



Photograph courtesy: DSDA

In this balcony, wood tiles mimic wooden decking

Your floor is an important part of your home. In fact, it defines the overall theme, or at least reinforces it. And when it comes to options in this space, today we are really spoilt for choice as there is something available for everyone, irrespective of one's budget and aesthetic sensibility.

NATURAL STONES RULE THE FLOOR

There is nothing more beautiful than natural stone flooring. In India, natural stone is one of the most sought after flooring choices in interiors. From high end imported marbles sourced from Italy, Spain, Greece, Egypt and even India (pure white makrana marble) to the humble desi options sourced from Gujarat, Rajasthan and south India, the beauty of stone lies in its numerous patterns, colours and textures. Every stone floor is

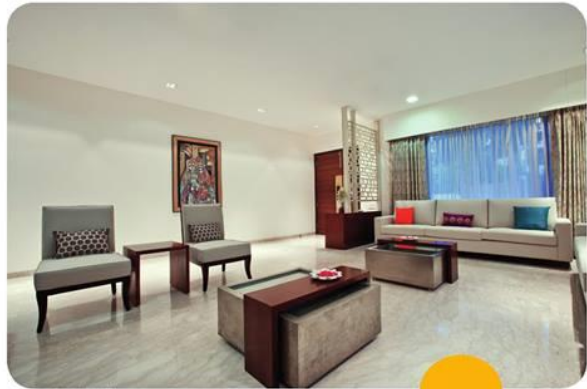


unique and it ages, changes and develops character over time. Imperturbable marble gives a rich, elegant look to any space, and screams luxury and style. This type is always in vogue because of the status symbol that is associated with imported varieties. Marbles like Statuario, Botticino, Crema Marfil, Classic Edge, to name just a few, are perfect for making a subtle style statement when used on their own. But going big and bold is definitely in and so for those who want this look, using striking coloured marble options like Oriental Black, Red Travertine or Rosso Lavante is the best option. These coloured marbles with distinct grains are ideal for defining a space like a foyer or for adding that X-factor to a dull, boring passage. Marbles can be finished in a number of different ways. Flaming is one such technique applied to it to create a finish that causes the grains of the marble to become embossed, making them stand out. It is quite a bold finish and is an interesting way to treat marble to achieve a focal point on the floor or wall. Creating arresting patterns using inlay technique is another emerging trend in stone floors. Vivid, geometric patterns are very popular and add a touch of Art Deco to a space.

Local Indian stones such as kota and jaisalmer are fabulous options if marble does not quite fit your style or budget. Kota is a beautiful stone with fine grains and rich, light tones that vary between green, yellow and brown, if executed well, it makes a versatile option that works equally well in a modern as well as a rustic setting. Unfortunately, kota stone, because of its use on platforms and low cost buildings, has got a bad reputation as being a low budget material. Despite this it remains one of my favourite floorings and a lot of designers are using large slabs of mirror polished kota to create expansive floorings for contemporary, luxury homes.

TRY RUSTIC FINISHES

The rustic theme never goes out of style, especially when we live in a concrete jungle. Bringing the outdoors in gives one a sense of zen-like calm. When try-



Photograph courtesy: PFA

ing to create a rustic or ethnic scheme the ochre-toned jaisalmer stone or the more neutral coloured sandstones and even granites are a great option. This is especially true for exteriors. These stones can be treated to achieve numerous finishes on the stone surface like rough, river polished, sandblasted and many more. They even up a small terrace garden, a courtyard or even a balcony. However, care needs to be taken with these softer stones as they are porous and need to be treated with chemical sealers in advance to ensure that water or dirt don't cause staining.

ARTIFICIAL ALTERNATIVES TO STONE

Engineered stone is fast gaining popularity as an alternative to imported marble. Comparable to imported marble in terms of pricing, it is produced by binding marble,

quartz or granite chips with a resin. Engineered stone is quite an interesting material to work with, and a real plus is it does not have the imperfections that are inherent to natural stones. It is also available in large slabs, which means fewer joints in the floor and comes in a wide variety of colours and finishes that resemble marble and granite. Indian brands have some great options in their quartz collection. The biggest advantage of stone, whether natural or engineered is its almost seamless joints resulting in stone floorings appearing vast and expansive.

WHEN ON A BUDGET OPT FOR TILES

Gone are the days when tiles meant a cheap-looking dull colored tile. Today, the sky is the limit. Tiles are a great op-



Photograph courtesy: OPEN CASA & ASSOCIATES

Mirror polished kota stone looks sophisticated

tion if one has neither the time nor the budget for stone flooring. There are different kinds of tiles available ranging from porcelain tiles to vitrified tiles, full bodied vitrified tiles and double charged tiles. This classification is based on their composition and manufacturing process, and these are available in bigger sizes such as 1m x 1m or 48 x 24. The surface finish of these tiles is also important and determines where they are used. They come in various finishes such as glossy, satin smooth and matte. Great leaps have been made in manufacturing technology, resulting in tiles that closely resemble imported high end marbles like Statuario, or granite, onyx sandstone and even wood. This means you can have a maintenance free wooden flooring, which is actually a tile. Tiles are a great alternative to stone in areas like bathrooms and kitchens where there are high chances of damage and staining. While being a hassle free and pocket friendly alternative, their biggest drawback is that grooves need to be maintained between the joints of

tiles to prevent bending. Unfortunately this means the joints are prominent and the seamless surface one sees with a stone flooring can never be achieved with a tile.

FOR ADDED FUNK USE CEMENT TILES

Cement tiles have been around since colonial times. They can be seen in ancestral mansions in the southern part of the country, where tiles have beautiful and intricate traditional motifs. They are making a comeback today, gaining popularity as a flooring material due to their funky patterns and trendy colour combinations. Cement tiles are actually concrete tiles that have patterns made from mineral pigments. The entire tile has a homogeneous structure, which means they can be re-finished to a certain extent. The quirky patterns like dots, geometric patterns, the famous chevron zig zag pattern and more others created in collaboration with designers, are really cool and a sure fire way to make a unique and interesting statement with ones floor.



Photograph courtesy: OPEN CASA & ASSOCIATES

River polished kota stone is used to create a rustic setting

KEEP KNOCKING ON WOOD

Wood never goes out of style. However, not everyone can afford and maintain a solid hardwood flooring. But if you love the sense of warmth, innately associated with wood, then laminate floor boards or engineered floor boards provide an affordable alternative. While laminated floorings are relatively affordable, and are easy on the eye, on closer inspection, they appear artificial. Though they are affordable, easy and quick to install, once moisture penetrates its upper layer, these floors spoil quite easily and need to be scrapped and redone. A better option is engineered wooden floorings. Though more expensive than their laminated cousins, they closely resemble the look and the feel of hardwood floors. This is because of the veneer like layer of wood

on the top of the board. A great advantage of engineered flooring is that it can even be lightly re-finished a few times.

POLISHED CONCRETE LOOKS GREAT

This type of flooring is relatively new and has till now been used mostly in factory and retail interiors. With people travelling overseas, it is slowly being accepted as a trendy alternative to the regular polished stone floorings for residences. It is a great option that offers seamless, expansive floors in different colours that have a shine and smooth feel quite close to marble. While the price point is higher than a tiled floor, it is still slightly cheaper than an imported stone flooring. Choosing the floor for any space is not a decision that can be taken lightly. The floor is an anchor around which the rest of the scheme takes shape