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POPULAR OPTIONS

Tiles

Ceramic designs are tough, hard-wearing and 100 per cent waterproof, while porcelain is denser, stronger and available in larger slabs with a crisp, square edge. Porcelain is also suitable for outdoors, making a seamless transition between indoors and out a possibility. Renewed interest in tiled flooring has led to a fresh wave of products, including impressive stone replicas, 3D-effect geometric patterns and French-style ceramics in chic, subdued shades. Wood-effect tiles are also on-trend, thanks to improved inkjet-printing technology, and the fact that they are cheaper, tougher and easier to keep clean than the real thing. Another emerging design is patchwork tiles (try Piazza Tiles and Mandarin Stone), which have distinct vintage overtones – great for giving definition to a dining area.

Wood

Timber flooring is timeless and luxurious and unlike most tiles and ceramics, wood has a natural warmth, making it comfortable underfoot. For the kitchen, experts recommend FSC-certified hardwoods such as oak, teak or iroko, properly sealed for a wear-resistant, smooth and easy-to-clean surface. Some

come presealed with a wax, oil or lacquer. A hardwood veneer is probably a better option for small, poorly ventilated and steamy kitchens. Looking almost identical to solid boards, a good-quality engineered floor is made up of a top and bottom layer and an inner section, with the grain running at right angles so it locks the natural movement of wood. It's then topped in your timber of choice. 'With engineered boards, the floor expands and contracts as a complete surface, making it more stable,' explains Harvey Booth of Kährs. 'Combined with a quality joint, this eliminates the risk of any gaps or problems associated with humidity.' Just like solid wood, engineered boards can be sanded or stained. They tend to be less expensive, although a good-quality version may cost the same. A wood-laminate floor (MDF laminated with a photo of wood) is cheaper still.

Stone

Solid and tactile, natural stone floors are tough, won't harbour dust and are easy to maintain. Limestone, slate, granite, sandstone, marble and travertine (a type of marble) come in many sizes, formats and finishes. A honed, matt finish will create an anti-slip surface, while



sealing. Some materials, such as terracotta, need to be waxed every six to 12 months.

Smooth flooring

Lightweight, warm and waterproof, vinyl is available in a wealth of colours and patterns in sheets or tiles (known as LVT or luxury vinyl tiles) that can be used to create an almost seamless surface. This tough, practical and relatively low-cost option is great for the kitchen. Be aware that there are different grades of vinyl – the thicker the 'wear layer', the more durable

'SEEING A SMALL SAMPLE DOESN'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY OF HOW YOUR WOOD FLOOR WILL LOOK. IT'S IMPORTANT TO ASK HOW LONG THE BOARDS WILL BE, WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM SIZE OF KNOTS AND IF SAP IS PRESENT IN THE BOARD – A GOOD-QUALITY FLOOR WILL HAVE NO SAP' *Adam Robertson, MD, Urbane Living*



a tumbled, antiqued effect is very popular at the moment. 'The softer corners and slightly distressed faces of a tumbled finish are ideal for achieving a rustic look that only gets better with time,' says Jo O'Grady, managing director of Stone Age. 'In more contemporary homes, there's an increase in demand for smooth, honed stone with sawn edges cut in big sizes. These larger-sized formats are a great choice if you want to create the illusion of more space.' Limestone remains a firm favourite for the kitchen, be it a textured, creamy hue, a dappled dove grey or a beautiful handpainted design from Decorum Est. Less expensive stones from Egypt and Turkey are making their way onto the market, too. Underfloor heating systems can be fitted with stone flooring, which along with terracotta and slate, conducts heat incredibly well due to its dense composition. Nearly all natural stone floors will need two coats of

and stain-resistant the floor. As a guideline, aim for a thickness of 0.5mm and above. A good-quality vinyl has a thickness of at least 2.5mm and is backed by a long guarantee. 'LVT offers incredible realism, low maintenance and water resistance,' says Philiep Caryn of Quick-Step. 'Bigger kitchens will get away with more dramatic dark slate and wood effects, while smaller rooms are better off with lighter limestones to maximise the feeling of space.' Linoleum is often confused with a synthetic vinyl but is, in fact, made from natural materials. It's hygienic, easy to clean, warm and quiet underfoot, and doesn't harbour dust mites, so it's ideal for allergy sufferers. Panels and squares simply click together, and both vinyls and linos cost from around £35/sq m. Rubber flooring is another option. It's soft and warm, tough, practical, anti-slip and waterproof, and comes in strong, vivid and neutral colours.