

# ON THE FLOOR

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BY JAMIE HEMPSALL

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Flooring choices can be fundamental to your design from both a practical and cost perspective. Interior Designer Jamie Hemsall advises how to ensure you do not make an expensive mistake.



*Tile is the ideal solution in wet areas.*

As we are heading away from winter, many of us want to get a hint of spring by freshening up our homes. Flooring often forms a part of that choice and is definitely critical in the success or failure of your look and feel.

It is easy just to replace your flooring with something similar, but it may not be the correct practical decision for the way you live your life and can lock you into some very definite style statements. Start your decision process by taking time to consider the use of the room and people who might therefore be enjoying the ambience.

#### Your key considerations should be:

- 1) The volume of traffic that the room will be subject to and, therefore, how durable your product needs to be.
- 2) Is there likely to be moisture regularly present (such as in a bathroom or utility room)?
- 3) How slip resistant does your floor need to be?
- 4) Does the floor need to act as a sound barrier? This is a particularly important consideration in upstairs rooms and for those living in apartments.
- 5) Do you want a maintenance free finish?
- 6) Do any of the occupants have asthma or allergies? Some carpets are more hypoallergenic than others and generally harder floors can be more easily cleaned and, therefore, less problematic.
- 7) What sub-floor will your surface be laid upon? For example, if you have under-floor heating, then engineered floorboards can be a better choice than solid wood.
- 8) What is your overall budget? (Not forgetting to allow for professional installation costs).

The flooring types have very differing properties, so here are my guidelines to help make an informed choice:

## RESILIENT FLOORING

Items such as vinyl (e.g. Karndean or Amtico) and linoleum can bounce back to their original form after something is dropped on them; helping preserve both the floor and the object. These make a good alternative to hard surfaces such as tile.

They are often flexible to lay, hardwearing with minimal maintenance; they are good in areas with moisture and most finishes are bacteria resistant. A broad range of prices means that this is a choice which can suit most budgets.

## PORCELAIN AND CERAMIC TILES

These are relatively easy to maintain and perfect in areas with moisture or immediate access from the outside. Without under-floor heating they can feel cool and you need to consider slip-resistance (especially where children and frailer people may be present). Tiles do require a level sub-floor. As a rule of thumb, budget for professional tiling costs to be as much as the cost of the tiles, but properly laid tiling can last a lifetime, so this can be money extremely well spent.



*Engineered Wood Floors designed to work with underfloor heating.*

## WOOD

This natural resource always gives a warm architectural finish and its colour can be altered with staining. Wood is wonderful for more informal areas, but your planks must be in good repair for visual interest (not all wood floors are beautiful, sometimes you have to take a hard decision to cover them back up again when there are mismatched boards or signs of patching). A wood floor will require regular maintenance depending upon finish, but if cared for properly it can be a very long-term and richly rewarding companion.

Wood may stain if it is in regular contact with moisture so your chosen finish and sympathetic cleaning is important.

Natural wood has to be used very carefully in conjunction with under-floor heating; for example, if the heating has been off while you are away during winter period you will probably be best to bring it back up to temperature over at least a day to ensure there are no problems. To avoid this you may wish to consider veneer engineered boards, which have been specifically designed with this sort of heating system in mind. Wood definitely needs professional fitting to ensure safety and longevity. It can also be one of the more expensive flooring options.

## LAMINATE

This has become a firm favourite in the last decade as a cheap and easy to fit flooring solution. It is unsuitable for damp areas and can sound hollow when walked upon, so is not recommended in flats or upstairs bedrooms. Some systems are suitable for owner installation. Laminate is easy to maintain and available at a variety of price points.

## CARPETS AND RUGS

These are particularly good solutions in cooler areas as they add warmth and comfort; while also helping reduce noise. Carpet may not be as durable as other surfaces, but stain resistant treatments definitely help prolong its life. Available in a variety of price points, but a



*Resilient flooring.*

good quality underlay and professional fitting are essential for carpets.

Rugs are ideal when used in conjunction with other surfaces to provide warmth and design contrast. They can also be a perfect solution to a "quick fix" change for a design scheme colour injection.

## STONE AND MARBLE

These offer a very permanent solution and are ideal in wet areas. They are cooler than most other finishes, but are ideal with under-floor heating as they retain the warmth. These are more expensive options and, as with other tiles, must be laid perfectly so you will need to factor in professional fitting costs. They make an ideal option for bathrooms; hallways and garden rooms.

Whatever your choice, good preparation and fitting are essential. Your subfloor needs to be as flat as possible (often over-boarding problem areas can be a simple and cost effective solution). This will help make for easier installation and ensure the longest life possible for the flooring you choose.

Jamie Hemsall Ltd is a locally based, multi-award winning interior design consultancy. See more of his design inspiration at [www.jamiehemsall.com](http://www.jamiehemsall.com) or call 0800 032 1180.

