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Help For Remodelers [Family Circle Archive]

Family Circle Articles

Help For Remodelers: How-To Ideas for Home Improvement

By Al Ubell

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Remodeling your home not only gives it a brand new look-it gives you a great opportunity to make life easier on yourself in the future. That's because choosing the right materials now can cut down on household chores and maintenance headaches later. Here's a rundown on some of the major items to consider, from wall coverings to carpeting.

Easiest-Care Materials For Walls, Floors, & More

Wallcoverings: Heavier stock "shiny" vinyl wipes clean, can stand up to scrubbing (grease build-up in a kitchen, for example), if needed. Great for bathrooms, kids' rooms, kitchens. (Avoid flocked papers in kitchens and bathrooms. They attract dirt, dust and grease like a magnet. You're better off saving them for less used, more formal areas like the living or dining room.



- **Paints:** Choose oil-based, gloss or semi-gloss where you'll be cleaning the wall fairly regularly. This paint cleans easily and wears well. (Make sure that your walls have no cracks in them, though; these show up on the highly reflective surface of oil-based paints.) Water based (latex) paints wear off with constant wiping, leaving you with dingy walls. Note: Most homes today are painted with latex products. If you want to switch to an oil-based paint, ask your paint store how to prep the walls.
- **Floors:** Ceramic tiles (mosaic and glazed), vinyl and linoleum are low-maintenance floors. (Ceramic is less comfortable to stand on, however I unless you install it over plywood instead of concrete.) Wood floors also get points for practicality. Give them a coat or two of polyurethane, and all you have to do is damp-mop them; no waxing needed. Consider wood for stairs, entry and hallways and living and dining rooms (with area rugs).
- **Carpeting:** Low-pile "industrial" carpeting is a formidable stain resister, highly durable and shows fewer footprints (looks just-vacuumed longer!). Use in kids' rooms, back entryways. Note: The higher the pile, the less the carpet belongs in an area where there's food or drink-spills and crumbs have farther to sink in, are harder to get out. (For room-by-room suggestions on carpeting)
- **Kitchen countertops:** Both plastic laminate and mosaic tiles are a breeze to clean up, but tile stands up better to scratches. If you like the natural look of butcher block, remember that it must be scrubbed frequently to prevent the growth of bacteria from uncooked foods and

grease; you must also oil it to keep it from drying out.

- **Furniture:** Plastic laminate or highly varnished surfaces resist water stains and burns, don't need waxing. Perfect in kids' rooms, family rooms, for coffee and lamp tables in the living room.

Bathroom & Kitchen Fixtures

When it comes time to shop for a new sink or tub, remember: there's a lot more to consider than color and style. The facts below will help you be a more informed customer - and bring home the fixture right for you.

- Lowest in cost are gel-coated fiberglass and baked in enamel steel plumbing fixtures; stainless steel and enameled-formed steel are next up in price, and vitreous china and enameled cast iron are the most expensive.
- Enamel steel (both baked and formed types) are the least durable and most difficult to keep up because they chip and scratch easily.
- Fiberglass products also scratch easily; use only non-abrasive cleansers with these.
- China and stainless steel are highly stain resistant, making them excellent for kitchen sinks. Porcelain is the most popular choice for bathroom sinks.
- Porcelain may be less resistant to stains and tends to chip a bit more easily, but it does give you the advantage of a wide variety of colors.
- Light-colored fixtures show water spots and dirt less than those with darker colors. A sensible place to install a dark-colored sink or tub is in a guest bathroom that isn't used frequently.
- Chrome and brass faucets require much more polishing than ones of glass, acrylic or wood.
- Sliding glass shower doors have these drawbacks: Water and fungus inevitably get trapped in the tracks if you don't clean them after each shower. And whether they're mirrored or frosted glass, they need constant shining. You'll have much less work with a machine-washable fabric shower curtain and a vinyl liner.

The Inside Story On Fabric Protection

When you're shopping for furniture, check the label (or the type of fabric protection being offered. There are two basic types: fluorochemicals and non-fluorochemicals. Fluorochemicals (Scotchgard is the leading such type) protect against both water and oil-based stains and soil. Non-fluorochemicals, which are silicone-based, resist water-based substances only.

Room-By-Room Guide

The rule of thumb for choosing a carpet is to buy the best you can afford for rooms most used. These will stand up to wear and tear and require less upkeep.

- **Hallways and stairs:** For these high-traffic areas, select a level loop, low-pile carpet or a frieze (this has a tightly twisted yarn that has a nubby appearance). Both don't show footprint impressions, and soil stays closer to the surface, making them easier to clean. Choose a medium color (too light shows the dirt immediately, too dark and every bit of lint stands out), in a texture or a soil-hiding pattern.
- **Dining room:** Your biggest considerations here are stain resistance and ease of cleaning. Avoid light, solid colors and deep piles that food can get trapped in.

- **Living room:** If you have a lot of company or your family tends to gather in this room, follow the suggestion for the dining room, above. For a more formal, luxurious feeling, try soft, smooth velvet plush or a saxony. But remember, these are harder to clean.
- **Master bedroom:** Because this room gets less traffic, you can indulge in a delicate color and plush texture, if that's your style.
- **Kids' room:** Select a carpet according to your child's age and personality. Younger, active children need tough, easy-to-clean carpeting. Dense, level-loop textures or prints are best for them.
- **Family Room:** A dense carpet of nylon stands up to anything. Tip! If you have pets, avoid loop-pile textures (these have uncut loops that pets can catch their claws in).



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