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# flooring 101

BY MELISSA DAVIS

In a vast world of choices, know where to spend and where to save on flooring

One of the single largest design elements, and expenses in your home, will be the flooring. It's no wonder it is also one of the most difficult for homeowners to resolve. I find the problem isn't for a lack of options, but rather how many seemingly identical options there are available.

Combine the near-daily addition of new products with the sound bites embedded in our subconscious by our grandfathers noting that nothing is better than a good solid oak floor. Respectfully granddad, you're no longer correct.

Here's a quick overview of today's top options and how to use and combine them to get the greatest impact for your budget.

## WOOD

Once the top choice for quality and longevity, solid-wood floors are now quickly being eliminated from the market. Made from approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch solid thickness of high-grade woods both above and below, from the substrate to the finished layers, they waste precious natural resources. Our Canadian climate inherently sees extreme fluctuations in temperature and humidity levels, which also presents big problems, causing gapping and buckling depending on the season. In short, don't use solid wood if you can avoid it.

Engineered wood is a layer of real wood where the thickness varies depending on the quality. It is adhered to a substrate of multiple layers of alternating directions of wood, much like plywood. This means a far more stable product, which also allows more design freedom with wider plank sizes and lengths.

## WHERE



Opt for engineered wood in above-grade floors, over in-floor heating systems and, if the budget allows, even in basements.



*"There's never been a better time to make the investment in new floors."*



### LAMINATE

No longer a dirty word, laminate quality has improved along with printing and production technology in general. Current offerings are near identical facsimiles of the real deal. Better companies offer five or more varied plank styles per box, which creates a very random and natural installation. It's also extremely hardwearing and über affordable starting at around \$2 per square foot.

#### WHERE

Perfect for playrooms, and basements and over in-floor heating systems. I like to match a laminate to my engineered wood and substitute the lesser-cost product and use laminate in the basement. Guests will never suspect the change but the cost savings translates to big bucks.

### LUXURY VINYL

Laminate's fancy new cousin, this vinyl product offers all the benefits of laminate with the bonus of also being water-resistant and some are even deemed water-proof. Look for options with a base layer of cork and glue-free click systems that are simply held in place with their own weighted design.

#### WHERE

Playrooms, basements and even light, commercial projects. The malleable nature of the vinyl also allows for some forgiveness on unlevelled subfloors.

### PORCELAIN TILE & SLAB

Much like the printing process on laminate and vinyl, porcelain floors can now be created to emulate virtually any material. Designers have been singing their praises for years. There is nothing quite like the soft organic nature of marble to elevate a design, however, natural stone is also porous, which means more maintenance and limitations in use, such as wet and high-traffic areas where staining may occur. Opt instead for better-quality porcelain like Maxime from CIOT, which is available in everything from mosaics to oversized slabs for a truly seamless look.

#### WHERE

Washroom floors, counters and walls and over in-floor heating systems.



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF CIOT

There's never been a better time to make the investment in new floors. By combining beautiful engineered plank floors with a hardwearing laminating or vinyl, and finishing it off with luxury porcelain, your investment will pay off in durability, looks and value. ♦

Toronto-based designer and contractor Melissa Davis is known for her appearances, creative design and reno work produced for various HGTV shows. Her work has also been profiled nationally in print publications. With almost two decades of reno and design experience her firm continues to service clientele throughout Ontario & GTA, specializing in value-adding ROI and resale consultations. [melissadavis.com](http://melissadavis.com) @melissadavis

