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## Walk On It

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Need a flooring with flair? A world of materials awaits you.



After the walls, the floor is the most visible surface in a house. And because the floor is such a commanding presence, home buyers typically spend a great deal of their spending power to make a personal style statement with it.

The floor, says San Francisco Bay Area–based Interior Floor Design, is “the foundation upon which we build our castles, our empires, our humble abodes” and “a reflection of who we are, how we got here, [and] where we want to go ... .” Well, the floor may not be as profound as all that for most people, but you get the idea: It’s a big deal.

Whether out of style preference or complacency, most consumers choose to stick with traditional options—wood, vinyl, ceramic, carpet. These materials serve buyers well, and they have proven themselves over the years. But for those willing to walk on the wild side, there is a vast world of materials to choose from: recycled rubber, cutting-edge Italian and Spanish ceramic tiles, reformulated linoleum, carpet tiles, woven vinyl, and even concrete.

After years as an “alternative” material, once exotic bamboo flooring has almost worked its way into being classified as a mainstream option. Today, it is regarded as a high-quality material that is durable, attractive, and sustainable.

Bainbridge Island, Wash.–based Teragren, known for a variety of bamboo products, has a new offering called Synergy. Unlike traditional end- or flat-grain bamboo, Synergy is a strand product that is manufactured by fusing bamboo strands with adhesive. The company claims that Synergy is about 150 percent harder than red oak and 125 percent harder than North American maple.

Most people are familiar with cork boards, fish bobbers, and wine stoppers, but fewer may be aware that the material can be used as flooring. “The resilient quality of cork makes it a great option for areas where people stand for long periods of time,” says Lancaster, Pa.–based Capri Cork. “It is easier on the limbs

than other hard surfaces.” Because the individual cells of cork are closed, the material does not easily absorb liquids. As a result, it performs well in wet areas.

For those who want to step out even further on the edge, there is leather. But not just any leather. Mississauga, Ontario–based TORLYS recently unveiled a new floating floor system that is made with 65 percent recycled leather scraps from the manufacturing of jackets, belts, and handbags. The company mixes the leather with 35 percent natural ingredients such as resins. As the company explains it, the leather is adhered to a high-density fiber core and a cork backing for comfort, warmth, and quietness. So far the reviews have been good.

“We’re absolutely thrilled with the positive response we have received from the design community and consumers who are seeking a highly styled and sustainable alternative flooring,” says Charles Lammers, the company’s vice president of U.S. sales. “They love the combination of unique rich looks, durable wear, and environmental benefits.”

For the truly intrepid buyer, there is aluminum from AlumaFloor in Addison, Ill. The material is the epitome of urban cool, ideal for lofts, high-end condos, live/work spaces, or adaptive reuse projects. AlumaFloor can be designed in any shape a buyer wants, the company says, and is machined so pieces fit tightly and need no grouting.

Of course, there are things to remember no matter what flooring option you’re considering. First of all, alternative materials are not for everyone. The trick is to know when and where they are appropriate.

It is highly unlikely, say, that a family with kids will choose metal (though given the material’s durability it may not be such a bad idea). Leather seems highly impractical in a kitchen, but it may work nicely in a study or an office. And bamboo may be all the rage, but—depending on the finish—it is important to know its limitations with heavy foot traffic and high moisture. If you keep these things in mind, you will help your buyers choose a floor that they’ll be happy to walk on and show off to guests for many years to come.



**Strands of Time:** Synergy, unlike traditional bamboo floors, is made from bamboo strands that are combined with earth-friendly adhesives to create a surface that is harder than red oak and North American maple. It features a wear-layer of strand bamboo and a cross-ply bamboo core for stability. The product is available in planks measuring 7 11/16 inches wide and 72 inches long. Four colors are available. Teragren. 800-929-6333.

[www.teragren.com](http://www.teragren.com)

*Credit: John Gran en*

<http://www.builderonline.com/products/walk-on-it.aspx?page=1>