

Floorcoverings lay flowers at your feet

Americans' growing preference for more color and decoration in home furnishings may be the tip-off to a new mood of national optimism, according to one expert, Wendy Claussen, head flooring stylist at Armstrong.

Claussen commented on the current decorating scene as the latest floor-coverings fashions debuted in January showings in major U.S. cities.

For the past few years, Claussen related, the Natural Look has dominated home furnishings. In vinyl flooring, that translates into patterns that look like wood, quarry tile, brick or stone and into neutral colors like beige and almond.

While neutrals and naturals continue strong, there's a definite swing to decorative flooring patterns and away from bland hues to pastel colors like creamy yellow, teal green and even lilac. Other colors on the rise are dusty rose and seafoam blue.

"The economic outlook is brighter and so are home furnishings," observed Claussen. "They often mirror larger social trends, which isn't surprising since they don't exist in isolation from the rest of our culture."

AMONG TYPES of decor, the Country Look and Victorian each still has a large following, but now Art Deco, the sleek, streamlined look of the '20s and '30s, is emerging as a factor.

Hallmarks of Art Deco are lacquered wood, rounded-off furniture and color schemes that tend to run to mixtures like plum, peach and gray. Good examples of pure Art Deco design are New York's Radio City Music Hall and the Chrysler Building.

"It's appropriate to mention Chrysler," Claussen said. "That company has come roaring back — just like the economy."

"Americans by and large have put self-doubt behind them, and our country is beginning to take a leadership role in the world again. I think that's what we're seeing in today's more assertive home-furnishings styles."

That assertiveness conspicuously includes what the Armstrong executive terms "the return of decoration." For example, in vinyl flooring, quarry tile patterns used to be just that: Reproductions of plain unadorned quarry tile.

Now the same tile patterns are showing up decorated with — of all things — flowers. In fact, florals are the hottest decorating motif today for all sorts of furnishings, not just floors.

Consumers won't go from plain to highly decorated home furnishings overnight, though.

"This is an evolutionary, not revolutionary, process," asserts Claussen. "Right now people prefer patterns that aren't too busy."



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