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## Discreet Charm

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The varied and exotic materials, shapes and sizes for flooring is catching the Indian real estate industry by storm.

By Jayashree Kini Mendes

One may walk all over it and if it's a sound floor, it knows better than to protest. And no, we are not talking about the stealth factor here. As an application, the right flooring material is for the long haul. Flooring is not always only tiles. Other materials that contend with tiles are carpets and rugs, wood, resilient, laminate, and stone, which are the key products available in the global flooring market. Tiles, among these, have been witnessing a greater demand than other products. With the rise in building and construction activities and increasing interest of people in interior decoration, this trend is likely to remain so over the forthcoming years.

What has led to this one aspect of building materials gaining ground can be attributed to the rising number of residential constructions across the globe, not to forget reconstructions and renovations. Such movements have convinced flooring tiles manufacturers that their business seems sturdy for some years to come. With a significant expansion in the construction industry in various Asian nations, thanks to the high economic growth, the Asia Pacific flooring market is anticipated to continue staying on top over the next few years. According to a report, compared to other regional markets, Asia Pacific has been reporting a higher demand for these components and accounted for more than 42% of the overall market in 2016 alone.

### ENHANCING BEAUTY

In terms of interior design, flooring becomes integral to the style of a space. But overall, developers are the biggest clientele for flooring manufacturers, says Amit Shah, managing director, Classic Marble Company (CMC). "Having been in the business for over two decades, we understand the finer nuances of construction and recommend the most suitable building materials for a given project. Flooring, which is the most important application for any kind of project, is suggested based on the economics and utility of a building."

For luxury projects, marble reigns for almost all flooring needs. CMC offers natural marble and engineered marble under its flagship brand, KalingaStone, for such projects. However, for many ultra-luxury projects, natural marble makes the cut because of its inimitable designs and timeless beauty.

Speaking of how they go about a project, Vivek Talwar, CMD, Nitco Ltd, says, "We meet the architect to discuss and present our product range and try to understand the products they use in their projects. This also offers us an insight into their upcoming projects and application areas according to their mood board and colour palate, post which we guide them on the right tile options that can be used for that particular project. Once the architect shortlists products of their choice from our catalogue, we send them samples to give them an experiential of the product. Once specifications are done with, an inquiry is passed on to the purchase department where we submit quotations and negotiate."

Flooring has come a long way from the days when mere sand or mud tiles offered solace to settlers. The last few decades have seen much innovations with new and varied designs, patterns, and, of course, at a different cost. Rahul Bhugra, director, Antica Ceramica, says, "Today, there are numerous options available in the market to suit different budgets. I believe there is no difficulty in designing flooring for customers as long as you focus on their requirements. Importantly, as a vendor, it becomes our duty to make them aware of the trends and new varieties that have been introduced in the market."

Bhugra breaks down the different kinds of flooring that are suitable for different homes. He adds that if one is talking about luxury homes/Millas then natural stone flooring, hardwood flooring and luxury vinyl tiles have always been the first choice. Further, for mid-end and affordable homes, timber tile and laminate flooring are the best options as they offer a rich-feel factor of hardwood flooring within the budget and are low maintenance. Ceramic tiles are another option when it comes to affordable budget flooring.

Parul Mittal, director, Greenlam Industries, believes in offering the best. "Every query we receive is dealt with a personal touch wherein we make it a point to meet the developers and understand their needs. We ask them the species of wood they want to work with, the finish and colour and the plank size and offer what suits the project best," she adds.

### INSTALLATION TECHNIQUES

Installation of floors is a project by itself. Other than what will make up a floor, the installation of the selected material can also make or mar a space. Considering that installation is mostly manual, it is necessary that trained and experienced masons and contractors are appointed for the job. In case of tiles and stone, the traditional method is employed, which is cement and mortar. Mittal says that Mikasa Floors are easy to install due to its PlankLoc technology that lets one install the products with no glue or any other adhesive. The planks have been designed with an interlocking mechanism that helps them fit into place easily and efficiently. Talwar offers a deeper insight. "Select the appropriate notched trowel based on the size of the tile. Using the smooth side of a trowel apply a layer of adhesive on the substrate and work the adhesive vigorously into the substrate to eliminate dust that may be on the surface. Quickly apply the adhesive to the required thickness on the substrate. Place the tile onto the fresh layer of adhesive while the mortar is still wet and embed it using a rubber mallet. Remove any excess material protruding in the joint to ensure the proper depth of the grouting of the joint," he ends.

Shah of CMC says that Kalingastone can be applied on floor with wet cladding. Wet cladding is with cement and mortar or adhesive fixing. Nowadays, an adhesive fixing is most preferred.

Satinder Chawla, MD, Span Floors, says, "We follow techniques that we have learnt from Europe and the USA and have over a century of experience in working with wooden floors. We stock installation tools and materials and train teams. Regular training is conducted to both the in-house supervisory teams as well as the outsourced installation contractors."

environment friendly too

Flooring too has come under the scanner of environment-friendly. Bhugra says that the use of eco-friendly and recycled raw materials options is helping sustainability and growth of the wooden/laminated flooring industry in India. "Our timber tile collection is one of the best examples when it comes to eco-friendly flooring. Also glass and ceramic tiles and reclaimed and distressed wood looks in laminate flooring are trends that can draw attention. We have tiles made of porcelain, rustic, timber and stone in a plethora of patterns and colours. Made of naturally occurring substances, these tiles give homes a distinctive look," he adds.

"As a trend, we've noticed that most consumers first factor in is the cost followed by aesthetics whereas it always should be function first, followed by cost and form," says Shah. In terms of environment-friendly, flooring materials are no different. The method of production determines its environment-friendliness. The more energy consumed including wastage, the lesser it is environment-friendly. CMC's KalingaStone marble and quartz, and also Techlam and Iris range of ceramic tiles are eco-friendly flooring options," he adds.

Mittal adds her company's methods and says, "We use resources and materials responsibly and make efforts to reduce waste. We do not use toxic materials that may be unhealthy for the environment, employees or users. We have been awarded the PEFC certificate which is a leading forest certification organisation."

Such initiatives that were little known only goes on to show how the industry has grown and advanced.



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