



## Criteria for Flooring

When you think about new flooring for your home, consider your needs and wishes for each room. Then think about these seven factors:

- Traffic
- Durability & Performance
- Safety
- Comfort
- Style
- Water & Moisture
- Noise

If you apply each of these factors to your home, you'll be better able to choose the perfect flooring. And we can help. Please see below for explanations and details.

### **TRAFFIC**

Traffic refers to how many people use a room, and how frequently. Higher traffic means greater wear on the floor, but the nature of a room's use is also important. For example, work boots create more wear and tear than slippers do.

#### **High Traffic**

Rooms and areas with high traffic include:

- Entrances, staircases and landings
- Kitchens, recreation rooms and some bathrooms

For floors in high-traffic rooms, consider more durable flooring materials (wood, ceramic tile, natural stone tile, vinyl and laminate) and more durable types of carpets (berber, frieze, indoor-outdoor).

#### **Low Traffic**

Rooms and areas with low traffic include:

- Formal living rooms
- Bedrooms
- Home offices and studies

For floors in low-traffic areas, wear is less of an issue, and comfort may be more important than durability. Carpets offer the greatest comfort, especially the plush varieties. The resilience of vinyl floors and the cushioning system of laminate floors make them more comfortable than other hard-surface floors, but not as comfortable as most carpets.

#### **Moderate Traffic**

Rooms with traffic levels between high and low include:

- Most bathrooms
- Dining rooms
- Living rooms
- Family rooms

## DURABILITY & PERFORMANCE

### Durability

If you want a floor that will stay beautiful and perform well year after year, choose the one with the highest durability. In general, durability depends on:

- The nature and strength of materials used in the flooring material's composition
- The manufacturing method used to construct the flooring material
- The quality of finishes, wear layers and chemical treatments added to the flooring

### Performance

A floor's performance refers to how well it keeps its original look and feel over the years - or how well a floor meets your expectations. A floor's performance depends on at least four major factors:

- **Use:** how the floor is used and how frequently, and what the floor is exposed to
- **Maintenance:** how well and how regularly the floor is cleaned and maintained
- **Construction:** how the flooring material was manufactured; stronger constructions perform better
- **Installation:** incorrect or faulty installations can cause a floor to buckle, warp, crack or fail completely

## SAFETY

Safety should be a primary concern when choosing flooring. Many slips and falls that occur inside homes result from improper installation, inadequate maintenance, grease and grime buildup and extensive surface wear. Sometimes the properties of the flooring material itself are responsible.

### Less Slippery Surfaces

Using materials in the flooring that are naturally less slippery will help reduce the risk of falls. Then again, even the safest surfaces must be properly installed, consistently cleaned and properly maintained to help prevent accidents. Many surfaces have good traction and are less slippery, including:

- Textured surfaces
- Low-pile or indoor-outdoor carpet
- Surfaces with low-gloss or no-gloss finishes
- Surfaces that absorb water

### Floor Materials & Conditions to Note

Floor surfaces with low traction are among the most dangerous. Low-traction surfaces, already potentially slippery, become especially hazardous with spilled liquids, powders or granulates. Using flooring materials in inappropriate places can cause accidents, as can improper installation or maintenance. Some potentially dangerous floor surfaces and conditions:

- Hard surfaces
  - Often naturally slippery, hard surfaces become more slippery when highly polished or naturally glossy.
  - Some materials are inappropriate for use on staircases and entryways.
  - Highly polished ceramic tile can be slippery.
  - Improperly secured area rugs can bunch up or slide.
- Loose tiles or floorboards
- Wood floors improperly sanded and sealed (splinters are a danger)
- Protruding nails

## COMFORT

In the world of floors, comfort refers specifically to how much a floor cushions feet, absorbs the impact of each step and insulates against cold. Comfort in this context refers to how a floor feels while you are using it in one of three ways:

- As you walk on it
- When you stand on it for a long periods
- When you sit or lie on it

Flooring can be harder or softer depending on the material used.

### Hard Floors

Hard floor materials are:

- Wood
- Stone
- Ceramic tile
- Natural stone tile
- Concrete

Tile (ceramic and stone) and concrete are harder than wood because they are more rigid and therefore less forgiving. Extremely hard floors (tile, concrete) offer little or no resilience, so standing on them for long periods can be uncomfortable.

### Soft Floors

There are two types of soft floors:

- Carpet (note that some carpets are softer than others, depending on thickness and pile)
- Resilient flooring, including vinyl and cork

## STYLE

The perfect floor should reflect your style. For evaluating rooms and floors, two basic and opposing styles are particularly important:

### Formal Style

The formal style is based on symmetry and balance, often using geometric shapes and patterns to create a clean, integrated look. Traditional, colonial and Victorian are examples of formal styles. Carpet, wood and natural stone tile often work particularly well in these settings.

### Informal Style

The informal style uses asymmetric patterns, shapes and objects like those found in nature. It usually avoids anything highly ordered or geometric. Elements are sometimes mixed. Contemporary, Arts and Crafts and country are examples of this style.

Every type of flooring – carpet, wood, ceramic tile, natural stone tile, laminate and vinyl – can create an informal style. The fun part is choosing the material, the color and the pattern that suit your taste.

## WATER & MOISTURE ISSUES

Before you select flooring, consider how water issues affect your home and specific rooms. For example, wood floors are typically not used in basements or rooms below ground level because of groundwater and humidity. High water usage in kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms and some utility rooms makes certain flooring, like wood and plush carpeting, poor choices. High humidity in a room can damage certain types of flooring, such as wood or carpet, so your choices will be fewer.

## ACOUSTICS & NOISE ISSUES

Acoustics and noise can affect flooring choices. Some floors, like carpet, insulate against outside noise while also absorbing and dampening the internal, ambient sounds of a room. Many hard-surface floors, like ceramic tile and wood, do just the opposite. Their hard, reflective surfaces guarantee each step will be heard while other sounds may produce echoes.

Here are some of the important acoustic issues for each type of floor.

### Floor Types & Acoustics

#### Area Rugs

- Effective acoustic control (especially carpet runners)
- Must be properly padded and secured

#### Carpet

- Best acoustic control
- Absorbs sound, dampens noise and reduces noise transfer between floors

#### Ceramic Tile

- Very noisy
- Soundproofing possible but complicated
- Soundproofing must be installed under the subfloor, since subfloor must be rigid
- Area rugs in strategic positions help

#### Cork

- Effective sound dampener
- Absorbs sound, dampens noise and reduces noise transfer between floors

#### Laminate

- Moderately noisy
- Soundproofing depends on subfloor – some include a layer of soundproofing
- Cushioned laminate floors absorb impact of steps, reducing noise levels
- Place area rugs to help manage acoustics

#### Natural Stone Tile

- Noisy
- Soundproofing possible but complicated
- Soundproofing must be installed under the subfloor, since subfloor must be rigid
- Area rugs in strategic positions help

#### Vinyl

- Quiet
- Natural resilience absorbs sound, dampens noise and reduces noise transfer between floors

#### Wood

- Noisy; wood is somewhat resilient making it less noisy than ceramic tile or concrete
- Reflects sound waves from surface
- Soundproofing installed under wood floors can reduce sound transfer to other floors
- Area rugs in strategic positions help