

GALLERY

KICK OFF

FLOORING ALTERNATIVES

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The materials of tomorrow are available today. We can walk on leather or sashay across cork. Bamboo, a grass, has taken its place next to exotic hardwoods. Concrete, once relegated to the basement, has morphed into elegant interior flooring that can mimic timeworn travertine or rustic woods. Vinyl is hot again. But it bears no resemblance to your grandmother's

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CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT:
Artistic Tile's Casa
Domani leather in
cognac whipstitch
matte. Robin Reigi's
Faux Leather is actually
rubber. Steve Charles'
Brogue Natural Bri-
quettes from its Alchemy
& Hide Leather Series.
Edelman Leather's An-
tiqued Brown Crocodile
floor tile. Old Virginia
Leather Company's
Antique Red Ostrich.
Stuart Weitzman's
Pythboot.



FROM TOP: Plynl woven-vinyl
Bamboo in brick from Chilewich.
Gammapar's Core Wood in wenge and
Bamboo in gray. Concrete tile in teal from
Amtico. Kate Spade's Bowtie sandal.

kitchen floor. Best of all—most cutting-edge floor surfaces are eco-friendly, taking the concept of “green” far beyond the color spectrum.

AH, LEATHER, OR IS IT?

Warm, resilient and hand-polished to a rich luster, leather is at home on the floor. Leather flooring is tough and withstands heavy foot traffic. Whether smooth or textured by makers such as Edelman Leather, Old Virginia Leather Co., Steve Charles, or Artistic Tile, leather is the ultimate luxury. Because of the variety of size options, patterns can be configured to look like herringbone, brick or geometrics in the hands of professionals accustomed to installing hardwoods or ceramic tiles. Leather offers good sound absorption, heat insulation and flame resistance. Surprisingly, it requires little care. A buff every few weeks and a wax several times a year will suffice. Spills are easily wiped up with a damp mop.

An option for leather lovers on more limited budgets is tiling made from rubber. The tiles are scarcely distinguishable from the natural material. New York-based Robin Reigi, Inc. distributes a 39" Faux Leather tile, which costs half what leather costs. Through her to-the-trade showroom, Reigi represents these and almost one hundred other architectural products.

RENEWABLE SOURCES

Bamboo looks and feels like wood and has equal strength and resistance to warping. Due to its eco-friendly qualities, it has become a favorite of decorators. Best of all, it is a grass and is a quickly renewable resource. Bamboo is cut into strips, then boiled. After drying, it is glued to produce laminated solid planks, boards and tiles, then milled and treated with a preservative. It is easy to clean and is installed like any hardwood. Colors vary from off-white to dark coffee.

Wide-slat bamboo, though made from one hundred percent natural material, is a flexible product with individual slats bonded to a felt-like surface. It resembles a sisal product more than wood and can be installed as a direct glue-down or bound for area rugs. One of its distributors, Floor Coverings by CPA, advises against its



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use in a laundry room or bath.

Gammapar was among the first manufacturers to create a process that impregnated natural bamboo with polymers, making its GammaBama-Boo Collection ten times stronger than solid hardwood. Bamboo absorbs dyes differently than most woods, making it difficult to add color, but Gammapar has succeeded with a wide range of tones from mahogany to honey to grays.

MORE THAN A WINESTOPPER

With more than five million acres of cork forests worldwide and diminishing hardwood forests, cork was a likely place to go for flooring materials. Frequently used during the early half of the twentieth century for commercial buildings, cork has been in use since 3000 B.C., but its harvesting methods remain virtually unchanged. Cork bark is cut from a tree, gently removed in large sections, then stacked and aged three to six months before processing. Bark can be harvested every nine years without interrupting the tree's 150- to 250-year life span. Rich, dark shades with intricate markings, playful stripes and even patterns resembling terrazzo allow for a plethora of options, say well-known makers such as KorQinc and Expanko. Due to space-age finishes, cork is suitable for any room in the home. It is glued down over a concrete or plywood subfloor.

ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Other categories of flooring may be more surprising and include compressed sorghum Kirei board and coconut-palm flooring. Kirei board is an environmentally friendly alternative to hardwood. Made from raw stalks of sorghum, an edible grass, it is compressed, washed and woven into sheets, which are stacked and compressed, using a formaldehyde-free adhesive. The result is a striking material with unusual markings offered by distributor Robin Reigi, Inc.

Coconut palm flooring, available around the world, is another eco-friendly product. Made from coconut trees after they no longer bear coconuts, the bark is pressed into flooring planks that vary greatly in color. As stable as hardwood and installed using the same methods, the coconut palm flooring comes in prefinished



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planks and parquet tiles from companies such as Smith & Fong.

HARD AS A ROCK

Concrete is hot. Desired for its unique appearance, concrete is available in a wide spectrum of colors and textures. Ann Sacks' faux wood concrete is impervious to wear and tear, is installed like natural stone, and needs only a simple damp mopping.

Designed to replicate reclaimed crosscut Italian travertine, concrete pavers are more cost-effective than a natural product. Peacock Pavers' handcrafted and textured pavers can be used inside or out.

Another noteworthy product, eco-cement is twenty percent wood pulp and eighty percent cement. It is warmer underfoot than concrete, weighs less than concrete and mimics the texture of the costlier product. Eco-Cem™ is easily cleaned and contains no toxins, according to one of its manufacturers, Coverings Etc.

NOT YOUR GRANDMA'S LINOLEUM

The term "luxury vinyl" is no exaggeration. The best known of its fabricators is Amtico. Its product line replicates a wide spectrum of flooring materials, including wood, ceramic tile, glass, marble, natural stone and concrete. But it is more durable than most woods, easier to clean than natural products and warmer than stone or marble. Luxury vinyl can also be combined with other products for a true designer look. Particularly suitable for the kitchen or bath, it can be used throughout the home and should be installed by a professional.

An alternative to natural bamboo, woven-vinyl echoes the striations of its "cousin" but is softer underfoot. Chilewich LLC makes the unique material known as Plynyl, a woven-vinyl that resembles a grass mat, and is a direct glue-down.

SO MANY CHOICES

Wood, tile or carpet? Once wall-to-wall choices were simple. Today the possibilities are endless. Innovative products range from as little as \$7 a square foot for some cork, bamboo and concrete to as much as \$75 a square foot for some natural leathers. Using alternative flooring preserves natural resources, ensuring more resources for future generations. □

See Sources on page 174.