

From carpet to tile, choose appropriately

By Orlando Ramirez
Copley News Service

Choosing a wall color was easy enough. The selections were dizzy-complications, but it was easy enough to sort out compared to choosing floor coverings.

Hardwood floors? If so, what color stain? How about tile? Then what kind? Linoleum? Ceramic. If that, then what finish?

Maybe vinyl flooring is best, but then what pattern and color? Better just go with carpet. What color? How deep a pile? Wool or one of those stain-resistant blends?

Before you make a decision, there are a several questions that need to be answered.

What is this room used for? If it's a child's room, then carpeting might be better than a hardwood floor.

For a kitchen or bathroom, where spills and moisture can make for slick surfaces, then grained vinyl flooring would be the solution.

In living rooms where elegance is the key, then hardwood or parquet flooring may strike just the right note.

How much foot traffic moves through the area? An entryway or hall probably gets more use than a bedroom.

When choosing, flooring experts suggest that a durable surface will stand the test.

Also, if you're choosing a color for your carpet, it's best to choose an earth tone for these heavy-use areas since these colors tend to hide wear better than white, pastels or melon tones.

SELECTING CARPET

Once you've made the decision to go with carpeting, then the real choices begin.

The durability of a carpet depends on three things — density, resilience and weight of the pile.

When selecting carpet in a showroom, there are two quick checks that will help you determine the quality of the carpet.

The first is to press your fingers into the pile and if it recovers quickly, then it is a good-quality carpet.

The other test is to take the carpet sample and bend it. If you can see the base of the carpet through the pile, then you have an inferior carpet.

Keep in mind that the deeper pile carpet has longer strands and big loops that although more substantial looking are actually less so because they weigh less.

On the other hand, short-pile carpets are more durable because the pile is denser and therefore more resistant to wear.

Another important consideration is the pad on which your carpet will rest. Foam padding is the

cheaper and less-resistant choice. One test is to rub it between your fingers. If it crumbles, then try to find a better padding.

The best choice is rubber padding, which lasts longer and doesn't rub the backing off the carpet.

When choosing a carpet, keep these terms in mind:

- **Broadloom.** This is an industry standard term meaning any carpet wider than 6 feet, although the most common size is 12 feet.

- **Body carpet.** At most 6 feet wide, this carpet is used for narrow areas such as halls or stairs.

- **Cut pile.** The fibers are cut rather than looped into a base.

- **Bonded.** Here the fibers are glued to the base material.

- **Tufted.** The fibers are punched into the base. The fibers then can either be cut or looped.

- **Multi-level loop.** The loops are two or three different heights to create a specific raised design.

Buying carpeting can be a confusing experience. The first thing to ask is if the per-yard quote includes carpet, pad, installation and tax.

When it comes to installation, does the price quoted include furniture moving, removing and carting away the old carpet, doing stairs and hauling away remnants.

Before placing the order, have the dealer come and measure the rooms to be carpeted. This will help plan seams and pile direction of the carpeting.

During the installation, check with the installer where the seams will be. Since most carpeting is 12 feet long, it is best to have seams away from foot-traffic areas.

Matching seams can be particularly difficult for patterned carpets.

Stretching the carpet is an important aspect of installation. This helps prevent wrinkles that can increase wear. Experts insist that mechanical stretching is preferable to manual stretching, particularly where high-density carpets are used.

WOOD FLOORING

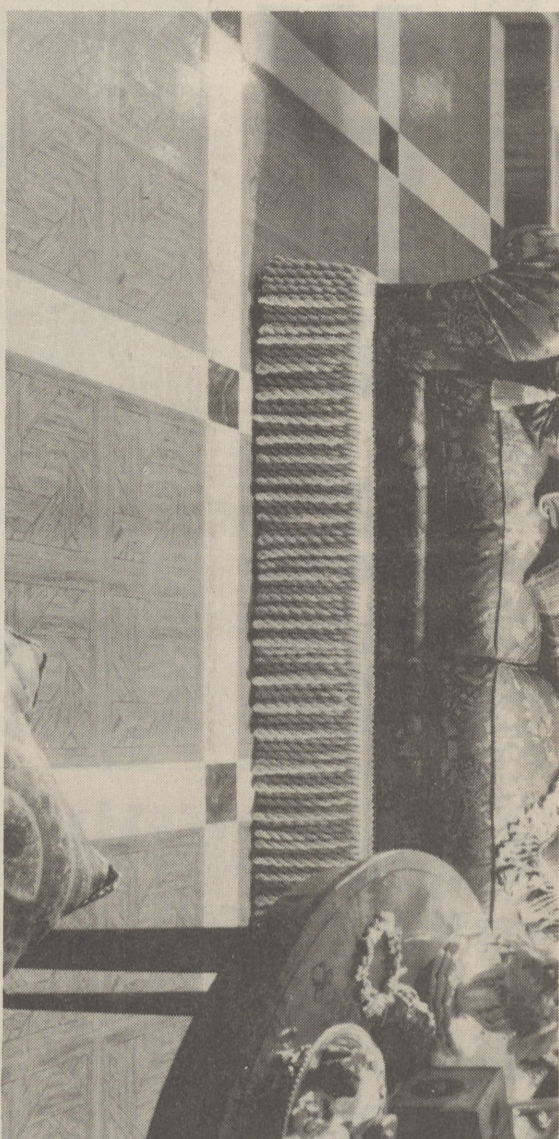
Once the staple of American construction, hardwood flooring has seen a resurgence in popularity in recent years.

One of the reasons for this popularity is that this flooring is durable, making it a one-time investment that raises the appraisal value of the home.

With proper care, a hardwood floor gathers more luster with age. Also if it has a good finish, it is resistant to spills and scratches.

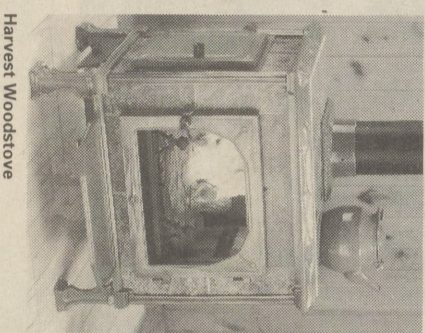
There are two types of wood flooring: parquet and strip (also called plank). Parquet floors are assembled from squares (usually 6 inches by 6 inches) using a tongue-and-groove method.

Backing is important to this type of flooring. Experts recommend a foam backing between the

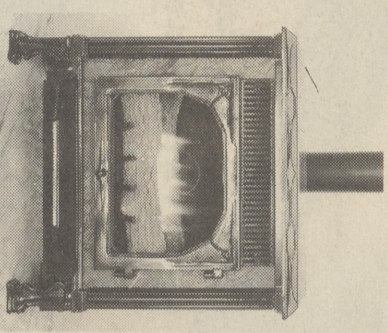


This floor looks like wood, but it's really faux-parquet vinyl with a tile border.

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parquet tiles and the subfloor to provide a moisture barrier.

Parquet floors are used primarily in difficult-to-fit areas like kitchens and hallways. Also, the squares can be combined in different patterns to create a dazzling effect.

Strip or plank hardwood floors are the better-known styles in which strips of wood (usually three- or five-ply) are constructed over a water-proofed subfloor.

These styles can be expensive, depending on the grade of wood and the size of the room.

Given recent trends, these floors now come in a variety of colors from ash to white to bronze, honey and traditional oak.

When selecting hardwood flooring, pay particular attention to the finishes.

The old-fashioned — and some say still the best — finishes are stains and sealers applied at the factory then buffed to a sheen under protective coats of wax.

For heavy-traffic areas, manufacturers have created the acrylic-impregnated parquet finish. Here, stain and acrylic are forced through the pores of the wood at the factory that can't wear away.

The most popular finish is the urethane finish, where coats of urethane and stain are applied to the wood, then sanded and sealed with two coats of moisture-cured urethane. A final wax finish is then applied.

TILES AND VINYL. Floor tile is the best choice when it comes to bathrooms, although it is becoming more and more popular in kitchens.

There are two types of finishes — clear finish, which is slick, and crystalline finish that has a textured surface to provide a certain amount of traction.

The American National Standards Institute has a rating system for tiles. When buying tile, look for the ANSI rating, with 1 being poor and 5 the best.

Also when buying tile, be sure to get all the sheets you will need from the same lot. Color and sometimes quality can differ from lot to lot, and many experienced installers have started with tile from one lot only to get halfway through the job and discover the remaining sheets don't match the original lot.

Vinyl tile comes in two varieties, either 12-inch squares or 6-foot-wide rolls.

Of the two, the squares are more inexpensive, although the sheeting is more durable, particularly since it is moisture resistant — a definite plus in kitchens and bathrooms.

Vinyl sheet flooring comes in either rotoviny or inlaid types. With inlaid, the pattern and color go all the way through the flooring and stand up better to wear.

Rotoviny's texture and color are only on the surface of the material. However, this type often has a urethane coating and a soft cushion backing.

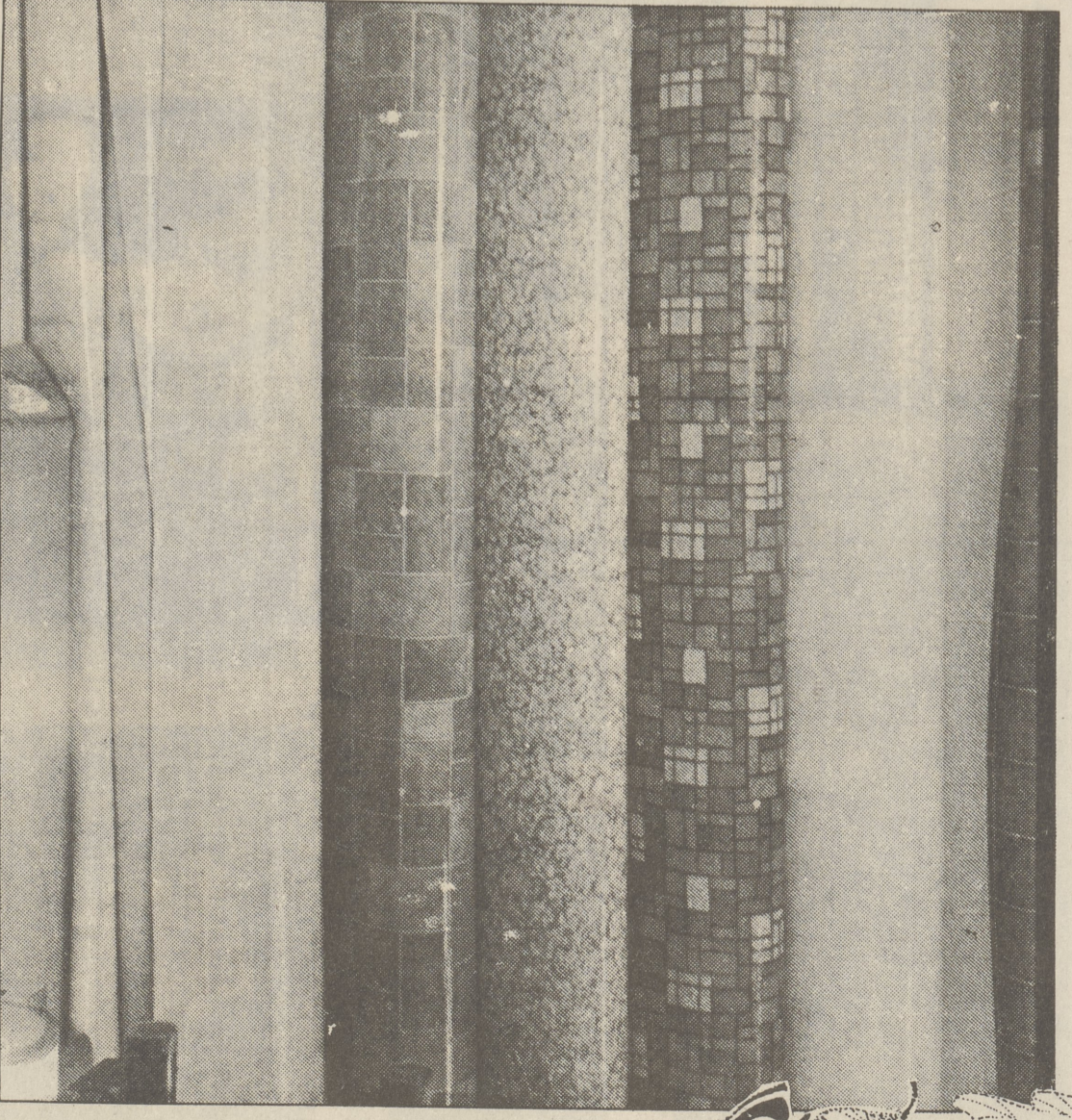
Also, rotoviny can be installed dry or with just adhesive on the corners. Inlaid vinyl has to be cut in one piece then glued to the subfloor.



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