

floor trends

- Coverings 2020: What You Would Have Seen
- Hospitality Trends
- Moisture Management Revolutionized





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On the Cover: Although we weren't able to walk the halls of Coverings in New Orleans this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, we've rounded up a selection of products that would have been seen at the show, like the Studio collection from Adex. See more on page 28.



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■ Grey Riven Slate SCB-ST16



BY TANJA KERN,
CHIEF EDITOR

CHANGE of Plans

After so many weeks of Zooming, Skyping and FaceTiming, our team is ready for some face-to-face meetings. At the time I'm writing this in early April, there is no real sense as to when the opportunity may arise again. That said, we're embracing technology and have been really excited about how many of our industry colleagues have been doing the same.

Due to the cancellation of the Coverings 2020 show in New Orleans, show management switched gears to create a digital show experience, Coverings Connected. Coverings has always done a great job educating and growing the vibrant tile and stone industry. The online experience, which ran April 20-23, offered a digital showcase for its 900+ exhibitors, opportunities to learn via live webinars, video tours of the latest tile and stone trends by interior designer Alena Capra, and interviews and life chats. They shifted gears in a big way, proving that learning and connecting is still possible digitally even when we're under quarantine.

As we all adapt to our changing reality and landscape, we are committed to providing you with the coverage across all flooring categories. As part of that mission, Heather Fiore, editor of our sister publication *Tile* magazine, rounded up a selection of the tile, stone and installation products that would have been seen on the show floor this spring.

With HD Expo cancelled this month and NeoCon cancelled for June, we are hustling to report on the latest trends and opportunities happening in commercial flooring. Our goal for next month is to offer you some fresh insight from leaders in architecture and design and the innovators developing the next best products.

We've had an influx of requests for online learning, whether it's through continuing education, webinars, or podcasts. Our team has rolled up our sleeves and created new ways for our readers to learn, through Zoom interviews, live social streams and photo galleries.

We are doing what we can to seek positive stories on how the flooring community can get through this unprecedented time. But let's get real: things are not great (unless you work at a company like Georgia-Pacific, who as of April couldn't keep up with demand). The immediate impact the coronavirus has become all too obvious. For those who have been around a while, it's reviving memories of the most recent recession. It's time for us to be change agents and embrace our new future, whatever that may look like. **ft**

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WHAT LIES AHEAD? A Conversation with Jim Gould

Jim Gould is the founder and CEO of the Floor Covering Institute. He is an international consultant who has served as chief product officer at CCA Global partners and was also the owner of Misco Shawnee, one of the 10 largest distributors in North America. Jim joined us recently at TalkFloor for a conversation about the changing floor covering industry. You can listen to this conversation in its

entirety at floortrendsmag.com. Following are excerpts of this conversation.

TF: Do you see the number of independent retailers growing, shrinking, aging or getting younger?

Gould: There's a major shift from independent local stores such as Joe's Carpet to national players, whether it's Home Depot, Lowe's, Floor & Décor or Lumber Liquidators. To be an indepen-

dent and not affiliated with anyone else is really tough. And it all goes back to the consumer and the shift in the way they buy. The path to market, where is the consumer going to buy, has been totally up ended with the millennial changing the way they buy compared to the baby boomer. The retail community is changing with more national focus and I think that's a good thing. So, the number of retailers is shrinking, but the size of


these retailers is growing and that's being caused mainly by the cost of software, technology advertising.

The whole shift in the way we advertise is an example. It's not the local newspaper anymore, it's got to be social media and the internet to educate the consumer because today the consumer is educated. Before they walked into the store, they've already done their research. It used to be they would walk into the store and have a salesperson explain the differences of the various products. Millennials don't like to talk to salespeople. They go on the internet, they make up their mind as to what they want and what they need, and then they walk into the store to buy, not to shop and not to learn.

TF: I understand that once Home Depot and Lowe's stopped building stores, the market share they had been building started being consumed by the likes of Floor & Décor,

As Jim Gould looks to the future of the flooring industry, he notes that there has been a shift in the way consumers buy, which researching and buying online.





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Lumber Liquidators and other big specialty players. Do you see that as something that's happening?

Gould: Oh, absolutely. You must remember the way Home Depot and Lowe's got into the business. It was when Color Tile went out of business. At one time Color Tile had over 800 stores and when they went into bankruptcy and withdrew all the corporate stores it created a vacuum that the home centers moved into. That has continued until today. Now with the home centers not building more locations, there is this void and that's where Floor & Décor, Tile Shop, and Lumber Liquidators have moved in and they're starting to take super store image focusing on floor covering, which I think is a very positive thing. Floor & Décor just keeps growing. It's a great operation, a great concept.

TF: Looking at these major players, Floor & Décor, Tile Shop and Lumber Liquidators, the amount of share they will amass ultimately depends on the number of stores that they build?

Gould: I think it's more of the markets they serve. It makes sense for them to locate in major markets and not in small towns. Their growth is really going to be limited by the size of their stores. They need to have enough population to support that size of a given store. So, you're not going to find a Floor & Décor in Columbia, Mo., but you might find a regional

player, or the buying groups come in and take care of that customer.

TF: You mentioned buying online. I've had some retailers discuss a fear they have about the major suppliers selling direct and I guess this means online. Do you see that ultimately happening and also others have told me that they'd see visualization software as being a pivotal element driving more online sales by increasing the comfort level of consumers toward buying floor covering online, what are your thoughts?

Gould: The second one first. There's no question that if the number-one driver for the purchase of floor covering is color and texture design, I don't think a person's going to feel comfortable spending the kind of money for a new floor based on what they see on a computer screen. The colors aren't that true. They're going to have to see something. If it's design, they will want to see the whole thing? If it's a solid color carpet, they would want to see a swatch I'm sure.

The other question you had is how big can it become? There you must divide it into product category. Something like area rugs. Absolutely. It's something they can pick out online, have it shipped to them like the shoe companies, if you don't like it, you send it back and they're of high enough value. They can afford to do that. If you're talking about wall to wall carpet, maybe you can pick it out from a swatch, but you

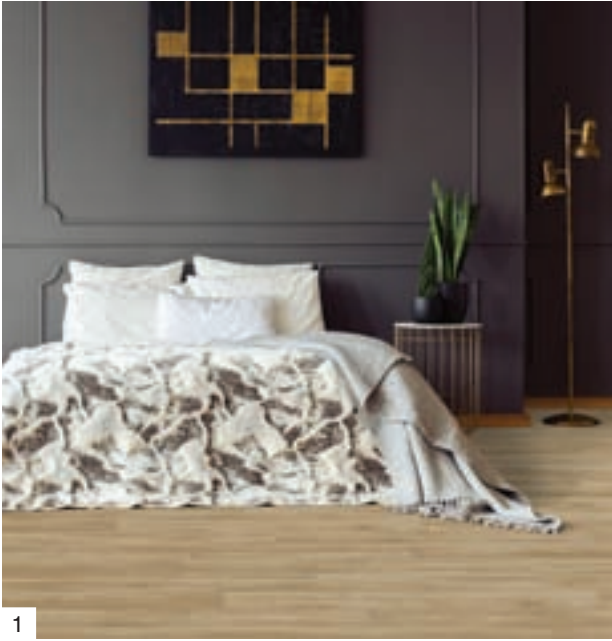
still need to have someone locally install it. There, we're our own worst enemies in some regards. When we started needing installation, that's something not anybody can do. You can ship the product in a box it's that much easier. So, the product category is going to determine how much business is going to be lost or controlled by the internet buyer?

TF: Looking at the distribution sector, we've seen lots of changes; we've seen a lot of players coming together. What do you see developing here going forward?

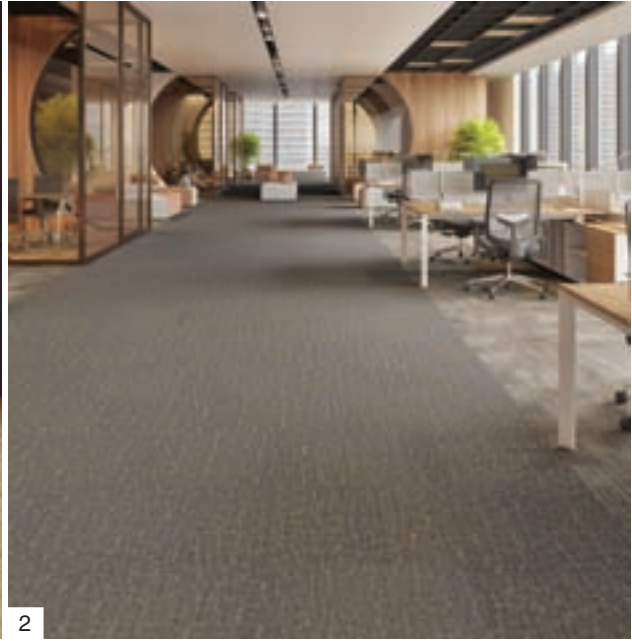
Gould: That's a good question. I think the overall answer is about shifts in margins. Take companies like Armstrong, Mohawk and Shaw, where they used to call it a distributor, that worthless parasitic middleman of the marketing chain. They now are sourcing as much product as they're making themselves, so they have in fact become virtually their own distributor. The thing is they have much higher overhead than say an independent regional or national distributor who can go out and source products pretty much at the same price and put the product together for their customers. So, the distributor today has to look around and ask why they are not competitive with a Mohawk and Shaw and Armstrong, because those are the organizations that are really going out and sourcing on behalf of the distributors and retailers.

So, the distributor can do that for themselves if they really get involved in the international market.

The real problem is that the customer is changing. We just talked about all the big box stores and national chains. Builders are now buying direct on a national basis, some of the buying groups are buying direct, Armstrong has agreed to sell the NFA direct. So, you have to ask how does a regional distributor compete if their customers be evolving into a national customer? I've been involved where distributors have put together alliances and they really have not been the most efficient group to put together something to cover the entire country and offer products to these big boxes. If someone put together a national distributor, I'm not talking about a conglomerate, I'm talking about someone who acquires enough distributors which would come under one management team that covers the nation. I think that would be a very effective tool for some of these national manufacturers that sourcing some of their products and in some cases the majority of their products rather than manufacturing them themselves. That's a dynamic that I think is very interesting and needs a lot of study, talk and thought, especially on the part of the distributors because the distributors are seeing their customer base shrink, business that is being taken by all the people we've already talked about. They must be able to compete on a national basis as opposed to the regional basis. **ft**



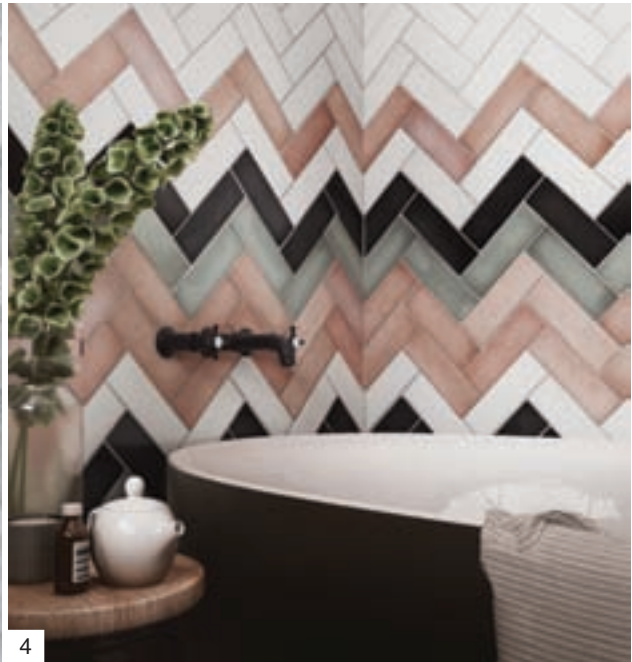
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4

1 Beauflor Relaunches Pure Collection

Beauflor has relaunched its Pure collection of luxury vinyl flooring, expanding its offering to include a mixture of 24 wood and tile visuals. The eight tile visuals offer a mixture of concrete and stone looks in earth-inspired colors and natural textures and the 16 wood designs showcase an array of colors ranging from stone gray to blonde to chestnut brown in smooth and wire brush textures. beauflor.com

2 Tarkett Explores Fashion Trends in Fabricate

Fabricate is the latest commercial carpet in Tarkett's portfolio. Developed in partnership with menswear designer Jhane Barnes, an innovative design technique was used to create a series of tiny repeating modules, creating an almost-solid visual and each six-foot repeat includes more than a 1,000 rotating motifs. To complete the design, Barnes created a palette of today's most dependable neutrals, plus some bright pops of color. tarkettna.com

3 Stand Out Quartzite Collection from Antolini

Antolini's Quartzite Celadon combines hints and hues that range from white to light grey and go as far as anthracite and black. A timeless symphony of colors, this material enhances expressive contemporary design. With Quartzite Celadon, Antolini offers a luxurious material for those who want to stand out. antolini.com

4 Nemo Tile Embraces Earth Tones in Cadence

The Cadence Collection from Nemo Tile + Stone highlights on-trend earth tones such as sand, rose, dusk, and jade for a total of 10 soothing colorways. From desert-emulating sand tiles to grassy jade tiles, Cadence's earth tones are sure to imbue calming natural elements into to any space. The collection features two sizes as well as a variety of different trim options. nemotile.com

A Focused, Fashionable Armstrong



Armstrong's new PVC-free vinyl sheet flooring, MedinPure with Diamond 10 Technology Coating.



Alterna Plank with Diamond 10 Technology captures the natural beauty of stone, ceramic or porcelain, while retaining warmth.

When Armstrong Flooring emerged as an independent business focused 100% on resilient after its split from Armstrong World Industries in 2015, the industry watched to see how the business would redefine itself. Fast forward to 2020—the company is demonstrating a renewed focus on the customer, fashion and innovation.

“Although it seems they are slow on the launch since the split of the companies, I think they are on the right track and the team they have in place is responsive, engaged and knowledgeable, especially the ones calling on me,” said Michael Longwill, president, of Carpet and Tile Mart.

“We are becoming much more customer focused as a company,” noted Armstrong

President and CEO Michel Vermette. “I would say it’s a different Armstrong than maybe you’ve seen the last couple of years. I think you’ll see a much more dynamic company and team.”

That dynamic is answering needs in the marketplace, including hastening product development and focusing operations to solve problems for customers in a world facing new challenges, such as COVID-19.

As customers search for domestic sources for supply, Vermette said the company has adjusted manufacturing shift schedules and overtime allocations in five of its six facilities. “We’re seeing some nice demand in our LVT and VCT, particularly commercial.”

In addition, the company is ramping up its product

development with fresh talent on the design team and speeding up timelines to go to market faster, beginning this month with the launch of a new PVC-free vinyl sheet offering that will answer the need of healthcare facilities around the globe.

“We’ve had some private showings and the feedback has been very good,” Vermette said. “We have a sizeable operation in China where we manufacture it—our team, our staff, they are very strong in healthcare. Let’s put it this way: the recent shock they’ve had over there is creating demand and the healthcare sector is looking for solutions and products.”

Armstrong is also fine-tuning its customer service for retailers.

“For elite and direct accounts, they seem to have

pulled out all the stops to facilitate business,” said Longwill, whose business is a member of the National Floorcovering Alliance. “The Elite program has everything a dealer would want—from nice displays, sample updates, marketing and advertising support including a web leads program, which they were the best at before the split.”

Armstrong’s Elite program offers a dedicated customer service team, free sample floors, samples to customers and self-inspect claim resolution.

“Most importantly, they say they will be offering unique product stocking opportunities that we should be able to make some extra margin on,” Longwill added. “I did see some new sheet good offerings that looked great.” **ft**

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THE GALLERY + CARESS®

The Gallery by Shaw Promotes Premium Floors



The Gallery by Shaw Floors cross promotes premium hardwood with Caress carpets.

Many of today's flooring consumers aspire to real wood, and a certain portion of those consumers demand the prestige of real wood. These consumers value style, design and prestige over performance attributes associated with other product types. Shaw created The Gallery collection with those consumers in mind.

"With smoked and unsmoked visuals, designer coloration, and much sought after white oak visuals, The Gallery is specifically designed for premium wood consumers," said John Ham-

mel, director of category management - hardwood and laminate.

The Gallery showcases a collection of premium sawn and sliced oak visuals that are hand selected by Shaw's design experts to bring natural artistry into the home. The hardwoods embrace time-worn character and age gracefully over the years.

"The timeless beauty of oak never goes out of style, making these hardwood styles a solid investment to live on and love for generations," Hammel said.

The research shows that consumers often buy hard and

soft surface flooring products together. In fact, the majority of hard surface consumers will begin looking for a rug just days after their floors are installed. In response, Shaw paired its popular Caress carpet collection and all-new The Gallery hardwood collection to cross promote both products and offer dealers a perfect premium solution from Shaw Floors.

"From a marketing standpoint, Shaw Floors applied a similar logo treatment to both collections making it easy for RSAs and consumers to identify this premium offering in the showroom,"

said Teresa Tran, director of soft surface portfolio management-residential. "Additionally, these collections will be positioned together on shawfloors.com, in our advertising and in our resources to arm RSAs with the cross-selling story."

To give consumers added confidence in their flooring decision, Floorvana + allows them to take inspiration to the next level. This award-winning tool allows consumers to take their flooring selection and see it in their own room with a real-time, augmented reality experience.

Pattern, Color Add Luxe Touches to Home



Caress by Shaw Floors showcases more design options in 2020.

Today's modern consumer wants to reflect their unique style in their flooring. Premium offerings, such as Shaw Floors' Caress collection, provide those unique visuals to match their personal design vision, according to Teresa Tran, director of soft surface portfolio management-residential.

Caress in 2020 offers more options to choose from to match personal style, from subtle and bold patterns to popular accent colors for wall-to-wall or rug options. To create these options, the company used Custom Tailor Tuft technology, which gives product designers more creative flexibility through

unprecedented loop control, three-dimensional effects for pattern enhancement, and enhanced dyeing characteristics for sharp, vivid colors. Designers then packaged these styles into four travel-inspired trends—Mediterranean, Nordic, Bohemian Chic and Zen—to help retail sales associates help customers find their perfect look.

Caress styles feature ANSO nylon fiber and a 20-year warranty on pet stains and lifetime on soil and stain. In addition, all new styles in 2020 offer added performance support of LifeGuard premium backing as a standard feature.

Karastan Extends Spring Promotion



Karastan's BelleLuxe engineered wood floors feature Karafinish, a low-gloss finish that emulates the elegance of traditional oil.

In response to the effect the novel coronavirus has had on flooring dealers this spring, Mohawk is extending its spring Karastan promotion through the end of June.

"We're trying to give you some extra months and some extra support," said Jeff Meadows, president of residential sales, Mohawk. "Also, there is going to be an opportunity for consumer for zero-percent financing. Those are all going to be through Synchrony and that's all through the end of June. We highly recommend digital advertising if you're going to spend that money during this time."

Karastan, which added new hard-surface collections for the first time earlier this year, has offered retailers support through in-store

merchandising and marketing campaigns.

"This event is going to be the first national sales that we have with a fully integrated hard-surface platform for Karastan," said Jason Randolph, vice president of sales, Mohawk. "We have a great foothold on the dealers that are targeting that premium customer and the wood product offering that we have launched this year is going to fit right into that category."

Before the pandemic hit, Randolph forecasted modest growth for the premium wood category. "We see unlimited potential for Karastan because we have not positioned ourselves in the hard surface categories in the past, so for us it's going to be all incremental business."

Customers Demand Beauty AND Performance



DW Select features uniquely bundled yarns to create dimension.

“In residential soft we continue to see growth in the pattern category,” said Laurie Dillingham, director of research and develop-

ment, Engineered Floors. “Where once, pattern was reserved for a small percentage of the business, we find residential consumers now very comfortable with small

scale geometrics and organic patterning as a dimensional contrast to the hard surface areas within their space. We are equally seeing the luster level in soft surface shift to a more natural, matte finish.”

This year, Engineered Floors launched DW Select featuring patented proprietary twistX technology.

“This collection of products explores both the nuances of natural materials as well as the simplistic beauty of the natural landscape,” Dillingham said. “Design and nature within the interior have coincided for centuries. Nature’s canvas embraces individuality like no

other, reminding us that in nature, no two things are exactly alike much like consumers distinctive design styles.”

While consumers want organically inspired products, consumers equally want practicality and performance. DW Select offers beautiful products which look and feel like a natural material while utilizing performance fibers and constructions appealing to today’s active households. “The PureColor twistX technology blend and bundle yarns in a unique manner to create subtle, time worn influences much like a hued patina creating rich dimensional colorways which pair nicely with our hard surface product offering,” Dillingham added.

Recreating the Look of Wool



Deco Impressions by Karastan features Karaloom.

To meet consumer demand for more styles, Karastan is employing an innovative technology that replicates the elegance

of woven wool—at a price point 30 percent lower than traditional wool carpets.

Karaloom precision stitching offers product designers the

ability to create more intricate and diverse large- and small-scale patterns, and the 2020 collection features an array of solid and tonal visuals.

“You’re seeing a lot more wool in the marketplace today from a lot of niche places,” said Brittany Stanley, senior design manager, Mohawk. “Consumers want a story to tell. In the past Karastan has been fairly traditional, and we want to provide a wider variety of patterns. Karaloom helps us with that.”

Karaloom enables Karastan to offer a much broader color palette. “Our wool products on average are offered in seven to 12 colors, and with Karaloom, we have up to 20.”



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STYLE TREND:

GLAM BAZAAR

Boho chic meets luxe glam in Glam Bazaar, a trending interior design style forecasted by Jennifer Farrell of Los Angeles-based Jennifer Farrell Designs. In Glam Bazaar, bohemia is elevated to a state of grandeur.

“We have this very exotic Moorish and Marrakesh-inspired feel,” Farrell described. “It’s as though we

are in a sun-bleached desert caravan, and we are the sultans.”

To set the scene, showcased at the Style Hub at the DISH pod during The International Surface Event, Farrell paired jute, rope and tan woven materials with gold and crystals for an added dash of luxe and sparkle.

For the color pallet, she turned to deeper hues in a range she’s dubbed “sun-

bleached spice market”. “Millennial Pink has been popular for the past few years, but now we are going to see that deepened as though it’s aged in the sun.”

Applying these colors throughout, on the floor, the Anderson Tuftex Kensington collection in Queen’s Gate was an ideal choice to compliment the pod’s textural richness and woven materials, and drawing eyes to a

focal point, Farrell placed an Iris US onyx-inspired porcelain slab in a deep rose hue on the center wall. Tying everything together, the warm, intricate patterns found in Shaw’s Islander were the finishing pieces to this display of opulent desert fantasy. **ft**

Above: Boho chic meets luxe glam in Glam Bazaar.



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TRENDS IN HOSPITALITY FLOORING

BY ANNA ZAPPÀ



In the first few months of the year, hospitality flooring professionals were optimistic about the continued growth in the sector. Now, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, and worry about the economy, manufacturers and designers alike are concerned but still hopeful about their recovery after this time of unprecedented challenge. *Floor Trends* spoke with industry leaders about the trends, and their thoughts on how hospitality flooring will continue to evolve and bring more comfort to our places of respite, needed now more than ever.

Even amid the current uncertainty, people still want an elevated experience complete with all of the creature comforts, wherever they are. We continue to see these residential trends, but hospitality design has gone beyond bare necessities or extreme luxury. “There’s a restraint now, because people want to feel nurtured in their home away from home,” said Lindsey Waldrep, vice president of marketing at Crossville.

Indeed, designs have gone from over the top to a more subtle approach, while still providing the luxurious touches that the public craves. The look—and feel—of the hospitality environment is key to ensuring that consumers will return to a restaurant or a hotel. Rather than considering a single trend of the moment, operators are moving from a macro to micro view when considering the design of a new property.

“Typically, you would start with inspiration material, and design your hotel based off of that mood board. Now, hospitality is taking the lead from things that are local

Left: Second Home rigid click LVT by Mohawk Group with an attached cushion backing.



Above: Aspecta Contours collection Chantilly Whalebone oversized herringbone.

Left: Yakedo Glazed Porcelain from Emser Tile.



and part of a community, versus just pulling from design trends in general that we see passing through the industry,” said Elizabeth Bonner, creative design director at Durkan. “We’re wanting the floor to take part in the story of the space again.”

Larger hotel chains are looking to boutique hotels and Airbnb for inspiration. It’s no longer about highlighting a brand logo everywhere or conforming to a cookie cutter look at every property. Regional artwork and furniture are sourced to create spaces which are truly unique. “A lot of hotels are really celebrating what’s special about the locale,” said Cindy Kaufman, Interface Hospitality’s director



Above: Chateau Windsor European Oak engineered wood by Duchateau.

of marketing. “Allowing the design to follow that narrative is dictating what’s happening on the floors instead of a brand standard.”

Wood flooring in particular continues to be specified for hotel and restaurant projects because of its timeless appeal. As designers move away from cold, industrial styles, wood is being used for the character it can bring to interiors. It’s also the perfect complement to biophilic elements like plants, sunlight, and ventilation.

“Wood has always played a role, whether it’s on the ceiling or the floor,” said Patrick Bewley, vice president of marketing at Duchateau. “The hospitality industry is utilizing wood to warm up a space but in a very natural way.”

Designers are pairing wood and throw rugs not only for a sophisticated residential style, but also for cleanliness. As anxiety about air quality, germs, and viruses grows, we’re likely to see this combination become a staple. Area rugs can be washed regularly,

and they can also be effectively used to mitigate any acoustic challenges normally faced when utilizing hard surfaces. These clear benefits have specifiers shying away from wall-to-wall carpeting.

“People are moving away from carpet for a few reasons,” said designer Lauren Rottet, founding principal and president of Rottet Studio, a Houston-based architecture and interior design studio. “A hotel room looks more like a residence if it has a hardwood floor and there’s a rug laid over it, that’s one. Everyone is so germ conscious, that’s another. No one wants to think about walking on a carpet that someone else walked on when it hasn’t been cleaned.”

Nicole Alexander, principal designer at Chicago-based Siren Betty Design, concurred, and said that designers at the firm use rugs for added sustainability. “We use a lot of vintage rugs in our projects. You can just pick them up and take them to the

dry cleaners. They help to balance the hard surfaces and the acoustics, and it’s another way of recycling, too.”

Tile and stone are appealing for many of the same reasons as wood, with versatility that designers want to be able to create ideal hospitality spots. “The tiles are so beautiful now, whether they’re porcelain or concrete. We’ll do a stone or porcelain entry, and then use some hardwood in the lobby, and then it might transition back to some kind of interesting tile in the restaurant,” Rottet said.

Although sound issues can be a problem when too many hard surfaces are used in one area, tile is beginning to appear more often in rooms, but with a light hand. Keeping costs down is also paramount today as business owners monitor the long-term economic impact of coronavirus on the industry at large.

Major renovations will no longer be a priority, so the longevity of hard surfaces is even more beneficial. “Hotels

definitely steer away from things that are too patterned because of the renovation turnaround—they don’t want it to look dated after five years. So, we’re finding quite a bit of the stone looks but with more subtle or unique textures, particularly for the guest rooms,” said Zoe Rahimi-Nolen, national account manager, hospitality, for Emser Tile.

Customization will continue to be important as hotels and restaurants look to rebound from the slowdown, and consumers resume travel or dining out. “When you talk about all of the unique experiences that hotels are trying to deliver, custom is the foundation. Everyone is trying to create something that is completely one-of-a-kind, and so if we weren’t designing customs, we wouldn’t be able to be a part of that journey,” Kaufman added. **ft**

FEATURED PROJECT
RAISED BY WOLVES, LA JOLLA, CALIF.



Raised by Wolves, a cocktail bar and retail store featuring a selection of curated, hard-to-find bar products and spirits, opened in 2018 at an outdoor shopping mall in La Jolla, Calif. It was an experiment for the Consortium Holdings, a development group that runs 15

hospitality enterprises that focuses on quality-driven products and a social environment built to encourage the sharing of ideas.

Named after the tale of brothers Romulus and Remus from Roman mythology, the bar takes an opulent approach to decor. Designed by Paul

Basile of BASILE Studio, the design was inspired by French Art Nouveau and Victorian Rococo Revival styles. The decadent space borrowed inspiration from London hotel bars and world-class hotels, and the floors feature custom parquet wood from the Duchateau Palais collection.

Above: Named '2019 Cocktail Bar of the Year' by Imbibe magazine, Raised By Wolves features custom parquet flooring from the Duchateau Palais collection. Design by Basile Studio. Image by Zack Benson.



FLOORING IN HOSPITALITY: Opportunity Will Knock Again

By Alan Rowell, Director of Sales, Aspecta

Times are more challenging for the hospitality industry than ever before. It's a tough time for selling flooring to this sector. New construction is slowing down, and many pipeline projects are being postponed as hoteliers furlough employees including specifiers and designers. Many manufacturers' existing orders have been put on hold as uncertainty grows about how long the COVID-19 crisis will last and what its ultimate effect will be upon the economy in general and hospitality in particular.

The value proposition of flooring can grow with the times. The primary appeal for hospitality is to help create spaces that differentiate from our competitors by giving that at-home feeling for a better guest experience. The appeal has not changed due to the circumstances of today. There's already been a trend towards more specification of hard surfaces and especially LVT in

hospitality, where it's moving from public areas into guest rooms and bathrooms. Given that movement, we expect usage to accelerate when travel and mobility are restored. It's an opportunity for flooring manufacturers to spotlight the relevant benefits of their products, setting the stage for architects and designers to specify accordingly when the market rebounds.

Now that we have time to reflect on the future, we need to consider how COVID-19 will change the way that hoteliers will need to operate their facilities. Collectively as a society, we've become much more aware of how germs and illness spread – and that includes hotel guests. LVT and other hard surface flooring's big strengths in a post-COVID world are easy maintenance/cleanability and hygiene. Hospitality A & D specifiers need to look at LVT with new eyes for these reasons.

Short-term, we may discover that now is an excellent time for hotels to renovate

to meet demand when the economy rebounds. With very low occupancy and most restaurants/bars closed, it's much easier to make upgrades without disruption and be poised for welcoming guests back in the future. So now is a good time to target those projects with the maintenance/hygiene message.

The need for product sustainability and transparency will increase given the current focus on the role of the built environment's effect on the physical and mental health of inhabitants/ workers and become more important than ever. Aspecta is one of the best-certified products in the flooring marketplace with our Environmental Product Declarations, Health Product Declarations and Declare labels. Given that downtime is a good time to expand our horizons, we find that more architects and designers are taking Aspecta's CEU "Biophilic Design & Resilient flooring" (available at AEC Daily). This course provides

an overview of the basic principles of Biophilic design and how resilient flooring specifications can support its expression in commercial design projects. Given that Biophilia defines aspects of nature that most impact and advance occupants' health, fitness, and wellbeing, biophilic design is more relevant than ever before – and an important selling point.

Let's be ready for when hotels, restaurants and shops reopen their doors by more broadly defining the role and contribution of flooring in a post-COVID world. **ft**



Alan Rowell, Director of Sales, Aspecta.

WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN

BY HEATHER FIORE



We may not have been able to walk the halls of Coverings 2020 in New Orleans this year due to the coronavirus pandemic and the show's cancellation, but there was no pause in new product innovations and designs. We've rounded up a selection of the products that would have been seen at this year's show. To see more, visit coverings.com.

Adex

The Studio collection's special glaze offers depth and character for understated movement and variation. Adex's ensemble includes highly embossed decos, artfully painted surfaces and three-dimensional trims — all in a deeply satisfying color palette. adexusa.com



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1 Apaisa

Apavisa manufactures high-tech porcelain stoneware cladding that is suitable for flooring and walls, and for use in both interiors and exteriors. The Wind porcelain tiles come in five colors and sizes, with a standard 10-mm thickness. The tiles are available in a variety of finishes, including Natural, Decor, Nonslip, Hexacon and Solid 2cm.
apavisa.com/en

2 Ardex

Ardex X 4 is suitable for setting most types of tile, including mosaics and natural stone over common interior surfaces, as well as over exterior concrete or masonry surfaces. It can also be used above or below uncoupling membranes. X 4 is water- and frost-resistant and very easy to apply due to its creamy consistency. Ardex mortars deliver performance and value for today's tile installations.
ardexamericas.com

3 Argenta Cerámica

Storm from Argenta Cerámica is a stone porcelain tile designed to be used indoors, which transmits softness and warmth. It combines the smooth texture of its structure with a balanced design. The tiles are offered in four colors -- White, Gray, Earth and Cloud -- and seven formats. Storm also has a non-slip version.
argentaceramica.com

4 Ariana Ceramica

Luce from Ariana Ceramica draws inspiration from the material quality of plaster, enhanced by a trendy color palette and metallic graphics from the Ariana Decora range. Four colors -- Piombo, Peltro, Acciaio and Perla -- feature a hand-troweled effect, while two others -- Verderame and Gold -- recall the look of brushed metal. These dry-pressed porcelain slabs and white body wall tiles can be used both indoors and out, on floors and walls in residential and commercial settings.
ariana.it/en

5 Atlas Concorde

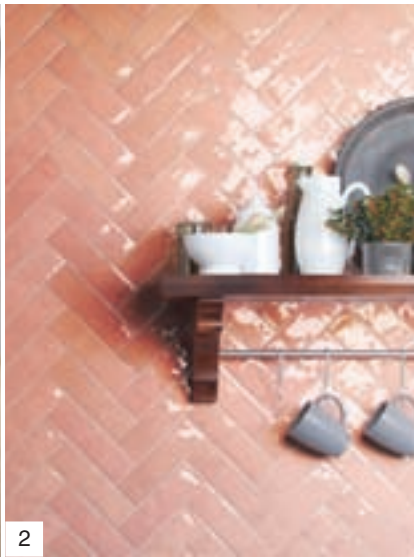
Inspired by oxidized metal, Blaze floor tiles from Atlas Concorde come in three colors -- Aluminum, Iron and Corten. Coordinated wall tiles are available in an additional blue-green color, Verdigris. The floor tiles measure 15 x 29.5, 24 x 24, 29.5 x 29.5, 29.5 x 59, 47 x 47 and 47 x 109.5 inches, with three geometric decor options. Wall tiles come in one standard size, 20 x 43 inches, with several decor options.
www.atlasconcorde.com

6 Azteca

The trend of metal in the world of interior design is always present, and for lovers of this style, Azteca proposes its Akila collection. It is a risky bet due to its innovative lapped effect, with which a spectacular metallic reflection is achieved. Depending on how the light is reflected, the pieces glimmer with linear shapes that create a continuous design.
azteca.es/en



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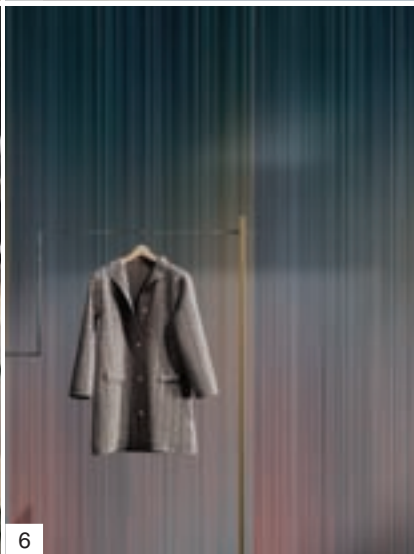
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1 Azulev

Chalk from Azulev is a plaster with a soft relief. The smooth bases are accompanied by two sets in 3D, Line and Pop. The Line forms a spike and the Pop are square, both with different decorative motifs that resemble small geometric inlays.

azulevgrupo.com/en

2 Bestile

Bestile provides a sophisticated design in its ceramics. Through creative aesthetics and high-quality manufacturing, Bestile creates innovative trends that correspond to people's demands and desires all around the world. Nolita Rose is a vibrant and mouth-watering series of wall and floor tiles, which is available in nine colors, two size formats and a high-gloss finish.

en.bestile.es

3 Century Ceramica

Old Stone from Century Ceramica celebrates the timeless elegance of natural stone. Four variegated colors -- Bliss, Greystone, Ancient and Cave -- give these porcelain tiles a historic, "lived-in" appearance. The natural surface is loyal to the authentic material, while a brushed version adds a hint of shine. The 20-mm-thick version with a special grip surface is perfect for outdoor pavers. The collection also offers wall tiles with geometric patterns for a unique decorative appeal.

century-ceramica.it/en

4 Ceramica Bardelli

Ceramica Bardelli teamed up with Italian design brand, Paradisoterrestre, to challenge the norms of nature with an original tile collection for interior floors and walls. Inspired by Giacomo Balla's Futurist Flowers, the designs are abstract and entirely hand-painted. The colorful, geometric floral motifs effectively add depth to any space, transforming the walls into pieces of art to be admired. The tiles -- which are available in Black, Gray, Light Pink and Mastic -- measure 10 x 10 inches and 10-mm-thick.

ceramicabardelli.com/en

5 Ceramica Fioranese

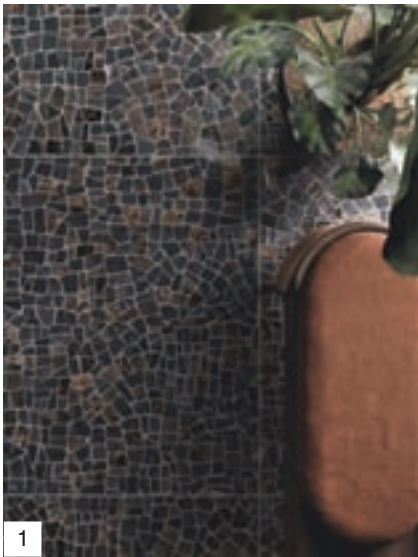
Ceramica Fioranese and Modenese design studio, Neropaco, created a porcelain tile collection that breathes new life into marble. Two decor options feature different patterns with curved shapes and mixed material combinations. Two green shades, Verde Intenso and Screziato Vivace, offer bold pops of color while Beige Antico, Rosa Cipria and Nero Fondo provide more neutral options. Suitable for both walls and floors, the tiles range from 3 x 12 to 29 x 58 inches in size.

fioranese.it/en

6 Ceramiche Caesar

Ceramiche Caesar introduces Join. These porcelain tiles for walls and floors blend the effects of concrete and resin, resulting in a dappled, almost cloudy surface quality. The collection features seven shades of gray, ranging from white to black, and three accent colors: Spice, Verve and Ink. Join also has a four different decor options, which are available in Caesar's Project Evolution large-format slabs, measuring 47 x 109 inches.

caesar.it/en



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1 Ceramiche Keope

Interno4 from Ceramiche Keope reimagines several different types of marble found throughout Italy's Lombardy region. With five styles, the collection features refined graphics, elegant veining and subtle pops of green, pink, gold and burgundy. A decorative Palladian terrazzo-effect style rounds off the collection, conjuring images of majestic Italian palaces. The 48- x 110-inch format recalls the grandiosity of large marble slabs, allowing for graphic continuity and minimal grout lines. keope.com/en

2 Ceramiche Supergres

H.24 from Ceramiche Supergres responds to the demands of contemporary architecture with cement-effect graphics, trendy colors and a wide range of sizes. The porcelain stoneware floor tiles and white-body wall tiles are ideal for both commercial and residential settings, and a 20-mm porcelain paver can be installed outdoors. Available in seven colors and six sizes, the decorative tiles feature damask prints, terrazzo patterns and floral motifs, which give the impression of hand-painted wallpaper. supergres.com



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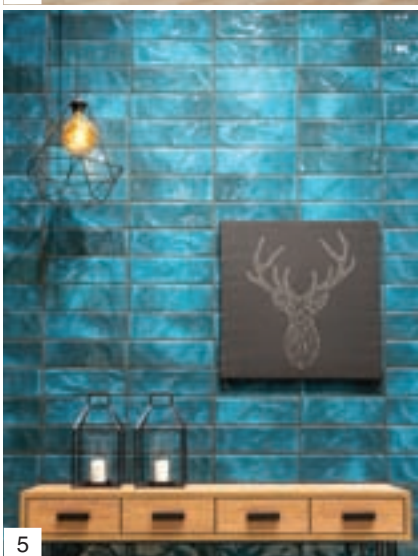
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3 Crossville

Swatches wall tile by Crossville offers the ultimate palette for interior vertical surfaces. This line is comprised of 16 colors grouped into three collections -- Necessary Objects (basic hues), Neutral Territory (foundational tones) and Brilliant Deduction (vibrant colors). Choose between satin or gloss finishes for 10 of the 16 colors. Beyond the color story, Swatches offers five calibrated field tile sizes and a full trim package, including bullnose and cove base options. crossvilleinc.com

4 Del Conca USA

Del Conca USA is introducing four new collections in 2020: Chamonix, Woodscape, Nature and Frammenti (pictured). Del Conca USA is taking inspiration from the evolving patterns of society's connection to the natural environment and its processes. Their collections draw from the idea that increased connectivity with nature creates a human centered approach in everyday spaces when these elements are able to coexist in an ever changing world. delconcausa.com



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5 Ege Seramik

Ege Seramik's new Verona collection offers a high-gloss wall tile featuring an incredibly unique "wavy surface." The 4- x 12-inch subway tiles are ideal for modern kitchens or contemporary bathrooms. Verona is offered in four colors and features a soft, subtle metallic accent. It is available in four colors: White, Anthracite, Turquoise and Taupe. egeseramik.com

6 Emotion Ceramics

A mixture of sophistication and creativity. New metal is a porcelain tile collection from Emotion Ceramics, which is available in three colors, Oxide, Pearl and Grey, with a glossy effect conceived to create environments full of history and new emotions. emotionceramics.es/en



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1 Emil Group

Medley from Ergon is an ultra-contemporary rendition of Venetian terrazzo with trendy colors and decorative patterns. The tiles are available in a range of four different compositions: Rock, with large fragments of marble; Pop, with pebble-like chips; Minimal, with tiny flecks; and Classic, a colorful interpretation of traditional terrazzo. The tiles can be installed on walls and floors, and can also be used to build custom furnishings like shower floors, vanities, washbasins and tables.

emilgroup.it/en/collections/tiles-ergon

2 Florida Tile

Lost River HDP from Florida Tile is a serene, yet powerful homage to nature's artistry. It features 12- x 24- and 24- x 24-inch formats in four color options: Cascade Beige, Rush Gray, Adrift Taupe and Torrent Black. It is entirely made in the U.S. in a Green Squared®-certified advanced manufacturing center in Lawrenceburg, KY, of 40% pre-consumer recycled content.

floridatile.com

3 Halcón Cerámicas

Origen is a new glazed porcelain tile collection by Halcón Cerámicas. A new style that mixes cement surfaces with a natural stone touch. The tiles are available in two sizes -- 24 x 28 and 24 x 24 inches -- and three colors -- Caliza, Acero and Sand.

halconceramicas.com/en

4 Iris

Iris U.S.'s new, made-in-the-USA Brooklyn collection is inspired by the industrial and artistic ambience of Brooklyn, NY, where different cultures and architectural styles generate an electric atmosphere. This cement-look porcelain tile collection is perfect for contemporary interiors, from shower walls to living room floors. Brooklyn is offered in two finishes -- honed and textured -- in six colors: White, Sand, Argent, Greige, Toupe and Black.

irisus.com

5 Island Stone

Add texture to everyday life with Island Stone's new Cascade collection of glass tile. Cascade features a textured finish that mimics moving water. Available in three patterns and six colors, the collection is perfect for a shower wall, powder room feature wall or kitchen backsplash. Rated for exterior wall applications, Cascade offers a dynamic alternative to matte or gloss finish glass tile. Each tile is back painted which allows for easy installation to achieve a flawless design.

islandstone.com

6 Jeffrey Court

Chapter 2 Vintage Studio from Jeffrey Court embraces the nostalgia of the traditional 3- x 6-inch subway tile and expands upon that tradition, modernizing the classic look. Available in six chic neutral tones, Vintage Studio represents the intersection between vintage style and out-of-the-box thinking and design, creating a subtle accent of color to any sophisticated living space.

jeffreycourt.com



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1 Lunada Bay Tile

The Tommy Bahama by Lunada Bay Tile collection adds five destination-inspired colors to its line of glass mosaics. The handcrafted glass tile incorporates creases, waves, wrinkles, bubbles and other surface effects, which combine with mesmerizing color blends to evoke sandy beaches, rolling waves and endless horizons. Inspired by some of the world's most treasured coastal landscapes, the collection's five new color blends comprise Twillingate, Skyros, San Blas, Cayo Coco and Kaikoura. lunadabaytile.com

2 Mediterranea

The tile design team at Mediterranea intensely studied the rich artistic and architectural heritage of Central and South America to produce its latest series, El Dorado. This series perfectly captures the rich dark browns and hearty gold tones seen in the region's native designs, jewelry and architecture. Manufactured in a 12- x 12-inch format, El Dorado is also offered with bullnose and mosaic sheets. mediterranea-usa.com



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3 Urbano Collection

MSI's Urbano Collection makes a style statement in a palette of cool and calming muted hues, like subtle creams, grays, and concrete-looks -- all the way striking black and MSI's newest addition, Navy. Available in 4- x 12-inch glossy wall tiles and 3D patterns, the Urbano collection has an authentic hand-crafted look and feel to give your interior a touch of contemporary detail. msisurfaces.com

4 Peronda

As part of his 50th anniversary edition, Francisco Segarra created a wall tile collection for Peronda known as FS Raku, which is inspired by an age-old pottery technique, raku. With raku techniques, pottery coated in a metallic glaze is fired in a special kiln until it reaches a bright-red firing temperature. It is then removed and covered in wood chips or slivers of paper to generate combustion and lots of smoke. This penetrates the pot, forming part of it. Offered in a standard brick format, FS Raku offers unique colors, textures, crackle surfaces and nuances. peronda.com/en



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5 Prova Products

The Prova Pan-Multi system is a pan and complimentary extension kit that is great for curbed or curbless shower installations. The prefabricated sloped pan is ideal for accessibility needs or open concept aesthetics. The modular system allows for flexibility to create large square or rectangular shower bases. There are endless design and size possibilities with the Prova Pan-Multi system. provaproducts.com

6 Ragno

Produced using Marazzi Group's Stepwise technology for soft-touch, anti-slip surfaces, the Contrasti line from Ragno features mottled colors and a selection of coordinated graphic patterns that resemble handmade cement tiles. Four neutral shades and two brighter tones make up Contrasti's unique color palette. ragnousa.com



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1 SomerTile

SomerTile's new Textile Basic Hex Red 8 5/8- x 9 7/8-inch porcelain floor and wall tile offers a daring pop of color. The bold red glaze is uniformly applied to create a striking matte surface. Its impervious, frost-resistant and durable features make this an ideal tile for residential indoor and outdoor use. SomerTile's Textile Basic Hex is available in 10 colors, including black, white, gray, yellow, blue, green and pink. sometile.com

2 StonePeak

The all-new Wave collection from StonePeak blurs the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces with calm colors inspired by the natural world. These porcelain tiles feature subtle movement and neutral tones that range from serene grays to peaceful greens. The collection is complemented by matching 12- x 24-inch Art Nouveau-inspired fanned decos, as well as mosaics and trim pieces. Wave is available in the six colors: Seaweed, Sand, Terre, Ice, Coal and Ash. stonepeakceramics.com



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3 Wow Design

Bejmat, as part of the Zellige Moorish trend, is considered an art in itself with significant influence on western decoration, which process has not varied for a millennium. Maintaining the original concept whilst rethinking the design for an actual market, the new tile line from Wow Design features nine colors and two shapes, which are suitable for floors, patios, countertops, backsplashes, pools and any other living space. wowdesigneu.com

4 Yurtbay Seramik

Design the soul of your environment with Fuji Gold & Barkwood Beige from Yurtbay Seramik. Barkwood with its rich natural texture and classic design provides four different colors, with 6- x 36- and 8- x 48-inch size options. To compliment Barkwood, Fuji comes in with its warm and unique style, which is available in five colors and a standard 8 2/3- x 33 1/2-inch format. yurtbayseramik.com

THE NEWEST INSTALLATION TECHNOLOGIES



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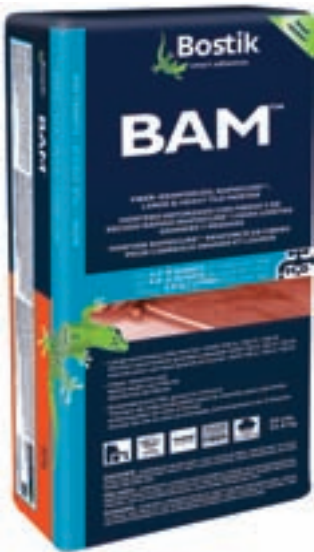
5 Alpha Professional Tools

Introducing the Alpha PSC-600 from Alpha Professional Tools, which is a newly developed, high-performance wet pneumatic stone cutter that will set a new "normal" in stone fabrication shops. It is lightweight and ergonomically designed for better maneuverability, with a central water-feed system that delivers ample water regardless of position. Equipped with an enhanced spindle shaft for easy tool removal, the PSC-600 also has a spring return throttle to avoid accidental start and works great as a grinder. alpha-tools.com

6 Miracle Sealants

Levolution is a complete tile spacing and leveling system in one. A quick way to space and level wall and floor installations, Levolution is designed to reduce lippage and create even spacing between tiles. rustoleum.com

THE NEWEST INSTALLATION TECHNOLOGIES



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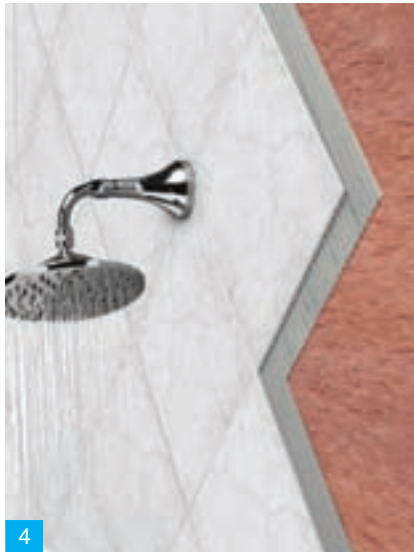
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1 Bostik
BAM is Bostik's latest high-performance, fiber-reinforced tile mortar. Formulated with RapidCure™ Technology, BAM offers maximum performance for installations of large and heavy tile, glass tile, mosaics, quarry, porcelain, ceramic, most natural stone tiles and gauged porcelain tile/panels. RapidCure™ Technology allows for a consistent cure resulting in tile being ready for grouting in just four hours.
bostik.com

2 Custom Building Products
Custom Building Products recently found a way to make Polyblend even better. Polyblend Plus has brighter, enhanced color and is more efflorescence-resistant than its predecessor without compromising the durability professionals expect from the proven Polyblend product. Available in sanded and non-sanded versions, Polyblend Plus accommodates joints up to 1/8 inch (3 mm) and meets ANSI A118.7.
custombuildingproducts.com



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3 Fila
Fila's neutral cleaners are up to today's hygiene challenge. Use Clean All for ceramic, porcelain, LVT, wood and laminates; Stone Clean on all natural stone; Clean All spray for all household surfaces. To remove tough-to-clean grease from heavily touched surfaces, including faucets, light switches and kitchen counters, use Kitchen Kare.
filasolutions.com

4 James Hardie
James Hardie's HardieBacker Cement Board with HydroDefense Technology is a 100% waterproof cement backer board that delivers an unmatched combination of strength, ease of use and excellent tile adhesion. Passing the ANSI A118.10 test for waterproofness, it offers upgraded protection from moisture penetration, eliminating the need to spend extra time applying waterproof coating across the entire surface area of your board.
jameshardie.com



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5 Laticrete
Spectralock 1 from Laticrete is an evolutionary pre-mixed, stain-proof grout that has the performance of an epoxy. Offering superior strength at 3,500 psi, the ability to be submerged and an extremely fast-curing rate so that customers can complete durable projects in record time. The grout provides exceptional versatility and color consistency. It is available in a wide variety of colors, is easy-to-use and exceeds all the standards under ANSI A118.3.
laticrete.com

6 Mapei
Mapei is partnering with nVent Nuheat to bring Mapeheat with "Technology from nVent Nuheat" floor-heating products to the North American flooring market. The Mapeheat family of products includes the Mapeheat Mat, Mapeheat Membrane, Mapeheat Mesh, Mapeheat Cable, Mapeheat thermostat, Mapeheat Thermo Connect, Mapeheat Thermo Touch, Mapeheat Thermo Basic, Mapeheat Fault Sensor and Mapeheat Cable Guides.
mapei.com

THE NEWEST INSTALLATION TECHNOLOGIES



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1 Merkrete
Merkrete's Sound Shield PNS is a thin, flexible, self-bonding, fabric-reinforced membrane that isolates ceramic and natural stone tile from cracks in the substrate. Suitable for both full and partial coverage applications, Sound Shield PNS exceeds the requirements of ANSI A118.12 and protects tile from in plane movement up to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch. Sound Shield PNS also reduces the transmission of impact and airborne sound through floors when installed under ceramic tile, stone or wood floor coverings. Available in both 40 and 90 mil.
merkrete.com

2 Miracle Sealants
The all-in-one Revolution starter kit from Miracle Sealants includes everything needed to achieve a lippage-free, professional wall or flooring tile installation -- caps, spacers and Evolver Tool. It eliminates any guesswork with a customizable three-in-one spacer profile; the cross spacer can be modified to T or flat profile. Revolution works with all tile sizes (up to 1/2-inch-thick) and patterns. It is available in 1/16- and 1/8-inch kits.
rustoleum.com/pages/miracle-sealants

3 NAC Products
NAC Products, Inc. introduces a new sound abatement underlayment for hardwood, laminate, engineered wood and LVT. dB4 Max is a unique product is designed for use in a commercial or residential setting, boasting an IIC of 55 with a IIC of 25 when used with typical hardwood flooring. dB4 Max is specially designed, combining a dense, flexible layer of protection with a fibrous insulation layer designed to reduce IIC sound at all frequencies. dB4 Max is made from EVA and does not contain plasticizers.
nacproducts.com

4 Pearl Abrasive
The Pearl VX5WV from Pearl Abrasive is a high-quality industrial handheld saw for tile, granite, natural stone and masonry cutting. It comes with a powerful 11 AMP motor ideal for cutting your material needs, and has the best in class cut depth for a 5-inch diamond blade. Designed for heavy-duty cutting, it features an all-aluminum, single-piece blade guard with built-in water and vacuum attachments; a side handle for additional support; and an on/off trigger lock.
pearlabrative.com

5 Prova Products
The Prova Pan-Multi system is a pan and complimentary extension kit that is great for curbed or curbless shower installations. The prefabricated sloped pan is ideal for accessibility needs or open concept aesthetics. The modular system allows for flexibility to create large square or rectangular shower bases. There are endless design and size possibilities with the Prova Pan-Multi system.
provaproducts.com

6 Rubi
The Rubi Slab System is formed of cutting solutions like the manual cutter Slim Cutter and the tile saw, TC-125. The system is completed with the range of transport and handling elements, Slim Easytrans and Slab Trans Heavy Duty, as well as the Slab Trolley.
rubi.com/us

THE NEWEST INSTALLATION TECHNOLOGIES



1



2

1 Schluter-Systems
Schluter-Systems' popular Trendline textured finishes are now applied to the 4-inch square Kerdi-Drain-Style series of shower drain grates and Schluter®-Shelf shower shelves. The same highly-durable powder coating procedure used to apply these finishes to Schluter profiles is used on the drain grates and shelves. In total, six different finishes are available on profiles, grates and shelves. Finishes include matte black, matte white, stone grey, greige, cream and bronze.
schluter.com

2 TEC
TEC is now offering Level Set® 500 HF Self-Leveling Underlayment. Level Set 500 HF is a high-flow SLU that pours like water and is pumpable for interior applications. The ultra-smooth surface means contractors can eliminate skim coating and sanding, which can cut labor costs by up to two-thirds. Level Set 500 HF is ideal for fast-track applications and is walkable within three hours for ceramic tile installations. Moisture-sensitive floor coverings can be installed in 15 hours.
tecspecialty.com



3



4

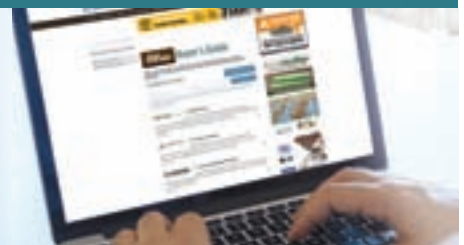
3 Tenax
Tenax 4- and 5-inch dry cut blades work great on ultra-compact and porcelain materials. These thin blades will produce a fast, clean straight cut with minimal chipping during the process. Designed with a rigid, heat-reducing core, the blades are designed for wet or dry use -- available in 4- (#4D-41952) and 5-inch (#4D-39794) formats.
tenax4you.com

4 Wedi
Wedi's Vapor 85 is a variant of the Wedi building panel and is designed for installations in steam showers and steam rooms. It serves as a strong vapor retarder and by far exceeds the minimum requirements set by the Tile Council of North America (TCNA) for vapor retarders used in continuous steam rooms. It's light, yet strong, and comes with a fully vapor proof seam and fastener sealant system.
wedcorp.com

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SHAW CONTRACT REVOLUTIONIZES MOISTURE MANAGEMENT FROM THE GROUND UP

BY DANIELLE CLAIR SIMPSON



Moisture-related flooring failures continue to be one of the biggest headaches on the job, resulting in commercial property owners spending well over \$1 billion annually on moisture remediation and subsequent flooring replacement.

“We get, on average, 45 calls per week about moisture in floors,” said Rick Morris, vice president of commercial hard surfaces, Shaw. “Talking to our contractors, our dealers and our A&D audience, we estimate that about 15% to 25% of all projects out there have some kind of moisture concern.”

Whether it’s because of accelerated schedules to speed up construction and move in time, retrofitting a building that was built before vapor retarders were a part of the building code, or vapor retarders that have been compromised during construction, going in before the concrete is ready for the product to be installed is a costly, time consuming mistake that happens all too often. And when these mistakes occur, the finger pointing begins.

“You use a floor covering product from a flooring manufacturer, you treat it with a third party’s system, you have someone else’s adhesive and you may have someone else’s floor pads,” said Morris. “And when something goes wrong, it seems like the architectural

Left: Shaw Contract is addressing common and costly moisture-related flooring failures with its new comprehensive portfolio that covers all bases of the project, from the floor covering and warranty to the treatment and adhesives.



Above: Shaw's Rick Morris, vice president of commercial hard surfaces, estimates that about 15% to 25% of all projects have some kind of moisture concern.

design community or the flooring contractor or the end user is caught in a battle of finger pointing that can go on sometimes for years.”

To eliminate this common issue, Shaw Contract has developed a comprehensive portfolio that covers all bases of the project, from the floor covering and warranty to the treatment and adhesives.

“If you follow the guidelines, register the products, we will supply all the products, including our floor covering, our treatments and adhesives,” Morris explained. “If you use our products, we will give a 10-year warranty for anything that can go wrong. No finger pointing. One provider, one system,

one warranty. All from us.”

Targeting bottom-up issues in concrete, Shaw Contract has developed a broad selection of products to address moisture management concerns.

The company has looked outside of the flooring industry for a time and cost saving treatment solution. Applying technology that was developed in the water treatment arena to prevent concrete tanks below ground from leaking, Shaw Contract has taken that technology and reversed it to create a game-changing, two-part surface prep system.

“We took the technology and reverse engineered it, so now we are keeping the

water in the ground, to come up to the surface of the concrete,” Morris explained.

Essentially, the spray on Surface Prep EXT system will open up the porosity of the concrete and profile it, taking concrete’s surface profile from a 2 to a 3, replacing the time-consuming and potentially harmful need for shot blasting. “You simply spray it on, wait an hour or two, rinse it off and then you’re ready for the next step of the process,” Morris said.

He notes that eliminating the need for the mechanical operation of shot blasting has been a celebrated change among those who have worked with the system. “Shot blasting is a mechanical operation that is timely, messy and could potentially introduce a lot of dust into the air that could be hazardous. As we are going around, talking to the community, the people that actually perform the shot blasting are thanking us for taking that away.”

Following the surface prep is MoistureShield, which is also a spray on solution. Once applied, this moisture-sensing membrane provides a permanent breathable membrane just below the surface of the concrete. “At that point any of our products can be installed,” says Morris. “Our LVT, our tile, our broadloom or sheet vinyl all can be installed.”

An often unaddressed topic, MoistureShield also adjusts the concrete’s PH. “Not a lot of people talk about PH in the industry,” said Morris. “If you read the fine print of all warranties and all installation instructions, it says your PH

should be between 6 and 11. This product will take a 14 PH down to neutral value of 7. So it treats the MVER as well as PH.”

The system’s breathable solution is EcoLogix Cushion Carpet Tile, which is a backing system that allows moisture to rise and evaporate through the seams of the tile, alleviating most slab-based moisture concerns. Not only does EcoLogix have a great moisture story, it also offers a high degree of comfort under foot.

“If you’re going into the workplace, we are all encouraged to stand more, and sit/stand work stations are becoming more of the norm than the exception now, so having that comfort under foot is something these products will also provide,” said Morris. “It also has really good acoustical properties. Not just from floor to floor, but inside the workspace. So it’s a great solution for any place where you have high moisture, but for the other attributes as well.”

For a bondable solution, Shaw’s 4151 All-Surface Adhesive and LokDots Pressure Sensitive Adhesive will bond the product to the floor in high-moisture environments. 4151 is a single solution for most flooring, allowing the installation of resilient, carpet tile and most broadloom products with one adhesive, saving storage space and reducing waste. And LokDots is a tab that goes on the back of the product that sticks the product to the floor, holding the product in place, thus making it a dry, non-toxic and odorless system that eliminates the issue of Vola-



Left: Adhesive sticking to carpet.



Bottom Left: Emulsified adhesive under luxury vinyl plank.

tile Organic Compounds (VOCs).

“We have researched the market over the last three years to come out with those two product solutions in a more dedicated way,” said Morris. “They’ve always been available, but they may have been a little cumbersome to use.”

Morris says Shaw Contract is asking dealers to become trained to ensure that they are working with the system properly, and the company is hosting a symposium across the U.S. to train its installation

partners on proper techniques. Led by 71 SEALs—Shaw Elite Aqua Leaders—these experts on the system have gone through intense training, starting with the basics of concrete 101 and working all the way up to the system’s products, giving them a firm understanding of moisture and how it relates to concrete.

Dealers’ responses to training have been overwhelming, says Morris, and feedback has included terms like revolutionary, genius and thank you. “We’ve gotten a lot of thank you’s. This really started with me three years ago where it did feel like a lot of finger pointing was going on. We had to do something to change this.” **ft**

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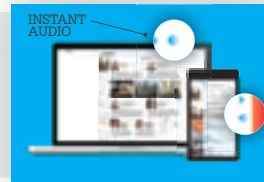
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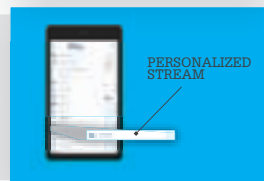
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floor trends

CLOSING THE GAP



Las Vegas Flooring has been a member of Flooring America for five years.

When Kasee Vermeulen first started working at Las Vegas Flooring in 2000, she never anticipated she would one day own the business.

“I was studying interior design and couldn’t draw,” she said. “I bounced from major to major.”

After moving to Las Vegas, she became showroom manager at the store. From 2004 to 2007 she worked with a variety of interior designers in the area and then returned to Las Vegas Flooring in 2007 as the owner’s assistant.

She became estimator in 2011, partner in 2014, and bought the business completely in 2018.

“I fell in love with it,” she said.

The 3,000-sq.-ft. showroom, which became part of Flooring America five years ago, is located on a street alongside nearly a dozen other competitors. The store sells about 70 percent hard surface, with private label tile and LVT leading the charge, and 30 percent soft surface.

Vermeulen said her point of differentiation is insurance work, which accounts for

about 40 percent of business, with the remaining sales coming from 40 percent commercial work and 20 percent residential, including custom homes. For this reason, she needs floors at a variety of price points, low to high, to satisfy the diverse clientele.

She inherited the insurance program through the previous owners, answering the call for replacement floors needed from fires and floods.

“Through the recession, insurance is what kept the doors open.”

Operating through this

year’s coronavirus pandemic, insurance is still keeping her doors open. In addition to her partnership through USAA, she draws insurance work general contractors in the area who get leads from All State, State Farm, and others.

Vermeulen is the top salesperson at her store, booking around \$2 million in business herself, but she would like to transition more of that business to her team of seasoned salespeople, many who have been with the company for a decade or more.



Above: Kasee Vermeulen, owner, Las Vegas Flooring.

Top Left: The 3,000-sq.-ft. store does 70 percent hard surface business.

Left: Insurance work accounts for about 40 percent of Vermeulen's business, emphasizing the need for flood-safe waterproof floors.



"It's the biggest challenge because I need to be focusing on the business so much more than focusing on doing accounts—a bigger picture strategy—but many of these accounts I've worked with for 17 years and they say, 'We like you and now you're giving me to somebody else?'"

The retail operation had two locations when she bought the business, but she decided to scale back to one storefront to focus on management and developing her team.

"I address situations by giving them ideas and allowing them to voice their concerns. If you just boss people

around, you're a dictator. It's nice to talk to my people, bounce ideas off of them, and see what they say. I try to make them a part of all my decision and then ultimately the decision lies on me."

She emphasizes the importance of accurate estimating, attributing her success to good training.

"When I was learning, I was told to start at the doorway and follow the walls around the whole house. They made me draw it, sometimes drawing houses that were in sticks—no dry-wall. My second house I had to draw was 4,000 sq. ft. My

boss made fun of me saying, is there really a space between those two bedrooms or did just not close the gap?"

Today, she is a stickler for details.

"I find a lot of people will take shortcuts and they don't draw a whole diagram of a house. They just measure a room here, a room there, and there's no rhyme or reason. But carpet has to run the same way. If you don't draw the whole house, how do I know that these three rooms of this hallway are all running the same direction?"

In the field, she requires her estimators to hand draw

floor plans and then use software once they get back to the office.

"I prefer to draw it in the field so I'm not in people's house long, but I always take pictures."

Being a female in flooring, she says there are some unique challenges.

"I would say people are still surprised when they see me out of their job sites, but I hear about a lot more female estimators out there. Some say that men think women are emotional, but I'm not an emotional person. I don't run an emotional business." **ft**



HOW TO HIRE THE BEST of the Best...Daily!

Companies that post for positions in the newspaper wait for resumes to be mailed or emailed and then interview candidates may be left in the dust. While that may have been an effective way to hire in the past, times have changed. We must be on the lookout for great people constantly! Banks loan capital to companies that show they're capable of handling their finances. In a sense, the people who easily qualify for loans prove they really don't need one. The same scenario is true in recruiting the best talent. The best companies are "hiring" even when they aren't desperate to hire. What do I mean by that? Here is how we find and recruit the best talent all the time.

Service Industry. When dining out, I am constantly on the lookout for waiters and waitresses who follow up on my order, offer a nice smile, and get my order right the first time. After all, isn't that what our customers expect in the flooring industry? When at church, I observe who the servant leaders are, who enthusiastically volunteers, and who goes out of their way to make me feel welcome. That person may make a terrific showroom manager one day.

Apartment Industry. Since we service the apartment industry, my staff is encouraged to volunteer side by side with industry leaders for committees our customers care about: government affairs, data committee, and

the board of directors of the local apartment association. This is where we connect with like-minded individuals who eventually may work either with us as customers or beside us as fellow employees.

Tours. If I meet somebody that I feel would be a great candidate, I invite them to take a tour of our facility. In that tour, I sell our company values to the person, teach them our business system, and show them how well our system works.

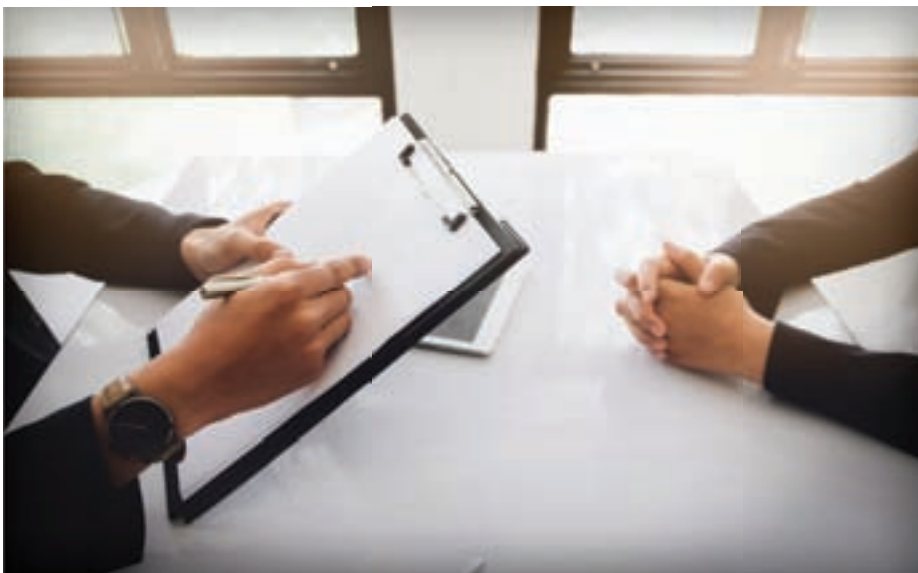
Staff Introductions. If the candidate enjoys the tour, I invite them back to meet some of my key employees and ask and verify what I told them about the company...after all, the owner is probably

the biggest cheerleader. Having the candidate meet two or three staff members simply adds credibility to the equation. The feedback I get from both the candidate and our employees is priceless.

Assessment. Before their first official interview, we have the candidate take an assessment that simply helps me learn more about their personality, their motivations, and how they may best fit into our company. The weight given to the assessment is about 33% of my decision to hire them. It simply gives me a roadmap and allows me to know best how to communicate with them in the future.

Interview. Once all of the above is complete, the interview has essentially already happened. Interviews, in my opinion, are a joke. People wear their nicest clothing and put on a front that is tough to read. If you properly follow the above steps you will most likely have all the information you need to make the decision to pursue hiring the candidate or not—before the interview!

Please send me your comments and best practices to mketterman@gotyoufloored.com. I love to hear your feedback each month. **ft**



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CHARACTERISTICS of a Great Salesperson: Part Two

In part one, we examined many of the positive qualities of a great salesperson. In part two, we continue the discussion about what makes a certain few in the selling world so successful while others struggle.

Honesty vs. dishonesty. Customers will not put up with a salesperson who they sense is lying to them. Anytime a salesperson misrepresents, stretches the truth, presents deceitful information or intentionally

overstates the capabilities of a product, they are lying. It is brazenly disrespectful to the customer and strongly resented as it should be. Anything but the truth will be seen as a lie. Never try to “fake it ‘till you make it” either. If you don’t know something, say so and find the answer for them. Your honesty will be appreciated.

Puffery. When presenting, avoid too much puffery, which creates an improbable claim. Examples: “We have the best

installers in town” or “We are the largest dealer in the area.” These types of statements show insecurity. Accordingly, the following are danger words that hurt your credibility and are often clichéd: greatest, best, largest, highest-quality, fastest and quickest. Generally, any adjective that ends in “est” is probably a danger word. Furthermore, while you are purging dangerous words or phrases, eliminate “trust me,” along with “always” and “never.” No matter how well

intentioned, when salespeople use these words, they plant doubt in the customer’s mind.

Admit downsides. Customers dislike salespeople who will not admit any downside to their products. These salespeople lack credibility. There are pluses and minuses for most products based on its application and purpose. Prove you are a trustworthy resource by being honest and realistic: If you pretend your product will be all things for every



purpose, your customer will not believe anything you say.

Understand “no” is an answer. While persistence is sometimes important, by continually not accepting ‘no’ for an answer, you are in effect arguing with the customer. Treat the relationship with respect, not antagonism. If you respond to their “no” by proving early that you respect their decision, you at once create the assurance that you recognize boundaries. A “no” that you respect the first time around has a lot better chance of being a “yes” later when there is more favorable information.

Product knowledge. Not having knowledge about what you sell is like being the world’s best salesperson and not being told what you are selling. It is like a computer without any input. You should understand everything about your company’s products, selection, inventory, services and installations. Without product knowledge, a salesperson will sound incompetent at best, and a con artist at worst. With the right knowledge, we prepare for anything.

Keep in mind there is such a thing as too much knowledge. While it is important to be well informed, she did not come into your showroom for a trade fair on flooring. I cannot emphasize this enough, keep the focus on fashion and needs, not a bunch of arbitrary benefits she has no interest in. So, how can we make sure that product knowledge aids, rather than hampers the sale? By asking effective questions and sticking to specific solutions.

Handle rejection well.

Would you like to know what causes the failure of most salespeople? It is the fear of rejection. In sales, we need to teach ourselves not to look at rejection as a personal thing. After all, it’s only our goods and services that are being rejected. When we lose a sale, our outlook should be what can I learn from this experience? What can I do differently? And then move on.

Tenacity. Top sales achievers have a unique ability to cope with difficulty. They are persistent in their quest for a sale. If there are obstacles, they will go around them, through them and over them. Put another way, we must control our beliefs and the way we are thinking. Successful salespeople separate each customer, each sales event, each rejection and think of it in unique terms. We need to focus our mind to react to the negatives—the problems, the criticisms, the failures—no differently than the successes in our sales day. Jeff Gitomer, author of the *Sales Bible* shared, “Obstacles can’t stop you. Problems can’t stop you. Most of all, other people can’t stop you. Only you can stop you.”

Part of the reason tenacious salespeople are so persistent is they have a healthy trait of optimism. Optimistic salespeople dwell on the positives rather than the negatives. These salespeople do not easily admit failure and do not feel helpless in changing a situation for the better. They see rejection as a tool of learning and move forward.

Professionals ask for the order.

This may seem obvious, but most salespeople don’t ask for an order because they think it is pushy or they are afraid of rejection. Years ago, a colleague gave me this valuable advice about selling, “If you don’t ask—you don’t get.” When all the customer’s concerns have been addressed and answered, ask! “Would you like to get this measured?” “Shall I get this moving for you?” What is the very worst she can say? Oh horrors, your shopper might say “no” and give you a legitimate objection. The good news is that with an objection you uncover what is holding her back. We simply offer new information and thus overcome the objection.

Interestingly, surveys of customers who were asked why they did not buy most commonly answered: “We were never asked.” Ask for the order! This one simple selling technique may literally double your sales.

Never, ever, say, “May I help you?” Whenever I hear this often-used greeting, I know another sale is probably lost. By using this common opening your customer typically responds as a defense, “No thanks, I’m just looking.” Please understand this; when we greet a customer, we are beginning a friendship! When friends come to your house, do you greet them with “May I help you?” Bear in mind, your customer is your guest, so treat her with the same transparent and enthusiastic manner you treat new friends at your home. Try becoming

a real person and approach your customer like a real person. Be authentic and believable.

Other “yes or no” greetings such as, “Finding everything ok?”, or even “Hi, what may I do for you today,” are impersonal and are therefore lackluster beginnings for taking charge of the sale and building relationships. It is much more effective to say, “Good day. Welcome to Custom Flooring. And thanks for coming in.” Otherwise, you will lose countless sales and commissions because you will make it much more difficult to warm up and establish rapport with your customer. The old cliché: “You are shooting yourself in the foot” is appropriate.

Always learning. If you are not satisfied with your sales volume, you must realize there are ways to improve. To admit this and not take steps to correct your situation is simply absurd. People who achieve success are successful primarily because of their attitude toward self-improvement. Conversely, it has been my experience that people who need sales training rarely take advantage of the opportunity. Ben Franklin is quoted: “Being ignorant is not so much a shame as being unwilling to learn.”

Good selling to you. **ft**

Buddy Wisdom has more than 35 years of wholesale and retail sales experience. He is the author of *Selling Retail Floorcovering - A Humanistic Approach* (2015 Edition) <http://www.lulu.com/shop/buddy-wisdom/selling-retail-floorcovering-a-humanistic-approach-a-complete-10yr-write-over/paperback/product-22165170.html> He can be reached at budhurd1@gmail.com.



PARTNERING for Success

Our industry continues to successfully adapt and change. The market is still carried by the salespeople working together to enable other businesses to thrive. They sell high-quality interior spaces supported by high performance flooring systems. Each side has many capabilities to bring together in order to offer enough value to earn a relationship with the client. Our industry speaks so often about the relationship defining success. Relationships only develop through the delivery

of value. The delivery of value occurs in repeatable areas—deep understanding and response to client needs, operational and service excellence, and innovative approaches to solving problems with services and products. The sales representatives for the manufacturer and the commercial flooring contractor complement each other to serve the client, add value, and earn a right to the relationship.

This opportunity to partner for success eventually leads to dream teams for clients.

Clarity and Certainty

People crave clarity and certainty. Unfortunately, our business lives are filled with moving cheese, permanent whitewater, transitional competitive advantage, black swan events, and tipping points all contributing to upending our daily routines. In the commercial flooring business, two roles that are desperate for clarity and certainty are the flooring manufacturer's representative and the commercial flooring contractor sales representative. In partnership, these two roles can influence

and define local markets to the benefit of the stakeholders and end users.

For the manufacturer's representative, their business responsibilities have become much more complex. The traditional mill alliance system that supported soft surface dominance of commercial floor space has evolved in response to changing office interior and construction trends. Soft surface, resilient, and hard surface are commonly used together in all segments. Manufacturers who offer more product categories work hard to communicate the breadth of the offering as a competitive advantage. They have also evolved compensation models, brand communication, computer systems, warranties, distribution channels, training, and internal customer ownership norms. With all of these changes, the manufacturer's representative always has a team member ready to support with them at a professional flooring contractor.

For the flooring contractor sales representative, the current requirements in the market are also daunting. After the mill alliance system gave way to the vertical integration of the 1990s, the market became extremely





Julie Meseck, district manager, Colorado, for Mannington Commercial, and Roger Judd, sales/project management, Next Generation Surfaces.

sensitive to concepts of sustainability. The sustainability movement drove massive changes in product and adhesive chemistry while buildings become more open, glass filled, and far more difficult to manage for site conditions during compressed schedules. Sustainability also drove more and more document management into the flooring contractor salesperson's daily workload. More people or time were needed to support sold projects despite the promises of BIM and the internet to simplify and speed the paperwork. While all these changes were a reality, products continued to be delicate after leaving the factory floor. Until the time the flooring contractor

delivers the actual value of an installed product to the end user in the space, so many variables must be managed as the limited warranty for all manufacturer's states: not too hot/not too cold, not to wet/not too dry, protect from other trades, and when the end user moves in protect the floor from the furniture. Despite these pressures, the professional flooring contractor always has a team member ready to support them in the field from the manufacturer.

Starnet members have demonstrated success in response to client needs, operational and service excellence, and innovative approaches to solving problems with services and

products along with their partner manufacturer sales representatives.

Response to Client Needs: Roger Judd, Sales/Project Management, Next Generation Surfaces

"Next Generation Surfaces has a focused strategy related to the K-12 market segment. This strategy includes multiple contact points with stakeholders at the architectural and design level as well as active engagement with school district officials. The local expertise brought to this segment is supported by a partnership with Julie Meseck,

district manager, Colorado for Mannington Commercial. Julie has more responsibility to deliver in other segments for Mannington. Next Generation Surfaces complements and amplifies her effort in K-12, allowing her to be more successful overall.

"We specifically target school districts where we might bring complementary strengths. In one case we had a relationship with a district looking to move from VCT to LVT, and they were concerned about the impact of the changes on operations and long-term budgets. During this discovery period we brought Mannington in to support a strategy of product and maintenance education along with design services. We were able to position the value and communicate a product comparison, pricing strategy, and layout ideas that met the target budget

over an 18-month period. We worked through site conditions with mitigation and prep as well as some product solutions recommended by Julie. We further reinforced our value proposition by engaging with the maintenance staff and additional district facility employees. We brought everyone together to share demonstrations on their new product system and increased the comfort level of all involved.

"The district was so impressed with the attention to detail and enthusiasm of our partnership, that we were successful in changing the standard to a higher value offering. The respect and trust we have built with several projects will go on and continue to cultivate business together as a team."

Service and Operational Excellence: Elias Shanine, Floor Care Division Manager, Lippert Flooring & Tile

"We established a Floor Care Division three years ago with a focus on appearance retention of flooring for end users, mainly targeting preventative maintenance for carpeting. From the beginning of the startup, Dave Beedie, the principal at NeverStrip Floor Coatings, complimented and enhanced the services we offered clients. Dave helped educate and demonstrate ways to lower floor care costs, enhance the appearance of floors, and improve the coefficient of friction. When we work with clients in their spaces, it involves much more than



Elias Shanine, floor care division manager, Lippert Flooring & Tile, and Dave Beedie, principal, NeverStrip Floor Coatings.



“Our service efforts reduce the incidences when salespeople must manage unhappy clients due to circumstances beyond their control. End users who have positive experiences with their flooring investment are more enthusiastic and more generous with their budgets in the next replacement cycle.”

Innovative Approaches: Monica Lenahan, Project Manager, Intertech Flooring

“Our Partnering for Success team is developing approaches that bring speed and clarity to decision making for end users. Our strategy is innovative because we are focused on eliminating the barriers to a decision. Often projects are lost due to lack of commitment in the end user organization. A ‘no decision’ is often worse than the failure of a contract to move forward after the client verbally commits to a project. We work together to eliminate the communication barriers and risk avoidance associated with major budget spend.

“My partner Elizabeth Clarke at J + J Flooring Group has a deep technical knowledge from years of practicing interior design and having her own design firm. She focuses on the design teams and key stakeholders at the end user. I assist her by lining up all the other solutions required to complete the project, because they carry the budget too. If the other elements are not managed well, the carpet project never happens.

“One of the new selling tools we take advantage to drive decisions is the spot rendering tool. This is different from visualization tools of the past as it allows me to create confidence in the outcome in that moment. You do not have to wait for the output over a few days. I can drive the decision while I am in the space with the client or walking a project with our general contractor partner. Simply by taking a photo on-site with my phone or tablet we can insert a product in real time to create excitement and consensus when working with clients. This combination of strengths we bring together helps us to be innovative in the selling process, clearing the way to faster decisions and eliminating the uncertainty of more traditional approaches.”

Annually, the Starnet Dream Team Celebration program recognizes the dynamic selling relationships between Starnet Members and the Starnet Preferred Vendor Partners. These strategic selling teams highlight the power of Partnering for Success with strong candidates demonstrating excellence in the delivery of value and earning relationships. Every year there are hundreds of daily successes between the Starnet Vendor Partner sales teams and the Starnet Member sales teams. The power of this collaboration brings clarity and certainty to an inconsistent market full of change.

Teamwork makes the dream work! **ft**



Monica Lenahan, project manager, Intertech Flooring, and Elizabeth Clarke, J + J Flooring Group.



following the manufacturer’s recommended maintenance procedures. That sets the minimum standard.

“We work closely with our manufacturing partners to test products, develop operating plans, and provide demonstrations that exceed expectations. The buildings we target are operating and have varied surfaces with varied maintenance procedures. We are often called in because the complexity of interior space is overwhelming to building operations, so the day to day upkeep of their interior assets begin to suffer.

“One of the major challenges with all manufacturers is the post installation maintenance. Due to compressed schedules, the trades are working over each other. Brand new carpet is often full of drywall joint

compound and the protective finish that manufacturers apply to resilient flooring has been weakened. When end users take over their new building, they often have no idea their flooring investment has been compromised. Unfortunately, symptoms do not appear until many weeks or months after they move into a space. With help from Dave, we have been successful in enhancing the product and installation division of our business through success with handling project final cleaning services. We can renew and transform tile, grout and resilient surfaces compromised by other trades or general construction site issues. In many cases, with Dave’s support, we have protected the manufacturers of resilient flooring from claims.

Shout out to the donors who are helping industry workers battling catastrophic medical conditions

get BACK TO NORMAL LIFE.



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PRODUCT INNOVATION Drives LVT Sales

Chances are luxury vinyl products, in every configuration and construction you can think of, will drive anywhere as much as 40% or more of specialty retail sales for the next several years. I suspect it will be an even higher number, and I'm not the only one.

Talk to Piet Dossche, president, USFloors, and he'll tell you it could be more than half of your future sales for the next several years. It's no

surprise then that we saw so many companies—even some that have had nothing to do with hard surfaces in the past—suddenly jockeying to get in on the action. And it's not just manufacturers, all sorts of alternative retailers are now moving in even if they have no idea how to sell flooring: All they need to do is throw a palette of the stuff on the floor of their home center or hardware store or lumber yard—and guess what? It sells!

I liken this tsunami of LVT sales to when laminate first hit the U.S. market—consumers were excited by this new product and a lot of retailers I know put their kids through college selling laminate back in the early days. It will be the same with LVT.

Here's the challenge as I see it: How do you cut through the confusion, the various construction formats and the alphabet soup of names that it is currently being sold under (LVT, LVP,

SPC, WPC, MLE, rigid core, stone flooring, waterproof flooring etc.) as well as all the competing brand names and private labels?

Consumers are confused and they're looking for answers. On my website, MyBeautifulFloor.com, the luxury vinyl posts (blog and social media posts) are the ones that garner the most attention—and the most questions.

Are your salespeople up on the latest? Can they distinguish between all the brands and explain the differences between them? Can they justify the added expense of WPC over SPC, or the performance characteristics of SPC over other formats? Inquiring minds want to know.

In an earlier column I spoke about the need to distinguish your store. Here's one way that has been the tried and true hallmark of specialty retailers all along: industry expertise.

Make sure your people are up on all the latest trends in this red-hot category, that they can readily explain the differences, that they can position your store's offerings against the private label



You can never have enough product knowledge, especially in a product category that is expanding as fast as LVT. Photo: Coretec Pro by USFloors.



Left: Sandy says it is safe to say that the advances we're seeing in core technologies will drive the flooring industry for at least a decade. Photo: Pergo Extreme Copper Hide.

brands shoppers will encounter at home centers, and that they can convincingly tell the incredible luxury vinyl/waterproof flooring story.

The truth is that each of these formats has distinct advantages and some disadvantages. I know that salespeople are reluctant to talk about disadvantages but perhaps this product requires full disclosure.

My stepson has a beautiful LVT floor in his apartment. Truly impressive styling, and of course, great performance. But in truth, I'd much rather see a WPC in this space because of its more realistic visuals, better embossing and the fact that the floor in this case is in the living room, a feature space in the home. He doesn't care so much;

he's a guy. It looks good, it performs; we're good to go.

While the choice of floors was not his being that he lives in an apartment building, I'm not sure he could have been convinced of the logic of spending more for a different luxury vinyl floor even though it was for the living room.

My daughter, on the other hand, opted for WPC in her basement and she knows she paid more for it. For her, it was all about the style and the superior visuals that first attracted her and finally sold her on the higher price. Yes, it's in the basement, but that basement has a spare bedroom, it's where the kids play, and it's where the family gathers regularly. The premium she paid for better quality WPC is well worth

it and she feels good about her decision.

You just never know what matters more to a given consumer and what they're willing to spend for it. Make sure you have the tools you need to help them make the right choice for their particular needs.

Think that monthly product knowledge trainings are too much? Think again. How many questions your salespeople will face this month? How many brands and other retail outlets are you competing against? Think of how many luxury vinyl sales you'll make this month and next. You can never have enough product knowledge, especially in a product category that is expanding as fast as this one, that is as confusing to

consumers, that is evolving as rapidly as the luxury vinyl category is.

And these changes go far beyond LVT. Not only are the technological advances in these new cores impacting luxury vinyl sales, now we're seeing them come to hardwood, to laminate, even ceramic tile. Is outdoor decking and hardscape next? Probably. Think that in a few years many flooring stores will be carrying both? Again, probably.

I think it is safe to say that the incredible advances we're seeing in core technologies will drive so much of the flooring industry for the next decade and more.

In a sea of confusion, your store can be the beacon that guides consumers to the right choices, the right product and for the right reasons. Your customers will not only love you for it, they'll tell their friends.

The fact is that most home centers salespeople will be hard pressed to keep up with all these changes. Your people better keep up. After all, they have kids to put through college! **ft**

Santiago Montero has been covering the flooring market since 1988. He has spoken to hundreds of retailers, manufacturers and distributors as they've generously shared their struggles and their challenges as well as their successes and triumphs during this time of unprecedented change in the industry. He can be reached at monterosantiago@gmail.com.

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