

However, Goodwin says that “a solid-wood floor will always be the ‘gold standard’ for those who can accommodate its greater demands.” John Lessick, president of the Downers Grove-based Apex Wood Floors, agrees. “A custom, handcrafted hardwood floor will provide the ‘wow’ factor for your home. It sets the tone for great design for the rest of the interior, and it makes the space warm and inviting. It provides a richness and feel like no other material can.”

In terms of the environmental impact a wood-flooring product has, several green options are available, including bamboo, a sustainable source of wood, and reclaimed hardwoods, a reused/recycled choice.

“A 100-percent reclaimed-wood floor not only lessens the need to harvest live trees, but it weaves pieces of American history into any room while also carrying the age-old character markings and strength that render it truly unique,” says Tommy Sancic, founder and owner of Olde Wood Limited, a manufacturer of 100-percent reclaimed, antique hardwood-flooring products. “Another advantage is that this wood was originally harvested from old growth—virgin forests that produce some of the strongest, most beautiful and unique wood with the tightest grain.”

Lessick agrees. “Clients are more eco-conscious now than ever before,” he says. “A ‘revival’ floor truly has strength and history behind it—the planks are comprised exclusively of enduring, old wood rescued from abandoned structures across the United States.”

Cork chic

Offering a unique texture, cork is a great option from both an aesthetic and functional standpoint. As an interior designer and LEED AP (the U.S. Green Building Council’s program for certifying professionals for their eco-friendly knowledge and practices), Sarah Barnard with Sarah Barnard Design is familiar with many green-flooring choices, and she lists cork as one of her favorite wood substitutes. “It is soft underfoot, available in tiles, planks, rolls and sheets, and has the visual warmth of wood,” she says, adding that cork is available in many colors, but can also be stained in custom colors.

Marusin likes to use stained cork tiles in family-focused areas. “Cork is durable and resilient,” she says. “Families like cork for its fun, unpredictable, natural patterns, resilient fiber and acoustic values. Incorporating a fun color in a play area, kitchen or mudroom lightens up the space and puts the fun first.”

The industrial look

In recent years, finished concrete floors have become a rising star in residential flooring. Paige Rien, interior designer for HGTV’s *Hidden Potential* TV show and principal of Rien With An Eye Design Consultancy, calls this trend the “industrial crossover.”

“People are now choosing flooring options for their home—like epoxy—that have previously been used in commercial/industrial applications,” she says. “I put polished concrete in this category, as well—it’s expensive but durable with a multitude of options for color and texture.”

Erin Shakoor, design principal of Chicago-based Shakoor Interiors, says, “I have found that concrete is one of the most innovative and flexible products for custom flooring.” She notes that concrete “is often overlooked because uninformed homeowners see it as purely industrial or unrefined,” but to overlook this material would be a mistake. “Because a custom mold ▶

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INLAY INFORMATION

Inlay flooring products are made of high-grade materials including exotic and regional hardwoods such as walnut, mahogany, sapeli, yellow heart, maple, wenge, cherry and oak. The inlay design is created using industrial scroll saws, lasers and computer-controlled routing equipment.

The inlay is typically bonded to a cabinet-grade plywood substrate, which gives each medallion or border a stable base to match your floors and allows the inlay to be a lifelong object. The net effect of medallions and borders is to provide a focal point or a rich alternative to an otherwise plain floor—one that will last as long as your floor.

Medallions and borders can be installed in either new or existing floors and then finished with the floor. Inlay floor products have also been used frequently in pre-finished or engineered floors and therefore would be finished before they are installed. The process of installing the medallions and borders is comparatively easy. Installation manuals are available for both homeowners and professional installers.

—Kathy Andersen, Inlay Product World Inc.

“Reclaimed hardwoods have a charm and character that new boards can never achieve, not with any amount of distressing. There is a certain warmth and some kind of magic that historic hardwoods bring to a project.”

—Sarah Barnard, LEED AP and interior designer, Sarah Barnard Designs

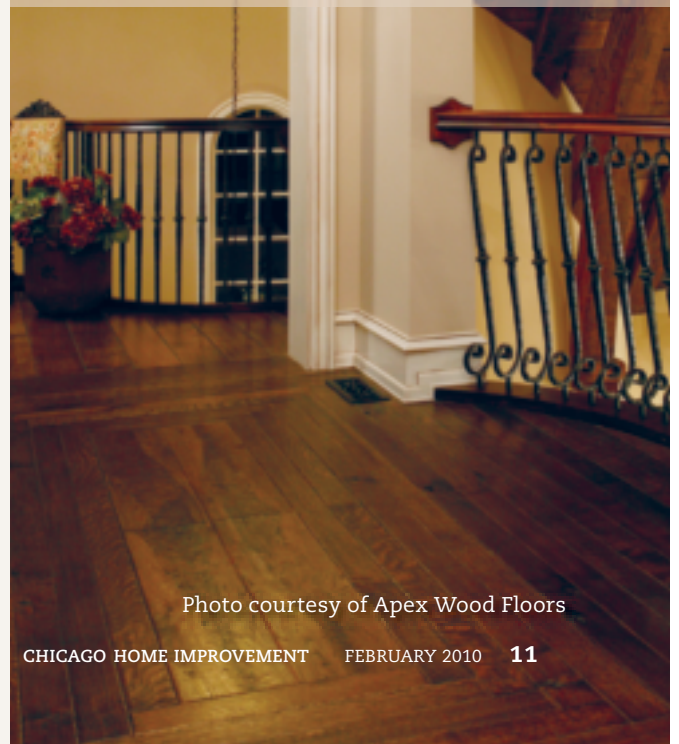


Photo courtesy of Apex Wood Floors