



Natural or carpeted, floors draw design raves

WHAT TO do about that scarred and scoured floor? You can take it down to bare and beautiful or you can cover it up. Both solutions have merit.

After years of being hidden under wall-to-wall carpet, hardwood floors have re-emerged in all their underfoot elegance. Now that they're back, they're even easier to maintain.

Thanks to a new interest in hardwood, companies are now producing flooring prefinished with several coats of polyurethane to make waxing obsolete.

The new hardwoods also come in a wide variety of styles, widths and colors - from chestnut parquet to bleached-white solid oak, to a wide plank, ranch-style wood with walnut pegs.

The new floor finishes make cleaning a breeze. The Oak Flooring Institute cautions that water and wood don't mix and offers a few general guidelines for keeping hardwood floors clean.

For routine cleaning, remove surface

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dirt with a dry mop, a slightly damp mop or a vacuum cleaner. Stains can be wiped with a damp (not wet) cloth.

Rub chewing gum, crayon marks, candle wax or tar with ice cubes wrapped in a plastic bag. When the residue is brittle enough, scrape it off. Use cleaning fluid to loosen any substance still sticking to the floor.

DISTRESSED WOOD floors that have been wire brushed to an antique, textured appearance, are particularly notorious dustrappers. Vacuuming is the best way to remove surfaces. If soil remains, sweep and re-vacuum.

If floors are scarred and worn, you may have to refinish them before they're fit to walk on. The entire pro-

cess takes about five days, so plan ahead.

The first step is to replace any damaged boards with cut-to-fit strips of the same type of wood. Cracks should be filled with wood filler. Then sand off the old finish using a floor sander and edger. After the wood dust and surface dirt are removed, you're ready to apply the new finish.

Stains, paint, bleaches, penetrating sealers, varnishes and urethanes (resin finishes) are your choices. Varnishes tend to scratch and they can darken or yellow, so if the floor is in a high-traffic area, urethane finishes are your best bet.

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Spatter-painting a floor involves using a dark or light background color and then spattering dots of one or more contrasting colors with an almost dry brush and a bit of wire screen. The result is a special effect that can pull a room together by using the colors of individual elements.

Stenciling is popping up everywhere, from furniture to fireplaces to floors. One of the easiest painted effects to achieve, it needs only a stencil, paint, brush, ruler, and a steady hand.

For floors that are too far gone to reclaim, tiling may be the only solution. Once relegated solely to bathrooms and kitchens, tiled floors are making a comeback. Vinyl tiles now come in an array of colors and textures unheard of 15 years ago. But the trend in tile is imported.

ITALIAN AND DUTCH tiles are being used to create richly textured floors that complement a wide variety of decorating schemes. Marble has become newly affordable, with the advent of smaller, less expensive tiles at \$4.25 to \$20 per square foot.

On of the drawbacks to bare floors is that walking on them tends to be noisy. In a city apartment or town house, it's almost essential to use carpeting in one or more rooms to keep the noise level down.

Comfort, warmth and a "furnished" look can be achieved with wall-to-wall carpet or room-size rugs. In the past, experts have recommended against the use of carpet when easy care was a de-

sign issue, but this is no longer true.

"The introduction of stain-resistant carpets has revolutionized the manner in which carpet can be used in the home," says Michael West, a consultant to Monsanto. "Floors are now protected from most household stains."

Tweeds, tone-on-tones and pebbled textures in rugs are a help in hiding dirt and lint. Patterned designs and stain resistant carpets are the wisest choice for areas in the spill zone.

Colors in carpeting run the gamut from neutral to noticeable, but Catherine Crane, author of "What Do You Say to a Naked Room?" offers this advice to prospective carpet buyers:

"IF YOU CHOOSE A bright and lively colored carpeting, the color must be repeated somewhere else in the room - say on the sofa pillows or drapery trim. Otherwise, it will look as if you just moved into someone else's home."

Some rooms may demand less formality - that calls for a rug.

A neutral fiber rug may be the best choice, and these grass or straw rugs are easily maintained. Vacuuming will remove everyday soil and undyed rugs can be washed with soap and water.

For the past decade, though, the last word in rugs has been Oriental. The deeply toned rugs are perfect for traditional homes and the lighter pastels work well with more informal styles.

Most rugs come from Persia (Iran), China, India, Pakistan and Turkey. Each region has distinctive styles. Persian rugs, for instance, are known for their soft colors and all-over designs. Most Chinese rugs feature soft shades; symbols, such as trees, clouds and dragons, and sculptured pile.

The size, fineness (number of knots per square inch) of weave, intricacy of design and, rarely all contribute to the price of an Oriental rug, but they are affordable.

Even carpeting can be treated a rug. Trim a carpet to create a space within a room, exposing natural wood.

Since a floor has to be underfoot anyway, you might as well make sure that it has a style of its own.

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HOMEFACTS

Rooms most frequently redesigned

Living room	80%
Den/family room	85%
Bedroom	57%
Kitchen	51%
Bathroom	39%
Dining	32%



SOURCE: A.E.D.