



Flooring fundamentals

Stylish, functional, and ecofriendly choices to fit every budget By Arricca Elin SanSone

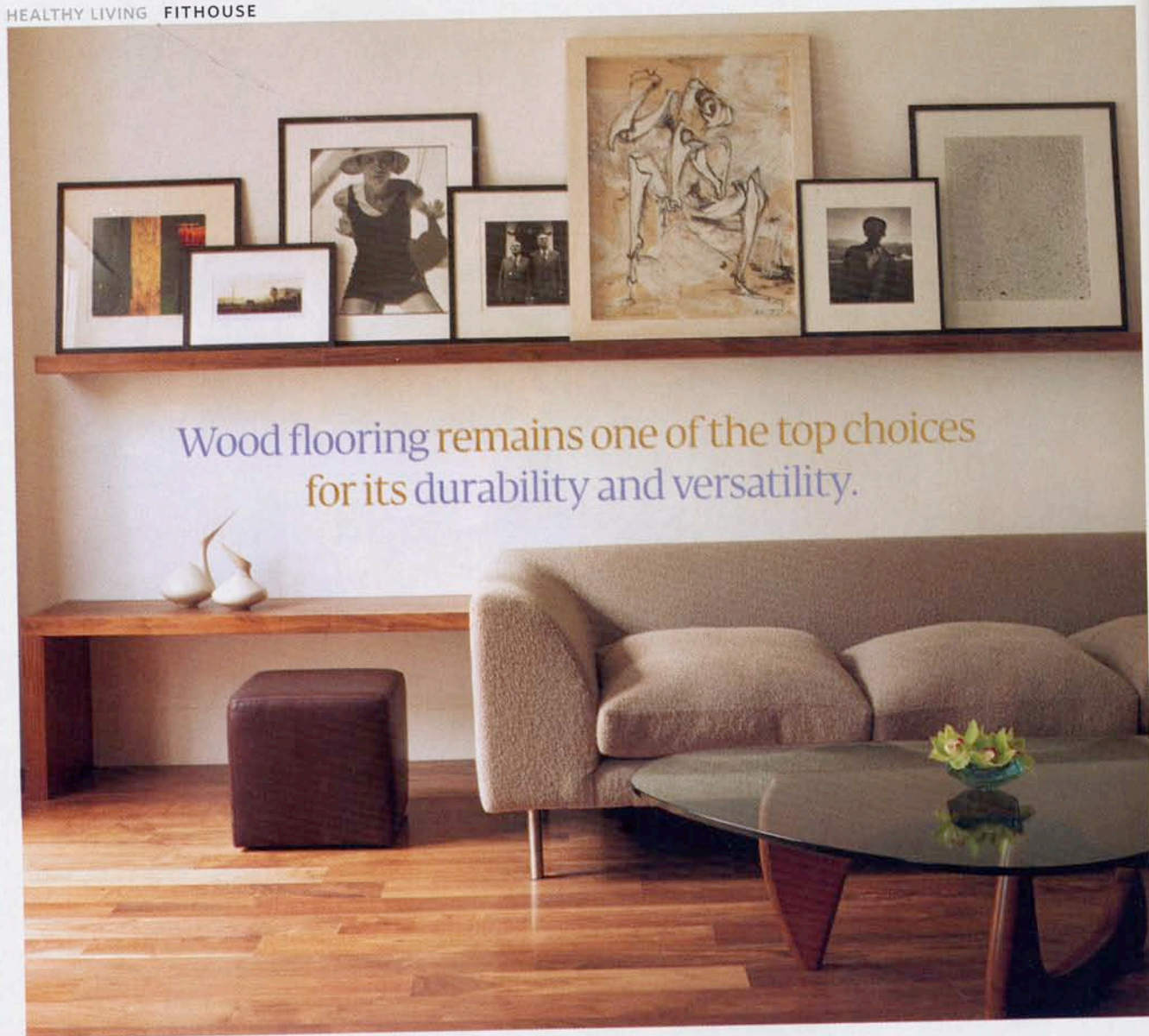
IT'S THE FOUNDATION of any room. We walk on it every day, track dirt on it, spill food and drink on it, and expect it to remain beautiful for years with minimal care. So when the time comes to replace or update your floor, consider your options carefully.

"The right floor ties together a design, yet it should also be practical," says Alan Hilsabeck Jr., Certified Master Kitchen and Bath Designer (CMKBD), American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), of Hilsabeck Design Associates, Inc., in Flower Mound, Texas. "Before you fall in love with something in the showroom, think about

how you use the space. What works well in a dining room may not be functional in a high-traffic area like the kitchen."

Wood is a classic choice that complements many designs, while there's growing interest in ecofriendly materials such as linoleum and wood reclaimed from old buildings. Bamboo and cork have also become more readily available through flooring retailers and home stores.

Although there are more inexpensive choices available, such as plastic laminate, we've highlighted the following materials for their durability, livability, and natural good looks.



Wood flooring remains one of the top choices for its durability and versatility.

Wood flooring

Hardwoods such as maple, oak, and hickory have remained popular choices for years with good reason: Wood floors wear well, feel comfortable underfoot, and are a renewable resource (search www.fsc-info.org for information on where to find Forest Stewardship Council-certified varieties—meaning they're from responsibly managed forests). Hardwood floors are available in both solid wood and engineered wood, which is manufactured from multiple layers, or plies, of wood glued together with the desired species layered on top. **Solid wood** floors consist of tongue-and-groove strips of wood that are $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, with individual board widths

varying between $2\frac{1}{4}$ to 6 inches wide. They have square edges, meaning boards sit flush against each other for a smooth appearance. They can be refinished as needed, making them a lifetime investment. Refinishing starts from about \$5 per square foot, on average.

Boards are available in many species, but the most common for flooring are red or white oak. "Oak is durable, takes stain well, and is one of the least expensive of the hardwoods," says Dennis Gehman, Certified Remodeler in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. It typically costs about \$5 per square foot. Other species, such as cherry or walnut, can cost more. Because it's a natural product, wood may contain variations in texture—grain pat-

terns or knots. Also, it may shrink and expand slightly with changes in temperature and humidity.

Engineered wood floors are prefinished and available in sizes and species similar to solid wood options. Costs are \$8 per square foot, on average. Many engineered floors have beveled edges so a V-shaped groove is formed where boards meet. "While some homeowners like this defined plank look, crumbs and dust tend to accumulate in these grooves, so you'll be cleaning more often," says Rochelle Horn, Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD), in Scottsdale, Arizona.

On the upside, engineered floors can be installed on concrete or in basements where solid wood can't be used because

humidity fluctuations. Another plus: "Because each layer is placed with grains running in the opposite direction, the product is more stable because it's essentially reinforcing itself," says Dawn Zuber, with Studio Z Architecture in Canton, Michigan.

Reclaimed wood comes from sources such as old barns, factories, gymnasiums, and even trees raised from riverbeds after sinking during logging operations. Some reclaimed wood can be refinished, though it's often sealed with a clear finish to showcase its character and rustic beauty. "The nail holes, streaks, and other gouges add charm and interest," says Patricia Davis Brown, Certified Bath Designer (CBD), CKD, ASID, of Patricia Davis Brown Fine Cabinetry in Vero Beach, Florida. In many cases, reclaimed wood is the only source of a species such as chestnut, which was long ago almost completely eradicated by disease in the United States. Hemlock, poplar, walnut, heart pine, Douglas fir, and cypress are other common reclaimed options.

Reclaimed wood starts from \$7.50 per square foot, on average. While there are national reclaimed wood retailers, such as EcoTimber and Restoration Timber,

ing online. For example, the Ann Arbor, Michigan-based Urbanwood project harvests urban ash trees that have been killed by pests, then mills them locally for use as flooring. The pests are eliminated once the bark and first layer of the tree are removed before milling, and this local use reduces the environmental costs of transporting lumber.

Ecofriendly wood alternatives

These rapidly renewable products are alternatives to traditional materials.

Bamboo is a grass that is ready for harvest in just five or six years and doesn't require replanting due to its extensive root system. Although most bamboo flooring comes from China, it's considered ecofriendly because of its durability, hardness, and short regeneration time. Bamboo is available in planks and panels, and is generally sold prefinished because the wood doesn't easily accept stain. "It has a clean, contemporary look," Gehman says. Bamboo starts from \$5 per square foot, on average.

Cork is harvested from the outer bark of cork trees, found primarily in the Mediterranean. Harvesting causes no damage

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Keep your floors beautiful

Even the most durable floors need TLC. The following tips will help keep flooring of any material beautiful for years.

Use rugs at entryways. Dirt and grit tracked in from outdoors act like sandpaper and can scratch surfaces.

Vacuum regularly with a soft brush head. Avoid using the power head or beater bar attachment, which can damage the floor.

Protect the finish. Wood changes color over time due to oxidation and exposure to light. "All species will gain patina to some degree," says Timm Locke, executive vice president of the Wood Flooring Manufacturers Associ-

ation. "Shield floors from direct sun, and reposition rugs occasionally to avoid patches of discoloration."

Choose cleaning products recommended for the specific surface.

"Homemade cleaners such as vinegar can eventually damage the protective finish on hardwoods," Locke says.

Use felt glides. Place glides on chairs, and clean the glides occasionally to remove grit. Replace every six to 12 months, depending on wear.

Be kind to your floor. Lift, don't drag, furniture when moving it; avoid dents from high heels; and keep your pet's nails trimmed to prevent scratches.

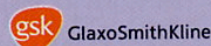
You should not take BONIVA if you have low blood calcium, cannot sit or stand for at least 60 minutes, have severe kidney disease, or are allergic to BONIVA. Stop taking BONIVA and tell your healthcare provider right away if you experience difficult or painful swallowing, chest pain, or severe or continuing heartburn, as these may be signs of serious upper digestive problems. Follow the dosing instructions for once-monthly BONIVA carefully to lower the chance of these events occurring. Side effects may include diarrhea, pain in the arms or legs, or upset stomach. If you develop severe bone, joint, and/or muscle pain, contact your healthcare provider. Tell your healthcare provider, including your dentist, about all the medicines you take. Your healthcare provider may also recommend a calcium and vitamin D supplement.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

*Bone density measured at the lumbar spine after 1 year of treatment. Individual results may vary.

†Bone density measured at the lumbar spine, total hip, or trochanter; 3 out of 4 at the femoral neck.

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to the tree, which grows new bark that can be utilized again in about 10 years. "Because cork is resilient, it's easy to stand on, quiet to walk on, and a good natural insulator," Gehman says. It's available in sheets and squares in numerous colors. "Cork can be somewhat busy in appearance because of its texture, so you need to consider that in your design," Horn says. A sealer coat must be reapplied periodically about

every nine to 12 months, depending on traffic and the type of cork used. Prices start at \$5 per square foot, on average. **Eucalyptus** is a fast-growing exotic hardwood from Brazilian plantations. Trees can be harvested within 14 to 16 years of planting. Its natural color varies from light pink to dark red (it will darken somewhat when exposed to light), though it can be finished to resemble more expensive exotics, such as

Reclaimed, or recycled, wood has an appealingly distressed look and is often salvaged from local sources.

mahogany. "Eucalyptus has a very fine, attractive grain pattern," Zuber says. It's sold under the trade name Lyptus and is available in solid and engineered wood, unfinished and prefinished. Eucalyptus starts from \$6 per square foot, on average.

Linoleum

First used in the United States in the early 20th century, linoleum is a natural product that's an alternative to resilient flooring, or sheet vinyl. Unlike sheet vinyl, which is made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC), linoleum is made from linseed oil (from the flax plant), wood or cork powder, pine resin, and ground limestone with mineral pigments for color. "It can be installed quickly, and it's more economical than many other flooring choices," Zuber says.

Linoleum starts from \$2 per square foot, on average. It is naturally antibacterial, comfortable to stand on, provides good sound insulation, and lasts for decades. Some manufacturers, such as Armstrong, add a coating to improve resistance to stains and scratches; uncoated linoleum will require periodic waxing. Be advised: When first installed, linoleum has a strong linseed oil odor that gradually dissipates.

Linoleum is available in sheets or squares that fit together, such as Marmoleum Click. "It has a clean, retro look that works well in many homes," Zuber says. "It's good in high-traffic areas such as kitchens, hallways, and playrooms." ☺

Arricca Elin Sansone wrote about bathroom renovations in the July issue of Cooking Light.