

Home&Garden

Hard floors bouncing back into fashion

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Today, many people prefer solid surfacing floors over carpet, not just for aesthetic reasons but also for health and hygienic reasons.

People with asthma or allergies may choose hardwood, laminate, cork or vinyl floors because they are not only easier to clean than carpet but it also doesn't trap dirt, dust, pet hair and other irritants that carpets usually do.

"Dust mites and pet allergens found indoors are one of the leading causes of allergic diseases," says David Doyle, owner of Allergy Relief Cleaning Services. "Carpets should be vacuumed three times a week using a vacuum with a Hepa filter."

Asthma sufferers should clean carpets every 6-12 months, he added, because dust mites produce feces that contains a protein that can trigger asthma symptoms.

"Carpets act like a filter — they pull all the pollutants from the air," Doyle said. "Cleaning the carpets before the filter 'overflows' greatly improves the indoor air quality in the home."

"The key is to clean the carpets before the dirt becomes noticeable."

The downside to carpet, apart from the pollutants that linger for a long time after they have been installed, is that they stain and damage easily, are difficult to keep clean (even after steam cleaning they retain dirt at the bottom) and are susceptible to mold, especially in basements.

Unless you intend to look after your carpets properly, Doyle recommends going with solid surface flooring, because failure to clean carpets regularly can become a health hazard.

And homes with carpets do not have good resale value compared to those with hardwood or other types of solid surfaces.

The benefit of carpet, on the other hand, is that carpets are soft and warm underfoot, which may be important in bedrooms. Carpets are also safer and quieter than other solid surfaces on stairs. Although carpets are generally cheaper than other types of flooring, some high quality carpets can be just as expensive as hardwood.

For these reasons, other types of flooring, most commonly hardwood and laminate, are gaining increasing popularity among homeowners.

Laminate, which is not real wood, looks like real wood and is made from high density

paper core with a lot of chemicals to bind it together.

"It's relatively easy to install and float, but there aren't many positive things to say about this product," says Mark Ashton, of Ashton Renovations. "It usually only lasts for a few years and is bad for the environment."

Hardwood, on the other hand, has been around for years and is an excellent product that is durable and sandable in future. Ashton recommends it for all areas of the home except for bathrooms and highly utilized kitchens.

A good alternative to hardwood is engineered hardwood, which is also becoming increasingly popular. It is made of real hardwood surface with plywood layers beneath. However, while it may appear to be cheaper than hardwood, since it uses less wood, it is actually more expensive because of the manufacturing process.

If you are looking for something more environmentally friendly, Ashton recommends considering natural linoleum and cork.

"Natural linoleum is extremely durable compared to cork, which is damaged more easily," he said. "There are a lot of cool things you can do with these products and they are very practical."



SOLID DESIGN: Unless you are going to look after your carpets carefully, you may be better off with hard flooring, such as hardwood, laminate, cork or vinyl flooring, say experts. Carpets can, however, feel warmer and softer on the feet — and they are more inviting to stretch out on.

"Linoleum allows for hundreds of colours and designs, while cork makes a floor appear warm and inviting. It's a great alternative to carpet."

Sigrid McCandles, of Avonbridge Interiors, suggests that

people look for a company that uses green practices in its manufacturing of the product, and products that do not have gas toxins.

"Today's consumer is becoming more environmen-

tally conscious and may want to source flooring that is made of a renewable or sustainable material," he explains. "Some of these materials include bamboo, cork and wool (carpeting)."