

Eco-Friendly Flooring



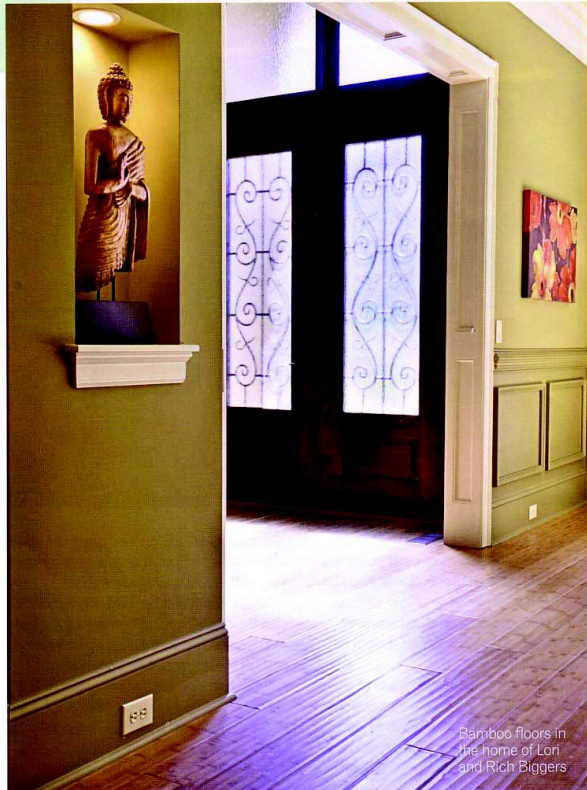
Homeowners turning to bamboo, cork, reclaimed hardwood and other green flooring alternatives

Lori Biggers loves the look of real wood floors, but hates the idea of cutting down trees to get them. So when she and her husband, Rich, built a home in the Palisades neighborhood in southwest Charlotte earlier this year, they had a specific request of their builder: They wanted bamboo floors.

"Though I loved different types of wood, cutting down rain forests was not something I wanted to support," Biggers says. "I knew that bamboo was more environmentally friendly, and I had seen the way it looked and I liked it."

Retailers and interior designers say they're seeing a growing number of Charlotte area homeowners going green in their flooring, much like the Biggers.

While traditional wood floors are still the most popular option, more homeowners are choosing bamboo and cork, which can look similar to hardwoods. But no trees are destroyed to make them.



Bamboo floors in the home of Lori and Rich Biggers



SPACES

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Others are using reclaimed hardwoods salvaged from old barns or other buildings, or dredged up from river bottoms. And linoleum, a kitchen classic until vinyl debuted in the 1960s, has staged a comeback in recent years as environmentalists tout its eco-friendliness.

"With the increase in awareness of all green products, more people are starting to ask, 'What are the alternatives to hardwoods?'" says designer and environmentalist Jennifer Pippin of Pippin Home Designs.

"Consumers are asking for more green products. They want flooring that's more durable, long-lasting and readily renewable."

When Pippin and her husband remodeled their Lake Norman home, they packed it with green features. Floors in different parts of the home feature cork, bamboo, natural slate stone and Marmoleum, a type of linoleum. "I wanted my clients to be able to see all the options and how good they look," she says.

Even clients who insist on hardwoods

can be environmentally conscious by looking for a stamp of approval from the Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC, which certifies that the manufacturer meets certain forest management standards. Other certification programs exist, but the Natural Resources Defense Council does not consider many of them to be credible.

Charlotte interior designer Tracie Johnson-Sawyers of PTI Design said retailers nationwide began introducing environmentally friendly flooring about five or six

years ago, "but it really started hitting the Charlotte market about two years ago."

Reclaimed hardwood floors have been especially popular among her clients, she said, because they work well in the French Country, rustic and craftsman style homes that have been hot in recent years.

The floors, which often come with wider planks than traditional hardwoods, can be double the cost, she said. Some companies even send you a certificate of authenticity telling you where your floors came from.

"People love having a story about their floors, being able to say they came from a Pennsylvania barn or a textile mill," says Johnson-Sawyers.

Locally, Charlotte builder Ross Allen often uses wood from older homes he tears down or from nearby textile mills, said real estate agent Linwood Bolles, who sells homes for Allen.

"He always goes into old homes to see what he can save," Bolles says. "It's a way to add character."


In the Lake Norman area, concrete stained floors have become popular, especially in lower level recreation areas, said Johnson-

Sawyers, who has them in her own home. The floors are cheap, look good and require no maintenance, she said.

In new materials, bamboo in particular has surged in popularity this year, she said.

"There are so many different strands of bamboo out there; you can actually get bamboo that looks a lot like a hardwood floor," says Johnson-Sawyers. "Right now I'm using it mostly in contemporary, modern homes or Craftsman homes."

For her Palisades home, Biggers chose a carbonized, hand-scraped bamboo, which is darker in color than traditional light bamboo and has plenty of texture. In all, it covers about 3300 square feet of her home, including the dining room, living room, kitchen, master bedroom, two half baths and two sets of stairs.

"It was a little bit of a struggle to get because it's still not a common thing here in Charlotte," Biggers says. "But once we got it, I've never gotten so many compliments on anything. Ninety-nine percent of people who walk in the door, the first thing they say to me is, 'Where did you get your floors? I love them.'" 



Bamboo flooring covers about 3,300 square feet of Lon Biggers' home.

Green flooring primer

Some of the different types of environmentally friendly flooring:

Cork: Harvested from a tree bark that regenerates, cork has natural cushioning and sound-absorbing qualities, resists mold and mildew and harbors few allergens. It typically comes in 1-foot-by-4-foot laminated sections that fit and snap together. Typically less expensive than hardwoods.

Bamboo: A grass that is cut and grows back quickly, it's as hard as maple and naturally water-resistant. Finer-grained than traditional hardwoods, it is available in a wide variety of colors, from traditional light hues to rich, dark browns. Cost is similar or less expensive than hardwoods.

Reclaimed hardwoods: Wood that is salvaged from old buildings or from river bottoms and re-used, it is often higher-grade than the newly-harvested wood sold today. Floors made from these typically have wide planks. Can cost twice as much as traditional hardwoods.

FSC-certified hardwoods: The gold standard for environmentalists, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification requires wood to be harvested from well-managed forests.

Linoleum: Made with natural ingredients such as linseed oil, cork dust and tree resins, it has been around since the late 1800s and comes in sheets or squares that "click" together. Available in bold colors and patterns as well as more neutral hues. Expect to pay slightly more than what you'd pay for vinyl.

For more information

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