



Green Flooring: Top of Our Minds

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Flooring. It is part of every room, in every build or remodel project. They take the wear and tear of the homeowners' feet but need to still be able to offer the love and comfort to playing children. Health, durability and maintenance are all key factors in selecting the right flooring for your construction project. An interview with Denise Hopkins, an architect for over 20 years and creator of Eden Environments, a sustainable design center and product expert, provides information on how to make the best decision for the material underfoot.

What makes a flooring product green?

Green flooring should start from rapidly renewable resources. It should be long lasting and able to withstand heavy use so that the homeowner doesn't need to replace it in just a few short years. Natural products typically last much longer and perform much better than mad-made products. Any flooring selection should not have toxic-chemicals; these will release into the air and can be harmful to people, children and pets.

Whether it is the builder, remodeler or homeowner making the decision, you need to make the appropriate selection for an area and for the users comfort level and make sure the user's needs are properly met.

What are some examples of green flooring?

Wool is the epitome of sustainable flooring. The sheep is sheared, no one harmed in process. It is durable and long lasting, wicks away moisture, cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Wool naturally repels dust-mites helping with great indoor air quality and positive health benefits. Also, it lasts forever and won't break down like other man-made fibers do. If you have to change your flooring you can throw it on the compost pile because it is natural with no toxic chemicals found in it.

Sustainable harvested wood is another great example. This wood is responsibly harvested and processed. The ANSI Standard offers several options for sustainably harvested wood.

Linoleum is a very affordable option. There are a lot of choices that don't use expensive fossil fuels in the production.

What questions should someone ask about a flooring product?

What is the source of the product? Where did it come from? How is it harvested? Who is involved in the production of it? Are the people involved in the production, getting paid a fair wage? Does it have to be transported a long distance? What are the finishes on it?

It is important to know the whole manufacturing process. For example, you can take a bamboo floor and put a toxic finish on it, it is not so green anymore.

Before purchasing it is important to think about the after-purchase process: how do you maintain it? Is it easy to keep clean and looking new? Can you clean it with environmentally friendly cleaners?

There are a lot of things to consider. If you can't afford to include all of these sustainable options, what is the most important?

The most important thing is to make sure there are no harmful chemicals in the product. A homeowner is going to live with their flooring choice for a very long time and come into daily contact with it; you don't want products that are off gassing.

When making your selection, don't follow the fads. Your selection should be right for you. Make your choice for the long term to avoid having to replace it every couple of years. If you make a good decision up front you will be happier with it longer.

What about rating systems?

Rating systems are not the most important thing to consider. Sometimes Eden Environments look at this information as a back-up but most of the rating systems have minimal requirements. Eden Environments tends to look way beyond to other requirements. In addition, many manufacturers with great sustainable and responsibly manufactured products will not pay the expense of certifying of certifying their products.

How much will green flooring cost versus traditional flooring?

There are a tremendous amount of products that are in line with traditional products in terms of actual cost. The value with sustainable products is much higher. With sustainable products, all of them from the low end to the elaborate are going to last much longer than traditional products.

People are looking much more seriously at every purchase now. This is when they should really consider green flooring; it is going to be much more durable and long-lasting for their money.

Why do you care about sustainability?

It has been a long process for me personally; I have been an architect for over 20 years. During this time I have learned how much damage the construction industry can do to the environment, but it doesn't have to be that way. Years ago I started learning about how we can minimize our impact on the

environment while creating healthy places to live. If you look at studies on illnesses and children with asthma and allergies, the places we live are to blame.

How can you help Green Built Members?

Eden Environments can help with everything from design, working drawings, recommending materials, or working directly with the homeowner to help them to determine what their needs are. We are also able to help with interior design needs.

A lot of people in the construction industry don't have showrooms; this can be their showroom. They can come in, bring their clients with them and put their hands on the products they are considering. We have many items on display for them to see in person.

Eden Environments can serve as a resource. We have thoroughly researched products. We have the information and ability to answer questions. There are so many products to choose from and so much information out there; Eden Environments has done the homework to take the "overwhelming" factor out of green construction.

The most important thing is that there is help out there. One of the goals of Eden Environments is to make it easy for people to make good healthy choices and it doesn't always cost more.

For more information, you can contact this Green Built Michigan Member directly at Eden Environment 616-956-5000 or you can find them on Facebook by searching Eden Environments.

Green Built Michigan, an independent 501 (C)(3), is a voluntary partnership between home builders, industry supports, and sponsors committed to the construction of sustainable, superior-quality homes. For those interested in residential green building, Green Built Michigan is a valuable resource providing residential certification through a third-party verification system and the use of the [NAHB Model Green Home Guidelines](#). Homes built to these guidelines will have higher standards of site management and waste recycling, water efficiency, indoor air quality, energy efficiency, materials, and homeowner education.

For both building professionals and homeowners, Green Built Michigan serves as a source of green education. Providing close to 200 education programs on a yearly basis Green Built Michigan strives to educate all builders about the science and practice of building green. In addition, Green Built Michigan works with homeowners interested in learning about green building practices and benefits, and how to hire a green builder.

Green Built Michigan is the officially endorsed green building program of the [Michigan Association of Home Builders](#) and affiliated with NAHB Green.