

FABRICS & FLOORING

Contributed by Kittikhom
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Fabric is the most flexible of all the materials at your disposal, and it allows you to give full rein to your imagination. It can be heavily draped as luxurious curtains, of course, or made up as covers for furniture or cushions-or indeed anything you fancy, but you can also use it in less obvious ways-as wall coverings, fixed to window pelmets, or stuck onto utilitarian articles like wastepaper baskets. It comes in a marvelous choice of textures and finishes too. There are flimsy laces and voiles ideal for a pretty, delicate look; stout linen union for tough wear, cotton prints and shiny chintz; wool, in the shape of tweeds, tartans and flannels; silks, satins and synthetics; rich thick velvets; chunky tapestry and – most luxurious of all – gaufrage.

Be experimental: gather it, swag it, drape it and knot it as highly original curtains, or have it made up into more conventional-style blinds, curtains and pelmets. The range here is tremendous, from smartly plain Roman blinds to the most extravagant curtain treatments with flounces, frills and matching tie-backs. Small amounts of fabric can be made up into co-ordinated cushion covers and all manner of accessories, while larger lengths can be thrown over a settee, draped on a bed or hung from poles as softly folded room dividers or to give an impressive four-poster-bed effect. Use scraps or small amounts of contrasting fabric and color co-ordinated tassels to make trimmings, tie-backs and other details.

FLOORING

The floor is one of the largest areas to decorate, so it is worth paying particular attention to the texture, color and design of your chosen material. Think about your requirements, in terms of both color and the purpose of the room. Do you want something neutral like coir matting to blend into the background and be a good natural foil for other colors and textures? Or will the floor area be designed to dominate, with a stunning patterned carpet or rug? Often practical considerations will influence your choice, since flooring has to be hard-wearing as well as good-looking. In the kitchen and bathroom it should be water-resistant, or recommended for use in those rooms, while in a hallway, where people are likely to come in with wet and muddy shoes, you may have to consider something that does not mark easily.

There is a surprisingly wide choice of stylish flooring materials. At the top of the range you can choose from stone, marble and granite, classic solid floors available in slab or tile form. They all have a rather chilly, stark appearance, and they will feel cold underfoot too. More visual warmth is provided by quarry and terracotta tiles, with their rough texture and strong, earthy coloring, though these are equally cold to the touch, and polished brick makes an attractive and extremely tough floor for hallways and kitchens. These look good in a conservatory too, although a favorite here-and-for-halls-is ceramic floor tiles. These are available in such a huge range of styles, designs and colors that almost any look is possible. Although hard surfaces like these may look or feel cold, they are very smart and can be hard to resist. They can be warmed up with rugs and runners-plain colors, Persians, wool, cotton or grass matting according to the style of the room.

If you love the look of stone, marble, brick or ceramic but hate the idea of cold feet, you could always opt for a vinyl imitation – the more expensive ranges look very convincing. Vinyl is easy to lay and is warm and comfortable underfoot, especially the cushioned types. It can be used to great effect in kitchen, bathroom, hallway or children’s rooms.

But if your main requirement is color on the floor, take a fresh look at lino leum, now enjoying a new popularity for the scope it offers the home designer: the bright colors can be cut into patterns of your own devising. If you want a strong, hardwearing surface with a bit more texture in hall or kitchen, industrial rubber-stud flooring is an instant attention-grabber, available in dramatic black and strong primary colors.

Very often, a neutral color is needed for flooring, especially when the same treatment is to run right through the home or at least across several rooms, making an attractive yet unobtrusive backdrop for other furnishings. A natural option such as timber, coir or cork can be a good choice here; they have visual warmth, with plenty of textural interest, and are tough as well as comfortable underfoot. They also look good with all kinds of rugs, allowing you to create softer, brighter contrasts in some areas.

When it comes to carpet, the choice is even wider. There are plains and patterns, every conceivable shade, and both modern and traditional designs, including smart borders and textural one-color carpets based on Arran knitting patterns. There is a vast range of textures; too, from the shortest cut pile and corduroy to loops and flecks, velvets and thick woolly shag pile that needs a rake to get through it. Once again, consider your requirements and the purpose of the room.

Carrying the same flooring through from room to room encourages a feeling of continuity and space, but you may want the opposite effect. In this case, change of flooring style can be used to break up a too-large area or denote a change of use in a dual-purpose room such as kitchen/diner. An individual look can be created by cutting carpet tiles, linoleum, vinyl and ceramics into new shapes to devise your own designs-work them out on graph paper first. You could also try laying tiles on the diagonal for a different look, or clipping the corners and using colored inserts for the traditional tessellated

design. Another way of making “designer” floors is by using paints and varnishes to stencil wood, cork and ceramics with new borders and designs.