

Green flooring gains a strong footing in hospitality

By Christopher Ostrowski

Another day passes and despite the obstacle of a recession, environmentally sustainable elements persevere within the realm of hospitality furniture, fixtures and equipment and specifically flooring, where suppliers have evolved from dabbling in "green" product to overhauling entire processes to perfect newly-green goods that—surprise, surprise—generally cost no more than non-green product.

It's a marked difference in the hotel flooring industry from only a few years ago. Now, if only the manufacturers can make the end users—the hotels—realize the FF&E world has honestly changed in this green manner and buy in full force.

"Certainly, sustainable product is getting more and more attention in hospitality. And the brands are the leading drivers of sustainability in hospitality because they're trying to get their individual brands to be green and are setting the new standards accordingly," observed Mark Abbas, the vp of hospitality and retail at carpet manufacturer InterfaceFLOR. "That's been going on for a few years now. And actually, FF&E is the newest part of the sustainability focus in hospitality because the biggest focus had been on energy usage and water usage—things that cut costs immediately."

All the while, of course, the recession may have kept the green flooring movement from possibly being at an even higher evolutionary level than it is now, according to several experts. "The recession has taken some momentum away, but [green flooring] is still becoming more prevalent," admitted John McIntosh, the vp of sales for Signature Carpet's new Signature Crypton Carpet division that is purely focused on making the carpet manufacturing process and its product 100% green from the very chemistry at its foundations. "It starts in the corporate arena and trickles down. It should be something everyone is very interested in and we now have some leadership with Starwood's Element brand, for example. So once the leader breaks from the pack everyone will scramble to catch back up."

McIntosh's Signature Crypton Carpet is a partnership between Signature Carpets and Crypton and uses the Crypton fabric technologies that have produced stain-resistant fabric for many years. At the heart of the partnership for the hotel sector is the EnviroCel eco-friendly polyurethane carpet backing that was developed specifically for hospitality and residential applications. EnviroCel replaces more than 90% of the petroleum-based

polymer normally found in polyurethane with biological-based polymers derived from domestically grown soybeans, according to Signature.

In addition, the low-volatile organic compound (VOC) EnviroCel contains Celceram, a highly refined material recovered from the coal combustion process in an electric utility plant.

Celceram has also helped increase the carpets' dimensional stability. Furthermore, EnviroCel also incorporates post-consumer recycled plastic from soft drink and water bottles as well.

Similarly making the full commitment to the sustainable carpet movement is Lexmark Carpet Mills, where, according to its vp of sales, Sam Burger, "Everything we produce in house is a green carpet

that by 2020 the company will have zero negative impact on the environment and be completely oil-independent in terms of its carpeting materials and manufacturing process.

"That's the path that we're on," Abbas asserted. "Seventy percent of the energy used to create carpet is in extracting oil from the Earth. So if

we can minimize and eventually eliminate the use of oil and nylon, we'll eliminate carpeting's negative impact. We want to eventually have a 100% post-consumer recycled content carpet. We have 33% post-consumer recycled content now. When factoring in the post-industrial recycled content we also use now, it's made up of 70% recycled material. We call this product the Convert Collection."

For those hoteliers worried that such a product as the Convert Collection can't produce the designs of traditional carpet or will cost more, Abbas assuaged those fears, noting there is no extra cost and that from what was once only six available colors, 65 are now available for manufacturing.

Then there's the competing realm of hardwood flooring and specifically bamboo flooring when it comes to environmental sustainability. Heralding the benefits and beauty of this flooring option is Teragren, the U.S.'s leading manufacturer of fine bamboo flooring, panels and veneers. Teragren's latest strand bamboo flooring collection is called Portfolio and is 154% harder than red oak, according to Ann Knight, the company's executive vp and global brand director.

"The Portfolio flooring is stable and has several green attributes while providing a warmer look in hotels than carpet," said Knight, whose company has been working with bamboo flooring for 15 years now. The Portfolio collection is eligible for two credits through the LEED program because of its use of a rapidly renewable material in bamboo and because of its low-VOC-emitting nature.

Clearly, with the manufacturers churning out an increasingly impactful amount of green flooring by the day, hoteliers no longer can keep their heads in the sand, ignoring the evolution and claiming "green" is unaffordable or unavailable. In addition, experts also say education must continue.

"There's still a lot of education that needs to happen out there," Abbas said. "The designers understand sustainability and they're trying to educate the hoteliers and we're trying to educate everyone in the hospitality industry. It's just a process that takes time."



Lexmark Carpet Mills' Moroccan Fretwork and SeaScape carpet (inset).



Teragren's Portfolio collection of bamboo flooring.



Welcome Home is part of the Signature Crypton Carpet collection.

exclusive use of Chitosan as an anti-microbial ingredient in the yarn. "It's an all-natural component made from shellfish and we've been using that for about two years now. It's mold resistant," Burger said.

The passion and pursuit of green has additionally been a hallmark of InterfaceFLOR, which has been at the green game for quite a while. In fact, it's so invested in this green business movement that it formed Mission 0, a goal hinging on the fact