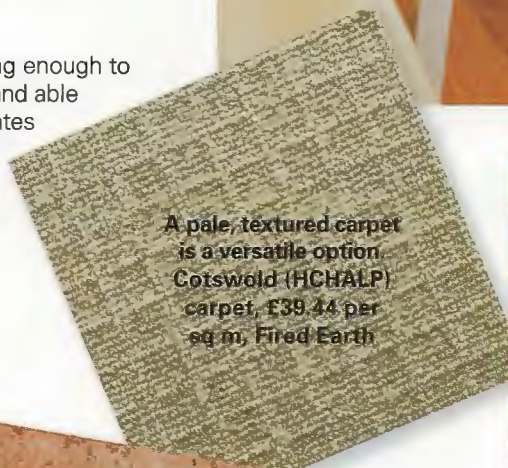
One of the few rooms in your home where you can go for luxury over practicality, your bedroom doesn't have to cope with as much wear and tear as other areas. Patterned carpets work well in a bedroom, as you tend to be covering a smaller area so the design doesn't become too overpowering. Rather than bold colours, create a restful area by choosing some of the latest geometric or checked designs in natural shades. Warm tones of wood flooring are another option and look great in a modern scheme.

Kids' rooms

Flooring here should be hard-wearing enough to withstand scuffs, warm underfoot and able to soften the impact of falls. Laminates and the new range of vinyls, which come in a variety of bright colours and patterns, are ideal for this space and are cost-effective to update as your child grows.



Ideal for a family kitchen, wood flooring is hard-wearing and easy to clean.
Prime oak flooring, from £31 per sq m, The Natural Wood Floor Company



A pale, textured carpet is a versatile option. Cotswold (HCHALP) carpet, £39.44 per sq m, Fired Earth



A classic choice for a conservatory. Umbria Terracotta, tile, £58.66 per sq m, Fired Earth



Select tiles with an image for a unique look. Daisies vinyl tile, £39.95 per sq m, Harvey Maria



FLEXIBLE FLOORING

Durable, scuff and scratch-resistant, soft underfoot and available in a range of colours and patterns, flexible flooring is an excellent option for high-traffic areas and family rooms. Synthetic floors like vinyl and rubber, as well as the natural alternatives like linoleum, are now available in some really exciting designs that can give your home a unique look. The great thing about this type of flooring is its versatility – there's no end to the looks you can create, from colourful styles ideal for a child's bedroom, to more traditional wood imitations that are a practical choice for wet areas where real wood wouldn't be suitable. Flexible flooring is also hard-wearing, warm and easy to keep clean.



Keep your bathroom light with a reflective choice. Glass GS05 tile in Glacier, £25 per sq m, Karndean

CARPET & NATURAL FLOORING

Carpet is still the biggest-selling flooring in the UK, especially for living rooms and bedrooms as it's soft underfoot and provides plenty of warmth. The latest designs have textured patterns to add interest, great in a neutral scheme. When choosing the colour, remember that even darker biscuit tones will look lighter when laid over a large area. These

darker neutral colours are a good choice for disguising marks and unless you have a room with minimal traffic, steer clear of the very light colours like creams and whites.

Know your options

Pure wool doesn't flatten easily and has a long lifespan.

Synthetic fibres polyamide, nylon, polypropylene, acrylic and polyester – are more cost-effective than wool and very hard-wearing, but they can be prickly underfoot.

Wool and nylon mix carpets feel like wool, but the nylon makes them more durable.

Coir is the most hard-wearing of the natural fibre carpets.

Sisal comes in a huge choice of textures and patterns and can be dyed any colour.

Seagrass is durable and

has a fairly soft texture underfoot.

Jute is a cost-effective fibre but isn't very resilient.

Choose the right texture

Woven carpet has pile and backing woven together and is very hard-wearing so is ideal for hallways.

Tufted carpet has pile inserted into a ready-made backing and held in place with adhesive.

Twist pile has tufts that are twisted and heat set to give more spring and be fairly crush resistant.

Level loop pile carpet has loops of yarn of equal length that remain uncut, replicating the textured finish of natural flooring.



IS CARPET RIGHT FOR YOU?

PROS

- ✓ Warm and soft underfoot, carpet is a comfortable option.
- ✓ Carpet and natural flooring are available in a range of textures and colours to suit all styles of décor.
- ✓ Natural carpet shows less wear.

CONS

- ✗ Light-coloured carpet can mark very easily.
- ✗ Carpet pile can flatten over time and is easily worn down by heavy furniture.
- ✗ Some natural carpet can be abrasive underfoot.

Make your floor the focal point of your room by choosing a patterned design. Paradise 511/32235, £46 per sq m, Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen for Brintons

Mississippi Stripe Multi WS101, £41.35 per sq m, Crucial Trading



When using a patterned carpet, keep the rest of the room simple with plain curtains and upholstery.

Sheridan carpet in Regency Cream Axminster, £58 per sq m, Ulster Carpets



'To get the most wear from your carpet, look for tighter yarns, a shorter pile and more yarns per square inch – all crush-resistant features. A good-quality underlay will make all the difference to how your carpet feels underfoot.'

▼ Stripes are a classic choice on stairways as the pattern carries your eye upwards to give a sense of space.

Kenilworth Gold runner with Woodville Farmhouse broadloom, £56 per sq m, Laura Ashley Collection from Brintons



◀ **Laminates are a good-value alternative to real wood.** Maple Finish Tundra laminate flooring (top), £2.39 per sq m, Ikea; Exotic Fire Red Walnut board, £29.99 per sq m, Pergo

WOOD & LAMINATE

If cared for properly, a hardwood floor like oak, elm, ash or maple will last for years. Real wood floors vary in price – the final cost will depend on the type of wood and what's involved in fitting it.

Some will come ready sealed, others will need to be sanded and sealed after laying, which can cause disruption and mess. If you live in an older property, look out for reclaimed floorboards at local salvage yards. Their worn, slightly distressed look will be much more in keeping with the rest of your home than new boards.

Laminate flooring is a cheaper alternative to wood and is usually made of coloured or printed paper or a melamine-covered layer of wood veneer bonded to MDF planks. The quality has improved enormously over the last few years with a wide range of colours and finishes available. It's worth going for the higher-priced makes, which look like real wood with a textured grain. If you're a competent DIYer, look for click-together designs that are easy to lay yourself.

Know the types

Solid wood is cut from a solid piece of timber and is available in different widths.

Multi-layered board or plank has a surface veneer of high-quality timber bonded to either a softwood or fibreboard middle and tough base layer.

Wood veneer is a thin strip of wood glued onto a tough baseboard.

Laminates are plastic-coated boards with a photographic image of real wood imprinted on them – the best-value option. ▶



Wood or laminate is a practical option, as it will match any scheme. Beech flooring, £42 per sq m, Junckers



'Why not install lights into your floor design – a great idea for hallways or bathrooms – as they're not that expensive and can look very effective. Another trick is to break up a porcelain tiled floor by introducing random toughened-glass tiles.'



Match warm tones of wood on floors that unify two spaces. Hickory Select, from £165 per m, Ebony & Co

IS WOOD RIGHT FOR YOU?

PROS

- ✓ Available in a range of widths, shades and patterns, wood suits any decorating style.
- ✓ A low-maintenance option, it requires little more than a regular brush and mop.
- ✓ Good quality solid wood floors and multi-layered boards last a lifetime and can be sanded back and restored if damaged to look as good as new.

CONS

- ✗ Vulnerable to pitting caused by stiletto heels or heavy furniture.
- ✗ Can be susceptible to extremes in temperature – too much dry heat can result in shrinkage, while water spillages may cause warping.
- ✗ Noisy to walk on and doesn't insulate sound, which can be a problem if you have neighbours on floors below you.



Tiles are ideal for kitchens as they're practical and come in a range of styles to suit most schemes. Antiqued Jerusalem limestone floor, £119 per sq m, Smallbone Stone

STONE & CERAMIC TILES

Limestone and slate are ideal for your kitchen, hallways and entrance areas – if sealed correctly, they are incredibly hard-wearing. Depending on how you use these types of flooring in your home, the look can either be contemporary or traditional. A stone floor is ideal in a country kitchen, for example, while sleek slate tiles suit a more modern style. Real stone floors aren't a low-cost option, but this type of flooring will last a lifetime. For a good-value alternative, take a look at ceramic or porcelain tiles, great in kitchens and bathrooms. The choice of colours and finishes is endless.

Choose your material

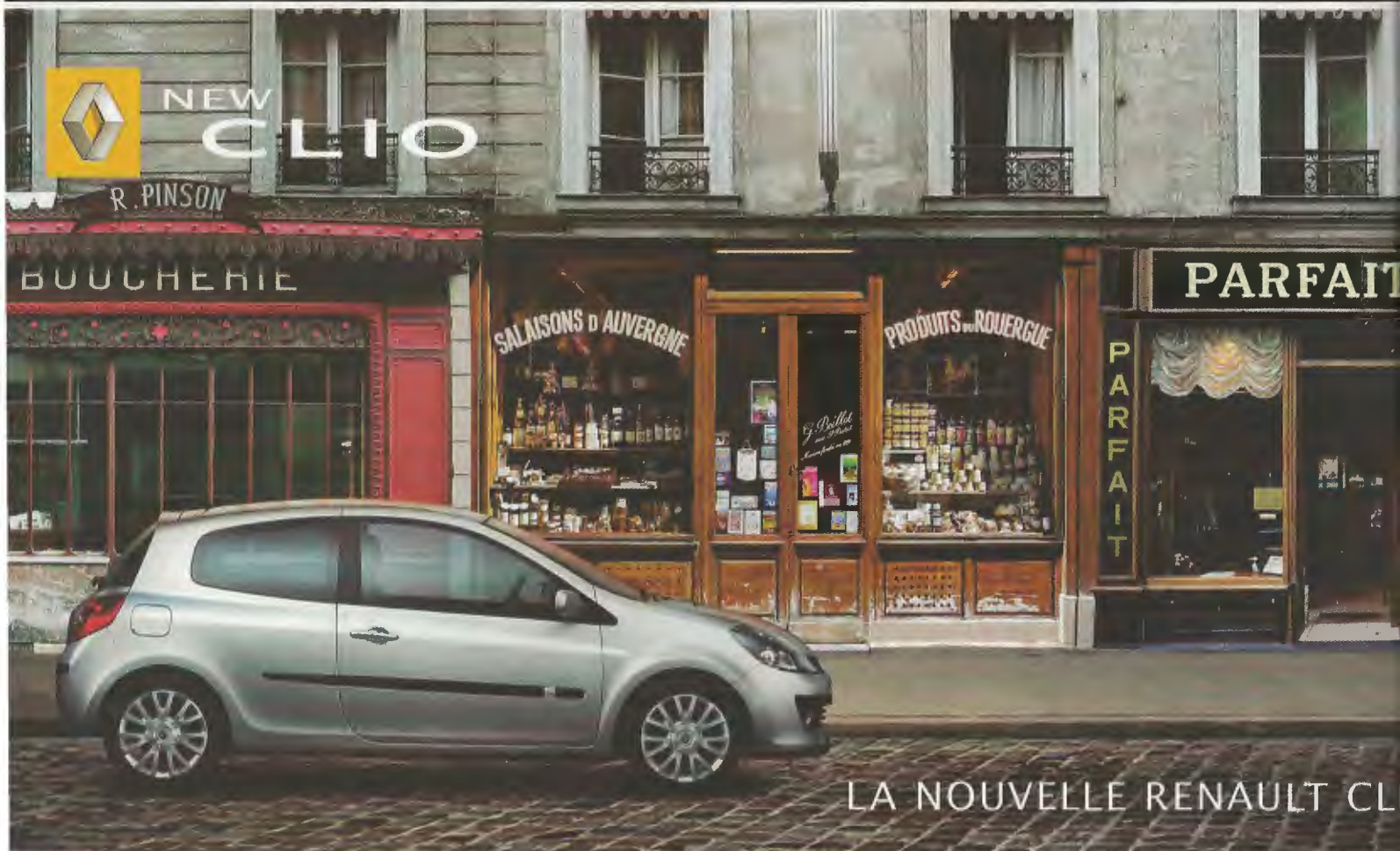
Limestone is made up of crushed sea-shells and bones of sea creatures. Available with a smooth or rough surface, it comes in pale cream and honey shades.

Travertine is a harder, thicker version of limestone and comes in white and cream shades.

Marble is a crystallised form of

▲ **Stone and ceramic are hard-wearing choices.**

Amber slate tile (top), £37.30 per sq m; Mosaic Square tile (above), £89.70 per sq m, Fired Earth



LA NOUVELLE RENAULT CLIO



EUROPEAN CAR OF THE YEAR 2006

The official fuel consumption figures for the Clio range in mpg (l/100km): Urban 28.2 (10.0) – 54.3 (4.2), Extra Urban 46.3 (6.1) – 70.6 (4.0), Combined 37.7 (7.5) – 64.2 (4.4). CO₂ emissions (g/km) 117 – 179. RENAULT RECOMMENDS

ARE TILES RIGHT FOR YOUR ROOM?

PROS

- ✓ All tiles are extremely hard-wearing, although the porous products will need regular sealing to avoid staining.
- ✓ They are well suited to both

traditional and modern room schemes.

- ✓ Tiles don't trap dirt so cleaning them is easy – a regular mop with warm, soapy water is all they require.

CONS

- ✗ Natural stone tiles can be expensive, as is the cost of having them laid.
- ✗ Tiles are cold and hard underfoot.
- ✗ Some tiles are too heavy to lay upstairs.



limestone and can be polished to bring out a range of different colours and veins.

Slate comes from shale that has undergone a similar process to marble. Hard-wearing and generally rough textured, it comes in beautiful earthy colours.

Terracotta is made from purified clay that's then shaped into tiles and dried before being baked in an oven. Characterised by warm pink or reddish tones, it has a smooth surface.

Ceramic and porcelain tiles are man-made alternatives to natural stone and come in a wide range of colours, textures and patterns – including good imitations of stone. The only tiles that are not porous, and are therefore the easiest to maintain.



For stockist details, see page 17

ESSENTIAL CONTACTS

★ National Institute of Carpet and Floorlayers

0115 958 3077; www.nicfltd.org.uk. Search the national list to find a qualified fitter or independent inspector in your area.

★ Wood for Good 0800 279 0016; www.woodforgood.com.

Discover interior design and maintenance tips, find stockists and learn more about sustainability.

★ The Carpet Foundation www.comebacktocarpet.com.

A helpful website with advice on choosing a carpet, plus maintenance tips and links to other carpet manufacturers and retailers.

▲ Try mixing different sizes of tile, laid in a striking pattern.

Saltillo 22cm terracotta floor tiles with Seville green 5cm inset, £29.70, Elon

Feature Rachel Volp • Photographs Tim Imrie, PSC

NEXT ISSUE
CHOOSING A
CONSERVATORY



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