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# HOUSE & GARDEN

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BUYER'S GUIDE

# HARD FLOORING

From beautiful parquetry and sumptuous stone to intricately patterned tiles, exciting things are happening underfoot, writes **Georgia Madden**.

There's been an explosion of new, improved hard-flooring products that not only look better than ever but are more versatile and easier to install. Take your pick from sumptuous natural stone, timber floorboards in eye-catching finishes, and porcelain panels that mimic everything from brick to exotic woods.

While there is no shortage of neutrals on offer, it's pattern that's really coming through in flooring right now. Think Moroccan-inspired encaustic (cement

tiles, delicately etched terracotta and graphic-patterned vinyl, all designed to make the floor the star of the room.

At the same time, there's also a renewed appreciation for materials in their natural form, flaws and all, according to Andrea D'Cruz, director of Sydney interior design firm D'Cruz Design Group. "We're embracing the veining in stone, and the knots and grains in timber," she says. "Inherent texture is now being favoured over highly lacquered surfaces."

IMU18.49 Impressive Ultra waterproof laminate flooring in Classic Oak Brown, \$62/m<sup>2</sup> (supply only), Quick-Step; (03) 9798 0808 or [www.quick-step.com.au](http://www.quick-step.com.au).

### WHAT TO CONSIDER

A new floor is a huge investment so it pays to consider your options carefully. Michael Karakolis, founder and managing director of Fibonacci Stone, offers this advice:

- ✦ Flooring is a long-term decision. Select a colour that will support you as your style evolves, and a material that will age gracefully.
- ✦ A dark floor will create a cosy, intimate ambience; a light one will make a room feel fresh and spacious.
- ✦ When it comes to light-coloured floors, those with a hint of grey or cream will be more forgiving.
- ✦ Be realistic about how much maintenance you are prepared to do and choose a type of flooring to suit.
- ✦ For longevity and ease of care, avoid high-gloss finishes, stark whites and extremely hard materials that can't be repaired when scratched.
- ✦ Factor installation costs into your budget.

◀ Ceramic tiles are a great choice if you're looking for a tough, easy-care floor but need to stick to a tight budget. "Matt and semi-polished finishes are still trending, and as for colour it's all about grey, from the lightest dove grey to the darkest charcoal," says Julie McLellan, tile and rug product manager at Choices Flooring.

The latest tiles can give you the look of solid timber or stone for a fraction of the price. "Tile-printing technology is now so sophisticated that any look can be achieved, and the tile is almost indistinguishable from the material it's mimicking," says Marita Blaschka, design director at Tile MegaMart. Size-wise, tiles are getting larger, as much as 1200x1200mm.

For flooring that's rich in character and improves with age, natural stone such as bluestone or travertine is hard to beat. It can also create a seamless indoor-outdoor look. "Natural stone has a greater sense of depth and colour variation than tiles and timber, while being forgiving in terms of wear, tear and stains," says Jen Stumbles, co-owner of Eco Outdoor. Stone is easy to clean but, being naturally porous, will require regular sealing.

Another classic treatment is timber flooring, which has warm, natural appeal and can be renewed countless times. The latest trends see us moving away from reddish tones and towards sophisticated shades of grey, according to Anne Plumb, general manager at Harper & Sandilands.

"Parquetry flooring is also having a resurgence," says Leon Travis, national sales and distribution manager for hardwoods

at Boral Timber. "The use of different lines, colours and shapes such as herringbone and geometrics creates visual depth and adds another dimension to interiors."

For an eco-friendly option, consider bamboo flooring. "Bamboo is highly renewable, plus it's more impact-resistant than timber, making it a popular choice for families," says Emma Bolger, brand communications manager at Choices Flooring. On the downside, bamboo is unsuitable for wet rooms or outdoor use.

Engineered timber, which usually features a thin layer of timber bonded to a high-density substrate, is fast to install and can be laid straight over existing floors. Sydney interior designer Alexandra Kidd is excited about its potential. "Our love affair with wide timber floorboards continues. Engineered timber boards can be as wide as 400mm," she says. "We're also spoilt for choice with colours, with everything on offer from soft greys and whitewashes to dark chocolate and black."

Meanwhile, new-generation vinyls and laminates have shaken off their daggy image. They come in a huge range of finishes that offer not just the look but the texture of exotic timbers, stone, slate and concrete. The latest styles are easy to install, budget-friendly and eco-conscious. They are much more versatile, too; laminate flooring, for example, was once limited to moisture-free rooms but with developments such as Quick-Step's waterproof Impressive Ultra technology, it can now be used in bathrooms and laundries. ▶

### *A cost-effective brush-up for timber flooring*

It's possible to breathe fresh life into existing timber boards with a specialist coating. According to James Fisher, brand manager at Feast Watson, grey, black and bright white are the go-to shades right now. "Also emerging is the use of stencils and patterns – everything from abstract shapes to lace effects." For best results, he says, proper preparation and technique are vital:

- ✦ Sand the surface and vacuum away all dust before coating.
- ✦ Test the colour or finish in an inconspicuous area before full application.
- ✦ Apply the coating along the entire length of three to four floorboards at a time, and never coat across multiple boards.
- ✦ For longevity and durability, apply a minimum of three coats.
- ✦ Always ensure your final brush or applicator stroke follows the direction of the grain.



#### TILES & STONE

**AMARENO 150X900MM  
PORCELAIN TILES IN  
WALNUT, \$67/M<sup>2</sup>**

Printed using digital technology, these tiles give the look of timber with the practicality of glazed porcelain. Use indoors or out. Amber Tiles; (02) 9629 2100 or [www.ambertiles.com.au](http://www.ambertiles.com.au).



#### LAMINATES

**MONDO LAMINATE IN  
LODGE PINE OLD GREY,  
FROM \$29/M<sup>2</sup>**

Resistant to wear, fading and stains, this hardy laminate offers the visual characteristics of real timber. Square edges give floors a contemporary feel. Carpet Court; 1300 227 738 or [www.carpetcourt.com.au](http://www.carpetcourt.com.au).



**188100 MECCA 597X597MM  
PORCELAIN TILE IN LIGHT  
GREY, \$131/M<sup>2</sup>**

A super-strong porcelain tile with high slip rating that can be carried through from indoors to out. Rectified edges line up perfectly, so tiles can be laid with less grout for a seamless effect. Beaumont Tiles; [www.beaumont-tiles.com.au](http://www.beaumont-tiles.com.au).



**PLANTINO LAMINATE  
DELUXE IN CHELSEA,  
FROM \$49/M<sup>2</sup>**

A great way to replicate the appearance of stained oak in a durable, cost-effective laminate. It's easy to clean, stain-resistant and suitable for all rooms in the home except wet zones. Choices Flooring; [www.choicesflooring.com.au](http://www.choicesflooring.com.au).



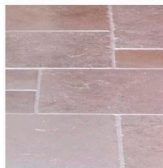
**CARPET 300X600MM  
PORCELAIN TILE IN  
DEVORE, \$175/M<sup>2</sup>**

The look and texture of carpet has been captured in Italian porcelain. It's perfect for use on interior floors and walls, as well as for exterior walls. Di Lorenzo Tiles; (02) 9698 8737 or [www.dilorenzo.com.au](http://www.dilorenzo.com.au).



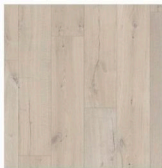
**TIMBER IMPRESSIONS  
PLATINUM LAMINATE IN  
QUEENSLAND WALNUT,  
\$54/M<sup>2</sup>**

A timber-look laminate that offers a high-gloss finish and superior scratch resistance. It's a breeze to install and maintain. Harvey Norman; 1300 464 278 or [www.harveynorman.com.au](http://www.harveynorman.com.au).



**LIMESTONE FLOORING IN  
JERICHO, FROM \$205/M<sup>2</sup>**

For a soft, rustic look, it's hard to go past this limestone, with a tumbled finish that enhances the stone's natural characteristics. It's suitable for both indoor and outdoor applications, and will age gracefully over time. Eco Outdoor; 1300 131 413 or [www.ecooutdoor.com.au](http://www.ecooutdoor.com.au).



**IMU1854 IMPRESSIVE  
ULTRA LAMINATE IN SOFT  
OAK LIGHT, \$62/M<sup>2</sup>**

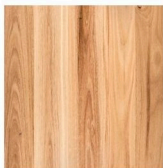
Specially textured to mimic the feel of real timber underfoot, this flooring has been treated with a waterproof coating that means it can be used in any interior, including wet rooms. Quick-Step; (03) 9798 0808 or [www.quick-step.com.au](http://www.quick-step.com.au).



**VINYL**

**COMFYTEX VINYL FLOORING IN TASSIE OAK 12226732, FROM \$40/M<sup>2</sup>**

A protective Superguard surface treatment makes this luxurious European surface lovely to walk on and tough enough to withstand family life. Signature Floors; [www.signaturefloors.com.au](http://www.signaturefloors.com.au).



**ENGINEERED**

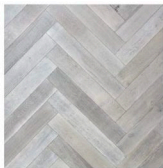
**ENGINEERED TIMBER FLOORING IN BLACKBUTT, FROM \$93/M<sup>2</sup>**

Warm and appealing, these boards can be laid straight over existing floors and walked on within hours. They are scratch-resistant and can be resanded. Boral Timber; 1800 818 317 or [www.boral.com.au/timber](http://www.boral.com.au/timber).



**BACL40040 LIVYN BALANCE CLICK ARTISAN PLANKS IN GREY, \$50/M<sup>2</sup>**

This durable vinyl has the look of on-trend pale-grey timber. It's soft and warm underfoot, and thanks to the protective top coating, suitable for any room. Quick-Step; (03) 9798 0808 or [www.quick-step.com.au](http://www.quick-step.com.au).



**FRENCH OAK ENGINEERED FLOORING IN PALE GREY HERRINGBONE, \$164/M<sup>2</sup>**

With a 4mm oak layer bonded to an engineered base, this creates a classic look reminiscent of a French chateau, brought up to date with the heavy grey wash. Royal Oak Floors; (03) 9826 3611 or [www.royaloakfloors.com.au](http://www.royaloakfloors.com.au).



**EXPONA DESIGN VINYL FLOORING IN BLUE WEATHERED SPRUCE 6230, \$54/M<sup>2</sup>**

This commercial-grade vinyl flooring is a hard-wearing and attractive option. It's splash-resistant and easy to maintain, due to its polyurethane finish. Polyflor; 1800 777 425 or [www.polyflor.com.au](http://www.polyflor.com.au).



**ETERNO EUROPEAN OAK ENGINEERED FLOORING IN ARGENTO, \$164/M<sup>2</sup>**

Made from three layers of solid European oak, bonded together for stability, these planks are available in a range of widths, lengths and design-led colours. Tongue N Groove Flooring; (02) 9699 1131 or [www.tngfloors.com.au](http://www.tngfloors.com.au).



**GENERO LOOSELAY VINYL IN GREY OAK, FROM \$59/M<sup>2</sup>**

A DIY-friendly vinyl flooring that can be laid straight over an existing floor for a quick and affordable update. It can be used throughout the home, including wet rooms, and offers durability with easy upkeep. Choices Flooring; [www.choicesflooring.com.au](http://www.choicesflooring.com.au).



**OAK SAND BRUSHED ENGINEERED TIMBER FLOORING IN WHITE OIL, FROM \$205/M<sup>2</sup>**

A brushed, textured surface and a natural oil finish help this flooring cope well in high-traffic areas. It's also safe to install over underfloor heating systems. Mafi; (02) 9698 7877 or [www.mafi.com.au](http://www.mafi.com.au).

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