

# Reducing Your Carpet Footprint

## ECO-FLOORING

by Judi Burton

You've agonized and chewed your nails to the nub looking at your embarrassing floors. You've tried desperately to get that spot out of your carpet, but it keeps coming back no matter how often you get on your knees and scrub it. The people who lived in your home before you smoked, and you can still smell that acrid odor every time you vacuum. It's as if the smell just gets lifted into the air and wafts around the room like a bad memory, only to settle back down again later. Little pieces of food are stuck under the corners of curling vinyl flooring, where the cabinets meet the floor. You've stopped using toxic cleaners, but the thought of the residues haunt you as you barefoot it across the room. In fact, maybe you'd better get your shoes. Your gut is telling you to get new flooring, and, honey, it's time and you know it.



Brewster Buck

But where do you begin? What are the choices for eco-flooring, and are they affordable? I met with Brewster Buck of Island Floors, in Pawleys Island, to learn about the options out there for us. His tall football-player physique and Southern-sounding name could lead one to presume he was a gas-guzzling good ole boy with no concern for the environment, but that presumption would be dead wrong.

Actually, Brewster is one of the greenest guys I know, and his showroom proves it. Half the flooring products he offers are green and sustainable, and he's been leading the green revolution since 1984. He schooled me on the pros and

cons of the different types of natural flooring.

### Bamboo-liscious

Bamboo is essentially a grass that can be cut and grown every three to five years. If you have your heart set on bamboo, look for Moso bamboo. It is the best, densest and has a five-year cycle for sustainability in the environment, and the carbon exchange is virtually one to one. Moso bamboo is a very hard material, and is denser than oak and pine. In fact, it is just as dense and durable as pecan planks. The look is quite beautiful, and can be used in matching durable kitchen countertops and lovely tabletops, too.

### Put a Cork in It

Cork comes from special cork trees that live for 300-800 years. Every 10 to 20 years, the bark is harvested, with no harm to the tree. The bark is then used to make stoppers for wine bottles and for flooring. It is naturally impervious to liquid or rot, and has a pleasant, bendable texture. The cork itself makes for attractive water-resistant and resilient flooring, and has been used for its insulation and sound-deadening qualities as well. On those frigid winter morn-

ings, there is no need to tiptoe across the cold kitchen floor, because a cork floor always feels soft and warm. Yoga studios tend to favor cork because of its bendable, almost mat-like texture and the fact that a gong sounds really good in a cork-floored room. "As far as yin, yang and feng shui, cork is the ticket," said Brewster. "It has a zero carbon footprint; you can't get any greener than cork."

## Linoleum Luster

A hybrid of cork, linoleum is made of pine rosin, pine flour and linseed oil, with jute backing, and is 90 to 100 percent natural, and a lot less expensive than solid cork. In fact, the making of true linoleum is considered an art form, with resurgence in popularity during the '70s. Not all linoleum is equal, so make sure the one you select is true linoleum. A couple of drawbacks to natural linoleum are that it doesn't last as long as some other floor materials, and needs to be protected and resealed often. If it isn't installed correctly, it can curl at the edges and suffer scratches to the finish.

## Hardwood for Tree-Hugging Saps

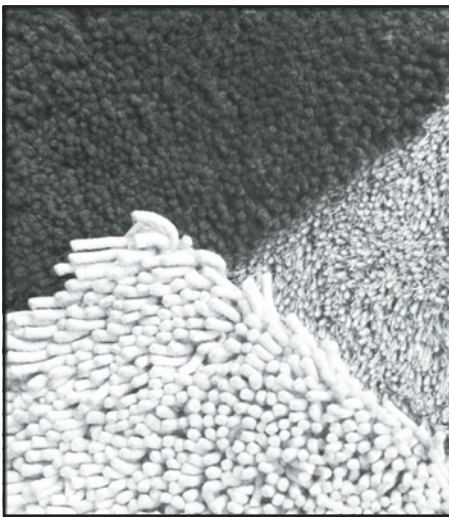
Reclaimed hardwood is always available for flooring. Very old wood can be recovered from the river bottom or reclaimed from old, demolished barns. But, if you want all-new hardwood, it is best to look for companies that are good stewards of the forest. For a beautiful Brazilian cherry, ash or American oak, get a product that has a "chain of custody." This tracks the wood through each step of harvesting, and holds each company accountable for its part in acquiring the wood. You pay a premium for it, and careless uncontrolled logging is a threat to old forests. "We'd better slow down, and we'd better slow down fast," Brewster said, with a heartfelt sigh. "We have not been very good stewards of our own country, let alone product that is coming in."

## Woolly Mammoth

Wool is the gold standard for beautiful carpeting. Wool is sustainable, as



Cork



Wool Shag



Natural Fibers

sheep are sheared each season. Sheep are grazers, and are allowed to graze naturally, and have a much lower carbon impact than grazing cattle. In some applications, wool carpeting may be difficult to keep clean; and if you treat it chemically to protect it from moths, you may lose that all-natural appeal.

## Native Natural Fibers

Coir, sea grass, sisal, hemp and jute are all outstanding natural fibers for floor covering. You are in no danger of exposure to nasty pesticides and chemicals, because these plants are not tasty to insects. They are often hand-woven, so the attention to detail is spot on, and they can be used for anything from area rugs and doormats to wall-to-wall floor covering. They look very chic and give the entire room a very earthy, natural, beachy feel. It may not be plush and soft like wool, but, hey, some of us like it a little rough and natural.

## Your Carpet Is Corny

Most carpet today is made from petroleum oil (nylon, polyester and olefin). What better way to get revenge on the oil industry than by instead buying carpet made from corn husks. Companies like Mohawk make a line called Smart Strand that is made with energy-efficient technology and sustainable material. The carpet is not completely chemical free, but is softer than hemp or sea grass.

## Keeping it Clean and Green

So, now you have your beautiful all-natural flooring that is eco-friendly. I bet you're afraid of even stepping on it, let alone allowing your kids and dogs to play on it, but I'm here to tell you to relax. There is a very good way to clean your carpeting, and it doesn't involve toxins, mold-growing water, or work.

You may have seen the All Dry N Green Carpet Cleaning team driving down the road in their green Toyota Prius. I don't mean only green as in eco-friendly; I mean green like bright green. They were probably on their way to extract dirt and stains from yet



another health nut like you. Ashton Moore and Damon Kramer, owners of All Dry N Green, gave me a demonstration of their service. They showed up early Tuesday morning at my house and unloaded two oversized vacuum-like machines out of their Prius. They explained that the machines have two round brushes on the bottom that rotate toward each other and vacuum to pull the fibers up, and actually take

about 87 percent of all the dirt, dander, mold spores, and dust mites out of the carpet. My carpet went from dingy to bright very quickly, and the carpet looked as though it had been combed.

Next, Damon pulled out a bucket with the word "Host" on it. He opened it and showed me the product they were about to use, the texture of wet sawdust. Damon smiled



at my look of confusion and explained: "It's like little sponges. We sprinkle it on to the carpet and the machine presses it in. Dirt gets stuck to the product and then we pull it back up. There is no sticky residue, which means the dirt is less likely to stick back onto the carpet once we've gone." I was a little skeptical, so I sat back and watched for a little bit as they threw the



sawdust-looking material around my master bedroom. Later, I found out from Brewster that it's not actually sponges or sawdust, but natural cornhusk material.

As they worked, they told me a little more about the positive aspects. "Have you ever had a stain that kept coming back every time you tried to clean it?" asked Damon. "Yep," I replied. "Several, and they all came back worse than before." He nodded and continued pushing the machine around. "That's because the dirt was pushed down into the pad. When the carpet dries after a wet-type shampoo, it acts like a sponge and pulls the wet dirt back up again. It's called 'wick-back.'" Thinking back on how many times I had tried to shampoo an old carpet in my old apartment, I could see how that made sense. "Also, because it's dry extraction, you don't get that 'wet dog smell,'" he added, having been greeted by my two Labrador retrievers. He stopped for a minute to empty the filter, and lo and behold, dog hair galore. "You could make another whole dog out of that," Damon laughed.

Something else was beginning to happen: The house started to smell cleaner. It wasn't an overpowering perfume smell like you would get from a commercial cleaning product, but an earthy, fresh smell. It was woody and pleasant like hay or fresh grass. It was one of those smells you can't put your finger on, but it wasn't bad in the least. I commented on it to Ashton. He said that the EPA standards

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Ashton Moore and Damon Kramer

for all-natural carpet cleaning say that you can't have any perfumes. I thought of my mother and her aversion to mall stores like Bath and Body Works and Hollister & Co., where they practically crop-dust you with cologne and fruity scents as you walk by.

I was really happy about the fact that I could walk around without getting my feet soaked, and that they weren't using any of my water. I asked Damon what type of flooring was this okay for. "We can use it on everything from wool to tile with grout. We have several different types

of brushes for different surfaces."

Before I knew, it they were done and the carpet was completely dry and clean. They loaded everything back into their Prius and were on their way. Now, as I write this, I see my dogs sprawled out across the carpet in deep sleep and I am not cringing. For what Damon and Ashton do, the price is very good. The floor will be cleaner for twice as long, and I am pretty sure I'm not breathing in any more dust mites or mold spores; at least not from the carpet.

For more info on eco-flooring, contact Brewster Buck at Island Floors and Rugs, in Pawleys Island, at 843-237-4704. See ad page 37. And for more info on All Dry N Green Carpet Cleaning, contact Ashton Moore and Damon Kramer at 843-457-3088. See their ad page 24.

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