

Words to the Wise

Linoleum Flooring Makes a Comeback

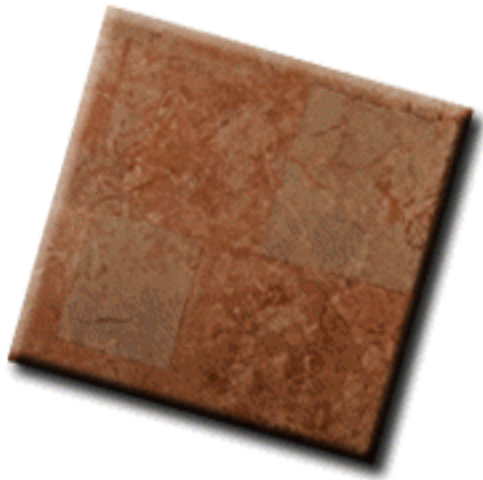
Linoleum is making a comeback, and not just with homeowners doing period restorations. While it's certainly true that linoleum can replicate the original '30s, '40s and '50s floors found in many older homes, its practicality, vibrant colors and "green" advantages are making this product increasingly popular for contemporary homes as well.



The ingredients in modern day linoleum (one popular product is called Marmoleum and produced by Forbo) are much the same as the ones originally used to invent the flooring 100 years ago. Linseed oil is a mainstay, and is created by pressing the seeds of flax plants.

Rosin, the sticky substance found in pine trees, is another important ingredient. When combined with linseed oil, rosin gives linoleum its properties of strength and flexibility.

Wood flour is added to help bind pigment into the flooring, giving linoleum the variety of colors available today. Other ingredients include cork dust and ground limestone. The finished product is pressed onto a jute backing.



Linoleum's ingredients are all renewable resources, and are created using low levels of energy. One of the largest "green" advantages for homeowners is gained when it is used in a new or existing home. Because of its primarily plant-based ingredients, linoleum emits no VOC's (volatile organic compounds), unlike the gasses given off by other flooring products and adhesives.

Linoleum also contains antibacterial and hypoallergenic properties that have caught the interest of medical facilities and hospitals.



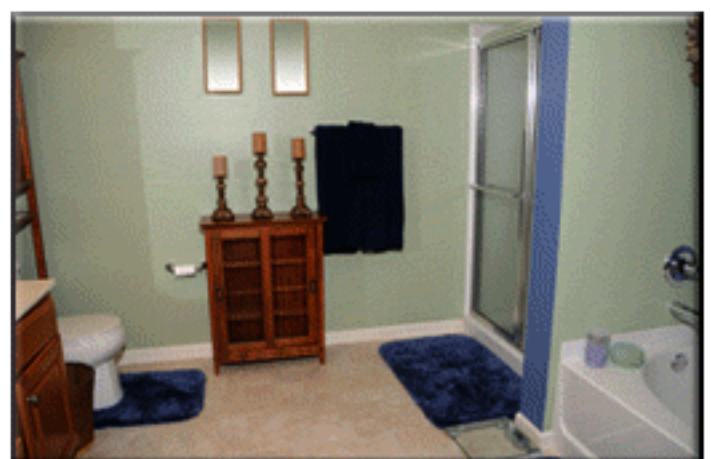
According to recent research, antibacterial properties of linoleum prevent microorganisms, including salmonella and staphylococcus, from multiplying. In addition, smooth floor coverings, such as linoleum, have been shown to decrease the presence of dust mites by reducing the accumulation and embedding of dust and dirt. Dust mites are major triggers of allergic reactions in people with allergies, asthma or other respiratory problems.



Linoleum products are also used in institutional settings because of their durability, the same factor that has endeared the product to homeowners. This flooring has an estimated life of 40 years, compared to 15 years for sheet vinyl. And because linoleum's color permeates the entire product, the color never wears away. By comparison, vinyl flooring has patterns printed onto the surface.

Linoleum is sold in sheets or square tiles, but is not as easy to work with as vinyl, which cuts easily. Linoleum is heavier and more awkward to work with, and needs to be cut with a flooring knife. To make the flooring easier to install for do-it-yourselfers, a product called "click" flooring has been created to allow squares to be clicked together.

Forbo now sells almost 90 percent of all linoleum used in the U.S. Their product, Marmoleum, comes in over 100 colors and includes color families such as neutrals, grays, greens, blues and sunset colors. Eighteen border colors and patterns are also available.



Once a linoleum floor is installed, it can be walked on, swept or vacuumed immediately. However, it must sit and "cure" for at least five days before it can be mopped. Linoleum should never be flooded with water or exposed to harsh cleaners, especially those containing ammonia.