

Dining room floor by Schreffler Custom Lumber Inc. in a distressed walnut for a lived-in look and feel

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL WOOD FLOORING ASSOCIATION

KITCHEN & BATH FLOORING TRENDS

A LOOK AT THE LATEST AND MOST POPULAR OPTIONS FOR KITCHEN AND BATH FLOORING, FROM COST-EFFECTIVE HARDWOODS AND CERAMICS, TO ECO-FRIENDLY CORK AND BAMBOO.

BY DAVID WHITEMYER

TODAY, THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF HOME FLOORING MATERIALS, STYLES AND COLORS AVAILABLE IN THE MARKETPLACE. BUT HELPING HOMEOWNERS SELECT THE RIGHT OPTION IS GROWING INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AS INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES CONTINUE TO BRING NEW PRODUCTS TO MARKET, AND IMPROVE THE DURABILITY AND "ECO-FRIENDLINESS" OF TRIED-AND-TRUE FLOORING MATERIALS.

Current trends toward both traditional flooring and unique, fresh products enable dealers to show off a plethora of options—and at the same time, embellish showrooms with colors, textures and patterns certain to encourage shoppers.

Back to Basics

It's no secret that the tough economy continues to affect the home remodeling market. Even clients in good financial straits are making conservative decisions and looking to save money where they can.

Popular for years, the trend toward exotic hardwood floors is leveling off, says Anita Howard, communications director of the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA). "The trend now is to go with basics and back to domestic species," she says. "Oak is the No. 1 seller in the U.S."

Domestic species are not only less expensive, they're also less likely to violate the Lacey Act, which requires all woods entering the United States to be legally harvested (see "Protecting Our Resources," pg. 32).

Many homeowners today opt for customization, where exotic woods—offering rich colors and grains—are used economically and more sparingly as borders or as part of a simple pattern. For example, wenge, a nearly black species, is often used as a border to complement oak, Howard says. Other popular decorative species used in this way include Brazilian cherry and purpleheart, a flowering plant/tree prized for its hardwood.

Hardwood in kitchens, and ceramic and porcelain tiles in bathrooms, remain top choices because of their almost permanent lifespan and seemingly limitless range of sizes, shapes and colors—making them perfect for the cost-conscious. According to the *2010 Kitchen & Bath Style Report*, a survey of National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) members, seven out of eight designers polled incorporate hardwood in kitchen flooring; ceramic and porcelain tiles are specified in bathrooms more than 90 percent of the time.

Howard adds that engineered wood products are also making inroads due to their ease of installation, though certain products can be more expensive than some hardwoods.

Down Home

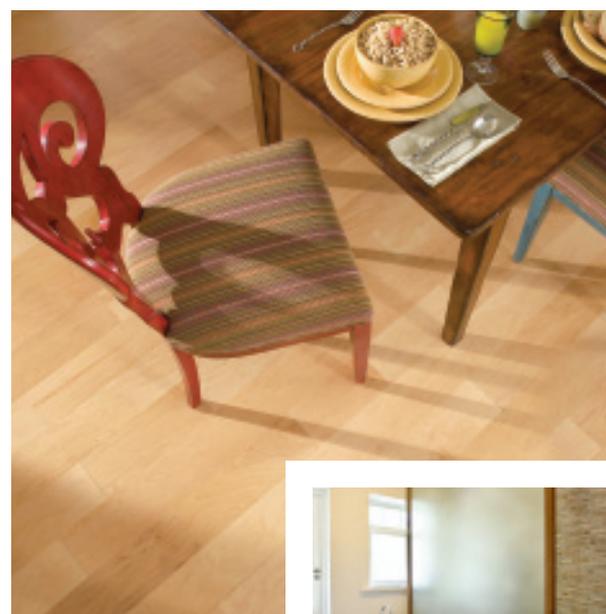
Many homeowners are opting for a more rustic, cottage-like, lived-in look, as a result of a shift toward simplicity and a reservation of appearing overly garish in this economy, Howard says.

With wood flooring, plank widths of 3 to 12 inches are in style, she says. And with tiles, bigger is now better, too. These trends are reminiscent of yesteryear when resources were more plentiful, and larger wood planks and stones were common in the home.

NKBA's *2010 Kitchen & Bath Style Report* shows a movement toward earthy browns and whites. Colors inspired by nature are admired in all flooring types.

One of the fastest-growing trends in flooring, particularly for kitchens, is concrete. Typically seen as an exterior material or relinquished to the basement, concrete is cost-effective and easy to maintain, and can be designed in myriad ways. Using warm, solid hues or a grained texture stamp, concrete is ideal for the rustic look. On the converse, it can also be stained and polished to create a more high-end appearance.

Hand-scraped hardwood flooring is another option for providing the lived-in look, says Nicholas Freadreacea, chairman of the board at the World Floor Covering Association. "It's perfect for the active family to hide the wear and



TOP: Kitchen floor in Armstrong Hardwood Premier Performance 5.25-inch maple

MIDDLE: Natural slate in large-format, glazed porcelain stoneware by Ragno, created with the Marazzi 3D printing technique

BOTTOM: Solid Brazilian cherry floor with custom accent blocks featuring wenge, maple and red oak by Majestic Wood Floors

ECO-FRIENDLY FLOORING

There's a lot to consider when specifying green flooring. Is it made with recycled content or renewable resources? Does it release harmful chemicals? Did it take a lot of energy to manufacture or ship? Fortunately, there are a host of options from which to choose:

BAMBOO: A fast-growing, abundant grass, bamboo is naturally resistant to insects, mildew and water. It's 13 percent harder than maple, more than 25 percent harder than some oaks, and available in many shades, grains and plank sizes. A criticism of bamboo, however, is that it isn't likely to be grown locally; most comes from China.

CORK: Regenerating itself every three years, cork bark is renewable. It's used to create a floor that feels soft, yet is almost impervious to dents and scratches. Cork provides thermal insulation and is hypoallergenic. Like bamboo, cork is often imported—mostly from Southern Europe or Portugal.

WOOD: Available in hundreds of shades, styles and species, wood is the original green building material. It's renewable, recyclable and biodegradable.

RUBBER: Frequently made from recycled tires, rubber floors are extremely durable and easy to clean. Popular with professional chefs for its comfort, rubber is available in a plethora of colors.

LINOLEUM: Popular in the early 1900s, linoleum is making a comeback because of its natural ingredients. Produced from linseed oil, pine resin, wood flour, cork powder and mineral fillers, linoleum comes in scores of colors, and can be made to simulate leather and worn concrete.

RECYCLED GLASS TILE: Formed from the crushing and re-heating of broken glass, recycled glass tiles come in a luminescent rainbow of colors. Their resistance to water and stains makes them perfect for both kitchens and bathrooms. As a precaution, glass tiles can be slippery when wet.



LEARN ABOUT YOUR CLIENTS' PRIORITIES WHEN IT COMES TO GREEN DESIGN IN "GREEN DESIGN: WHAT YOUR CLIENTS WANT," PG. 10.

tear of daily living," he says. Wire-brushed and distressed woods provide a similar feel.

Cork flooring, though more contemporary than cottage, is warm in both appearance and texture,

PROTECTING OUR RESOURCES

The Lacey Act is a conservation law first introduced by Iowa Rep. John F. Lacey and signed into law by President William McKinley way back in 1900. The law is still very much in effect today, although it has been amended several times.

When the Lacey Act was first introduced, illegal commercial hunting threatened many game species in the U.S. The law made it a federal crime to poach game in one state with the purpose of selling in another.

The Lacey Act was most recently amended in 2008 to include a broader range of plants and trees. The law as it stands today bans commerce of illegally sourced plants and their products, including timber and wood products.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.APHIS.USDA.GOV/PLANT_HEALTH/LACEY_ACT/INDEX.SHTML.

and comes in an assortment of neutral colors, adding to a home's bucolic aesthetic.

Mother Nature Meets the 21st Century

Green materials have transitioned from fringe to chic to mainstream. Today, nature-sensitive finishes are as common and dependable as traditional products.

Bamboo is one of the most highly requested flooring materials. Commonly produced from the Moso species, it's not only a renewable resource, but is harder than oak. Engineering marvels have pushed consumer choices beyond solid bamboo, adding strand woven bamboo constructed from stripped stalk fibers, and durable laminated versions.

Stone, ceramics and glass tile continue to remain a green flooring option. But improvements in high-definition technology and printing are taking these natural, already known and tested materials to another level, Freadreacea says.

One of these new technologies is called inkjet sublimation, which uses high-quality printers and, in some cases, water- or soy-based inks to impregnate an image. For example, the image of marble could be printed onto tiles so real marble doesn't have to be used. With this method, tiles

can be matched to any color, seamlessly blended with a backsplash or accent surface, or even incorporate natural patterns or photographic images. "This environmentally friendly technology not only makes the tile look more realistic, but it uses less water and ink to produce the product," Freadreacea says.

Similar reproduction technologies are creating hard-wearing laminates and luxury vinyl tiles that look as good as the real thing: wood, bamboo, marble, you name it. Less expensive than their natural kin, these products allow homeowners to follow fashion while watching their wallets. Freadreacea adds that modern inkjet products are easy to install and a breeze to keep tidy, cutting down on construction debris and home cleaning products. High-quality laminates tend to be easy to clean, and laminated/engineered products tend to not require a flooring substrate, so they can be installed directly on an old floor.

By considering the economic climate, and embracing new technologies and the move toward green, kitchen and bath dealers can stay ahead of the curve—informing their clients about attractive, high-quality and affordable flooring options. WP