

Floor

Unit

10

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Floor

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this unit the candidate will be able to:

- ✓ explain the need for suitable flooring for the room,
- ✓ describe how to choose suitable flooring keeping in view the functions of the room.

A floor adds comfort, colour and texture to an interior. Being such a large surface, it has a major influence on the room's style and atmosphere. Floors are both expensive and inconvenient to replace, so the factor which should be considered is 'it should be durable.' This applies not only to the material but also to the fittings.

Suitable Flooring

Deciding on the right floor for a particular room is not about the taste alone. Consider the shape and size of the room, its architecture, furnishings, style, the amount and quality of natural light and the room's purpose. Once all these elements have been carefully weighed, you can consider the different materials that might work in the room. The first step in the flooring process is to plan and determine a room's overall use, appearance and personality.

Kitchen floors need to be durable and easy to clean, so choose surfaces like tiles, stones, varnished wood, or good quality vinyl. In bathrooms the flooring must be able to withstand the effects of water and steam. Hard tiles are practical for bathrooms, but if something warmer and softer is required, consider good quality vinyl, a natural floor bamboo or sea grass. For the living room wall to wall carpet is luxurious, warm and quiet, but it may not be the most practical option. One solution is to introduce two levels of flooring: a foundation floor, such as wood, that is exceptionally durable, and a second layer, for example, a rug. This second layer will help to moderate the noise associated with wooden floors. Another advantage of using this combination of flooring is that the room can be altered, season by season, simply by removing the top layer in summer, and in the winter putting it back.

Architecture and Flooring

Architecture provides the style definition. Look to the mouldings, window openings, baseboards, mantelpieces and other architectural elements and you can determine whether the space is formal, classical, modern or rustic. Often the short cut to determine a house style is to know the date of construction, and then to match it to interior and exterior design elements.

Right Floor for the Room

Think about the effects of reflected light. Very shiny floors look cold; matte flooring gives the appearance of softness. The way the light plays off the grain, wood or stone is part of their beauty; use materials to highlight these characteristics. Light coloured floors make a room look larger, while dark colours promote an intimate atmosphere. Texture, too, contributes to the mood; a smooth unbroken surface seems streamlined. A mixture of materials gives the impression of depth and complexity. Natural materials bring the outdoors inside. For a modern look, use pale neutral floor colours to give the room a clean uncluttered appearance.

Colour and Pattern

The size of a pattern is important, but scale is even more important. Generally small patterns work best in small rooms and large patterns work best in large rooms. Make sure that the scale of the pattern is consistent with the overall design statement.

Modern Looks

Materials appropriate to sleek, luxurious modernism are polished stone, rubber, neutral wall to wall carpeting, or a sophisticated vinyl. Cork flooring is also popular these days.

Classic Looks

Stone and wood flooring tiles are the modern shortcuts to a classical interior.

Country Look

Mexican tile or honed stone are an important part of establishing a well loved rural design. A country farm house interior is best with wide pine boards. Another choice for this kind of décor is linoleum.

Existing Floors

Floors are both expensive and inconvenient to replace so do not make any radical decisions on floor coverings before studying existing floors carefully. They might not need to be covered again but can either be polished, varnished, painted or repaired.

Wood Floors

If parquet and timber floors are in reasonably good condition without any gaps, splits, frayed or splintered ends they can just be polished and can then be covered with either rugs or left bare. If a floor is worn, the first task is sanding it. It can then be either stained a different colour – say, much darker, or maybe even a dark green or bronze - or bleached, or

whitened. An alternative is to paint it with either floor paint or with acrylic, emulsion paint. Another option can be a plain floor with a stencilled border or design.

Whichever treatment is chosen – plain, stained, bleached or painted - the floor will need to be sealed with two or three coats of protective varnish afterwards.

Vinyl and Linoleum Floors

These floors can be disguised by using oil based paints rather than emulsions, because emulsion does not grip on their surfaces. Before applying any paint it is essential to wash the floor thoroughly using sugar soap solution, and then rinse it before allowing to dry.



Concrete Floors

Paint is very effective on concrete flooring. Either special concrete floor paint can be used or, alternatively, oil paint can also be used. Whichever paint is used, it should be finished off with an acrylic floor varnish.

Tiled Floors

Existing tiled floors with cracked or unsightly grout can be cleaned and re-laid with new grout.

Juxtaposition

When planning flooring for a room do not think of it in isolation but in conjunction with the whole house flooring. Doors which lead off corridors and hallways are often left open, and glimpses of upper storeys can be seen from stairways. The floor coverings need to be coordinated, especially in a small apartment. It looks better if one colour is used for flooring throughout. Where different texture and colours meet at the doorways. i.e. carpet with tiling, a threshold strip should be inserted between the two to achieve a neat affect.

Types of Floors

The way the floor looks is important but other factors, equally important are: how much is the cost, is it easy to care for, and how long can it be expected to last? Most flooring options fall into three main categories:

- Hard Flooring
- Soft Flooring
- Flexible Flooring

Hard Flooring

The hard flooring usually covers materials that are extremely rigid with virtually no flexibility at all. Brick, tiles, stone and wood are different types of hard floors, all hard wearing surfaces, and are generally best if used with area rugs.

Brick

Brick is an unexpectedly good floor treatment, especially in the country: useful for halls, kitchens and cloakrooms. This type of floor should be laid on top of a solid, level base or concrete screed. Modern bricks used for floors are thinner and lighter than conventional building bricks. Once they have warmed up, brick maintains a comfortable temperature that is cool in summer.



Floor Tiles

Tiles can be installed in different patterns for interest and a border can be created around the perimeter of a room, using different shaped coordinating tiles.

Ceramic Tiles

Non-slip floor weight ceramic tiles can look highly decorative in the right setting and climate, and are pleasantly smooth to walk on. Ceramic tiles come in a variety of colours and styles.



Terracotta Tiles

Terracotta tiles come in various varieties. These are unglazed and like bricks they retain heat.



Quarry Tiles

Unglazed quarry tiles are tough, dense and non-slip, and are also absorbent to some extent. These are made from unrefined high-silica clay and look rustic.

Laying and Maintaining Tiles

All these types of tiles need a solid, level base and concrete screed. When tiles are laid a grout is used to fill the gaps. It is made from ground Portland cement and sand, mixed with water to form a quick drying paste. All unglazed tiles benefit from a liquid resin sealant which acts like a heavy duty polish.

Stone

Stone floors give an elegant look to a home. They last practically forever but are cold underfoot and usually quite heavy.

Flagstones

The term 'flag' refers to slicing stone into thin slabs. They usually come in irregular slabs and also although some are cheaper than ceramic and terracotta tiles they are more expensive to install. These can be used in hallways or in some other room on the ground floor.



Slate

Slate is often used as an alternative to marble, as it is much more stain resistant. These come in slabs and tiles and look best in squares or rectangles. The colours range from pale grey, green and blue grey to dark green, bluish-purple and black. The slabs are laid on a concrete screed or slab floor. Slate can be left untreated but it looks effective if sealed and waxed.



Marble

Marble brings a level of glamour and shine but is quite expensive. The most fragile grades are usually more decorative with the most interesting veining and colouration. The more solid grades are usually classified as A and B, with the more delicate ones as C and D. The disadvantages of marble are that it scratches and stains easily. It is laid on a concrete sub-floor.

Terrazzo

It consists of marble chips set in a cement base and polished to high sheen. Terrazzo is non-slip and durable. It is also laid on a concrete sub-floor.

Granite

Granite is cheaper than marble. It is less likely to stain and scratch and is also less slippery. Like marble it comes in slabs and very thin tiles, which means that it can be used in upstairs rooms as well. It comes in a variety of colours, in either matt or polished finish.



Concrete

It looks very attractive in tile form if it is painted or stained and waxed. It is also extremely practical, being both heat and cold resistant and also scratch proof.

Wood Flooring

Wood floor can be used anywhere in the house. Soft and hard woods can both be used for flooring, with softwood being cheaper. Softwoods include spruce, fir and pine; it should be finished with a polyurethane or oleo resinous sealer, and then polished if desired. For hard flooring maple, oak, cherry and walnut are often used.

Wood flooring comes in various forms: planks, parquet, and mosaic panels. Wood flooring is available in either solid or laminated wood. The laminated type consists of a thin layer of hardwood veneer. The solid wood floor can be nailed directly to a wood sub-floor. If wood is laid on the concrete a vapour resistant would have to be used on top of the concrete, in order to act as a barrier against the moisture. Laminated flooring however can be laid straight over the concrete.

Soft Flooring

The soft furnishing category largely consists of carpets and rugs.

Carpets

There are two main types of carpet: cut pile and loop pile.

Cut Pile Carpet

As the name suggest the fibres of the carpet are sheared off creating soft tufts above the carpet backing. This type of carpet is usually made of wool, nylon, polyester, acrylic or a combination of these materials. Wool is a resilient natural fibre that is moisture resistant, but it is relatively expensive compared to other carpet options. Nylon is strong and works well when mixed with other fibres. Polyester is less expensive and has a luxurious feel. Acrylic is a lower priced option to wool. Though it looks similar to wool it is not quite as stain resistant.

How a carpet will wear depends on various factors, not just the material it is made of. Twist and density of the fibre are very important. Higher numbers are better on these scales. Very closely tufted or woven carpet means that it will wear more. Carpet tufts that are not dense will have the tendency to mash down over time.



Loop Carpet

The other type of carpet is loop-pile carpet. The carpet fibres form loops above the carpet backing. Berber is a typical example of carpeting of the loop type.

Loop pile carpeting tends to be more resilient and hard wearing because of its construction. However it is not as soft to the touch as cut pile carpet therefore it is not as comfortable underfoot.

Looped carpeting is often made of olefin fibres which are naturally stain resistant. There is a degree of variation in style within the looped carpet category. The loops can either be uniform in length or sometimes varied to create interesting patterns.



Cut and Loop Carpet

This type of carpet combines both cut and loop varieties. Some of the fibres are left in looped condition and other are sheared off to create soft tufts. The combination at different heights above the carpet backing can create interesting patterns. One of the greater benefits of carpeting is its warmth in comparison to other types of flooring.



Alternative Floor Coverings

Natural matting such as sisal, coir, woven rush and sea grass all provide attractive alternatives to carpeting. It is however tough on feet and slippery on the stairs but it provides an excellent background for rugs.

Rugs

Rugs are not only soft underfoot but they soften hard floors and add colour and texture to a scheme. They are particularly useful to make zones within a room and to draw disparate items of furniture together.

Another advantage that rugs have over fitted carpets is that they can easily be moved around or replaced. A considerable number of ethnic rugs are widely produced all over the world. Roughly they fall into three categories: ethnic cotton, dense woollen piles, thick woollen weaves.

Oriental Rugs

‘Oriental rug’ is the umbrella term for rugs, carpets, prayer mats runners and kilims made by nomadic tribesmen. The rugs were made to hang on walls and draped over seating as well as being laid on floors. Oriental rugs are still produced in designs of the past and relate to the area to which they belong. Kilims are made using a technique of flat weaving, which is also known as tapestry weaving.

All designs in oriental rugs are based on traditional patterns and reflect the life, culture and customs of the Islamic and Far Eastern worlds. The six traditional rug producing regions are: Persia, Turkey, Turkestan, the Caucasus, India and China.

Persian Rugs

- These are considered the finest of all oriental rugs.
- Persian rugs are generally woven in wool, using the special Senneh knot.
- Persian rugs are almost always rectangular or elongated rather than square.
- Their colouring is usually rich. Indigo or crimson are usually the main colours. Other colours usually include yellows, greens and browns.
- The Persians were the only Muslim people to represent men and animals (in hunting carpets).
- The designs are usually based on floral motifs, showing flower beds, pools and streams.
- Vase rugs are more formal motifs i.e. vases holding flowers.
- Persian rugs made before the eighteenth century can be classified according to their design: garden, vase, animal etc.

Turkish Rugs

These come from the Anatolian region and are often called Anatolians by dealers. These differ from Persian rugs, not only in design, but also in colours.

- The pile used in Turkish carpet is usually longer than the one in Persian carpet, and very few colours are used.
- The most common background colours are red and blue. Prayer mats are, however, usually woven in green as being the sacred colour.
- Patterns are bold and geometric.

Indian Rugs

- In Indian rugs the designs mostly feature animals, birds, trees and flowers.
- The colours are usually lighter than those of Persian Rugs.
- The pile is usually longer than the Persian rug.



Chinese Rugs

- Most common colours in Chinese rugs are blues, yellows, peach and rose.
- The designs and motifs are based on Chinese art. The designs include animals, especially dragons, and also flowers like the lotus, daffodil and pomegranate
- They usually have a longer pile.

Caucasian Rugs

- These come from the Caucasus which is the mountainous area between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.
- The distinguishing colours are red, blue, green and beige.
- The designs, though varied, are always severely rectangular.
- Animals, flowers and birds are common motifs.

Turkoman Rugs

- These come from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan.
- Red is the prominent colour. Although different tribes and areas can be identified by specific colours, i.e. Baluchis use a lot of dark blue with rust-red and bluish-mauves.
- Designs are usually geometric, with the rose motif also found in these rugs.



Flexible Flooring

These are hard wearing, easy to maintain, and relatively inexpensive. Flexible floorings are not only practical but are extremely decorative and warmer underfoot than tile or stone. Flexible flooring is dominated by rubber and vinyl products.

Linoleum

This is made of linseed oil, pine resins, wood, ground cork and pigment pressed onto a jute backing. It comes in sheets and tiles. It is non-slip, reasonably priced and burn resistant. They come in a wide variety of colours and the material can be inlaid to make handsome designs. Linoleum is glued to a spotless level surface, preferably plywood. The floor is easy to clean.

Cork

Cork is an easier alternative to both vinyl and rubber. It is durable, economical, soft and quiet underfoot. It is a very resilient material and is made of compressed and baked pieces of the bark of the cork tree. It is efficient in bathrooms, kitchen and play areas. It comes in sheet and tile forms. The tiles are usually pre-sealed, if unsealed they will have to be varnished after laying. Cork is available in a range of colours.



Vinyl

This is made from polyvinyl chloride. Vinyl flooring is comfortable to walk on, reasonably priced, easy to clean and available in a huge choice of colours and designs. Like linoleum, plain colours can be combined to form good looking patterns. Vinyl is found in cushioned and flat varieties. The cushioned variety is slightly bouncy and makes a very soft tread; it also provides some sound insulation. Solid vinyl comes in plain colours but also in realistic copies of marble, terrazzo, lime stone, wood and terracotta tiles. Vinyl is available in both sheet and tile forms.

Rubber

Rubber flooring is more hard wearing than vinyl and supplies greater sound suppression as you walk on it. It is resistant to burns and dents. It is available in both sheet and tile forms and comes in a range of colours, including, primaries, pastels and industrial black. The studded and ribbed versions are very non-slip, which makes them useful in bathrooms, but they are also difficult to clean and are not really suitable for kitchens.

Suggested Further Reading:

- ✓ *Residential Interior Design: A Guide to Planning Spaces, (2007), By Maureen Mitton, Courtney Nystuen*
- ✓ *Building Systems for Interior Designers, (2010), By Corky Binggeli*