

*Buyer's guide to*

# FLOORING



Oak Amber wood flooring by Mikasa Floors

What goes on down below is definitely something that should be high up on your list of priorities. Choose the right flooring for your home and tread easy.

**F**looring is a major part of any home, and is the most used surface on a daily basis. It is also a feature that determines the look and feel of a room – whether it be the cool appeal of marble or the warm, lived-in feel that wood flooring imparts. It makes sense therefore to give careful thought to what goes on your floor, as you would have to live with your decision for a long time. Changing your mind would come at a cost!

A good way to start is by considering how the flooring would fit into your design scheme. Think about whether you want a statement floor or an unobtrusive one that blends seamlessly into the background; whether you want a formal or informal look, and so on.

Knowing your family's need for durability and maintenance is also important. Easy-to-clean and hard-wearing materials, for instance, would be a time and effort saver in the long run. Heavy-use areas, such as the kitchen and bathroom, should be able to handle heavy foot traffic, spills of all kinds, potential water damage and heavy things being dropped on them.

Finally, consider your budget and see what you can invest in or where you can cut corners without compromising quality. With the plethora of flooring options available, it's not hard to find the right floor; rather, it's more difficult to narrow your choice. Read on to learn about the different flooring options most commonly available and find out what best suits your needs.

## Stone

Stone is as natural a material as you can get. It holds appeal mostly due to its unique physical properties and looks. No two types of stones are alike and are thus inherently subject to variations and unpredictable characteristics, such as veining and mineral deposits. Usage and application may therefore vary from stone to stone. You can use almost any type of stone as long as it is properly laid, polished and sealed.

**Marble:** Strong and durable, this stone is a favourite, mostly due to its distinctive veinous patterns and lustre. It is usually heavily veined, shows lots of grains, has a smooth texture, and comes in a variety of colours. The unique trait about natural marble is its unpredictability – no two slabs are ever exactly the same, and there's a great variation in design. This is more so in the case of Italian marble, which has stronger veins and more vivid patterns. Although Italian marble is softer and more expensive than Indian marble, it is more popular among consumers for its sheer visual appeal. Natural marble often cracks and so it is usually sealed with a layer of fibre after the fabrication process for strength and protection. However, its main component being calcium, it is susceptible to acids such as vinegar and citrus.

**Granite:** Granite is the hardest of all stones (second only to diamond) and has the highest load-bearing capacity among stones. Its durability and resistance to weathering make it a popular flooring choice. It has visible crystalline formation and texture and comes in a range of colours. Some pits and fissures on the surface are normal and can be evened out by applying sealer. Unsealed granite could absorb stains leading to dark spots or discolouration. Granite is not easily damaged, unless great force is applied, and chips can be sealed with a mixture of epoxy and granite dust. As it is a slippery stone, a glossy finish is not recommended for flooring. It is best to go for a textured or blasted granite.

**Travertine:** A type of limestone that is usually cream, beige and yellow in colour, travertine is characterised by small pits and troughs on the surface, which give it a natural coarse texture. This porous stone can be used in its natural state on walls but if it is to be used as flooring, it is imperative that the pitted surfaces are filled with epoxy or resin. Unsealed travertine equates to a maintenance headache, which is best avoided. Besides, sealing and polishing give the stone a finished and

## Other stones

**SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES:** Apart from natural stones, you can also opt for fossilised stones (such as petrified wood) and semi-precious stones, such as Mother of Pearl, Agate, Onyx, Jasper and Rose quartz. Mostly imported from Europe and the Middle East, these stones offer a range of colours and opacity and translucency. Although visually appealing, these stones are not as hard as marble and are generally used for highlighting rather than complete flooring. Price wise, they are on the expensive side.

**ENGINEERED STONES:** These are man-made products derived from a mixture of natural stone chips and acrylic or polyester resin or cement. Because their properties and production can be controlled, these stones have several advantages over natural ones. Cultured stones are available in many textures, designs and colours, weather very well, retain their colour and are maintenance free. Moreover, they are easier to install because they are lighter than natural stone. Some common types of engineered stones are terrazzo, agglomerates and engineered marble.



Statuario marble from Classic Marble



Travertino by Antica



Stonex has a huge variety of marbles from all over the world.



Natural Merbau strip from the Pergo Wood Parquet Collection



Oak Stain wood flooring by Mikasa Floors



Notion Finline flooring



Antique white and black oak planks floors at Junckers

Bisazza's range of wooden tiles sit in pretty mosaics reflecting moods that range from sombre to vivacious

refined look. Travertine is not as strong as marble and tends to get etched with acids, leaving marks and rings.

**Kota:** This is a fine-grained variety of limestone quarried at Kota district in Rajasthan. Its many positive physical properties make it an excellent material for flooring. Apart from being tough, Kota is non-porous, non-slippery, acid and alkali resistant and forgiving towards stains. It is quite affordable, too. Although it lacks the lustre of marble or granite, Kota is a popular choice and can be used both outdoors and indoors. It can be processed in different sizes and thicknesses and can be finished as desired, whether honed, polished, brushed or tumbled.

**Cuddapah:** This is a black limestone with a smooth granular surface that is quarried in Cuddapah district, Andhra Pradesh. Very hard and brittle, this stone can be used in extreme temperatures. However, with prolonged exposure to the sun, it tends to decolourise and take on a greyish black tone. There are many finishes possible with this stone. It takes on a nice dull black colour when polished.

## Wood

Whether it is dark cherry or light ash, wood flooring has a timeless look and gives a house a warm feel. There are many wood types of different hues and grains to choose from. Wood floors are warm





underfoot, fairly easy to keep clean, long-lasting if properly sealed and maintained.

**Hardwood:** This is solid wood with no additional materials. Hardwood flooring comes either unfinished or pre-finished. While unfinished hardwood requires sanding, staining (optional), and sealing after installation, pre-finished hardwood is ready to use upon installation; it has a stronger coating and wears better than unfinished wood. Unlike other wood flooring options, hardwood cannot be installed straight on top of concrete or your existing floor. It must be nailed or glued to a sub-floor and this can be a messy affair. Hardwood floors face various issues like expansion and contraction, and are prone to scratches and dents. On the bright side, it can be re-sanded numerous times, thus extending its life.

**Engineered wood:** This flooring type is made of several layers of plywood topped with a veneer of real hardwood. The base layers are laid in perpendicular directions, giving the wood dimensional strength and stability. Due to its stable base, it stands up to moisture better than solid hardwood and works well in kitchens, basements and bathrooms where light moisture might be present.

'Engineered wood floors have a longer life. Solid wood floors need to be re-polished, re-oiled and re-lacquered more frequently as opposed to engineered wood, which require minimal maintenance and need to be re-sanded and polished after about 10-12 years of usage,' says Parul Mittal, Director of Marketing & Design at Greenlam Industries (makers of Mikasa Floors).

Engineered wood comes pre-finished (sanded and sealed) in strips or planks. Installation is much easier as compared to hardwood floors. This type of flooring is usually installed as a floating floor on top of the existing floor, which should be level and stable. There are now advanced joint systems, such as Pergo's PerfectFold click technology and Mikasa's PlankLoc, which make the installation process simple and quick, without having to use glue or nails.

## Ceramic & porcelain tiles

Ceramic and porcelain tiles are popular options for flooring and are available in a wide range of colours, designs and sizes. Ceramic tiles are hard-wearing, stain-resistant and don't need sealing, so they are easy to look after. They are fairly durable and moisture-resistant. Porcelain tiles, which are made from high-fired, refined clay, are denser and more durable (and more expensive) than ceramic tiles. Porcelain is also much harder than natural materials like marble. Being a non-porous material, it does not absorb any liquids, and is a versatile, hard-wearing choice for flooring.

'Ceramic and porcelain tiles are a popular choice among buyers who are always concerned about maintenance of materials they use in their homes,' say Ridhi and Vidur Arora, co-founders of Intersekt, a home décor

