

Hardwood or laminate, natural tile or luxury vinyl: What's best for your lifestyle

(NAPS)—Anyone can have beautiful, functional floors—once you review your options. For example, you may have your heart set on hardwood, but laminate may be a better option given your lifestyle. Alternatively, you may admire tile floors, but you might be a lot happier with luxury vinyl tile (LVT).

In order to make the right decision, consider three key factors—budget, wearability and maintenance.

• Hardwood floors are a great choice under the right conditions. Nothing compares to the natural beauty, color, intricate graining and depth of shine of a hardwood floor. Not only easy on the eye, hardwood floors tend to be warm underfoot too. Quality hardwood flooring is a big investment but will last a long time and add real value to your home.

Hardwood is timely and timeless and completely authentic, and it comes in many colors, from nearly white to practically black and various warm shades of brown in between.

Though there are many pluses to hardwood, there are some minuses to consider when deciding whether it's right for you. Bear in mind, all hardwood is not the same; quality and pricing are big factors. Depending on the species, some hardwood

floors can take a great deal of wear and tear and still look good. Others, though beautiful at first, show the signs of wear very quickly. In any case, you have to clean and care for it properly. This includes not using ammonia cleaners, oil soaps or a wet mop; using a professional hardwood floor cleaner to remove scuffs and scratches; and cleaning spills immediately. For these reasons, hardwood might not be the best fit for every home.

• In some cases, laminate is a great alternative. Fortunately, for people who really like the look of wood, there's an excellent—and much less expensive—alternative: laminate flooring. Through highly detailed digitized photography, laminate floors of today duplicate hardwood with tremendous realism that allows for a lower initial cost. What's more, an inner cork subfloor on some laminate products helps tone down the noise and echoing attributes associated with laminates of yesterday.

Unlike hardwood, a laminate floor will not fade. Pets can also be a problem for hardwood flooring. Laminate, on the other hand, offers a durable wear surface that is highly stain, scratch and moisture resistant.

Because of its durability, hygienic nature and



ease of installation and maintenance, laminate floors have become a low-cost alternative to hardwood, stone and tile.

• Is your heart set on stone? Natural stone and porcelain tiles are another popular way to pave your floors. They come in all shapes, sizes and colors, glazed or unglazed, and can be used plain, decorated or as part of a mosaic.

Along with its beauty, natural stone flooring will likely increase your home's resale value, and it only improves with age.

Stone is also popular because every piece of stone is unique so no two

floors are alike. Natural stone varies in hardness as no stone floor has a perfectly smooth surface. There is always a possibility that small chips or pits may show up and be more evident in certain kinds of lighting. It's a good idea to match the flooring with the kind of activities that will be taking place, as soft, porous stone flooring is probably inappropriate for a high-traffic area.

• Is tile the right fit for your family? A properly installed ceramic tile floor will outperform and outlast nearly any other. Glazed ceramic tile and porcelain resist stains, odors and dirt and can be

cleaned easily.

Environmentally friendly, ceramic tile is manufactured using natural materials and does not retain odors, allergens or bacteria. It also does not burn or emit toxic fumes. It can, however, be expensive and difficult to install, and some people find tile cold underfoot.

• Vinyl floors offer many perks. Luxury vinyl tile, which falls in the "resilient" flooring category, may be a flooring you should consider—especially if you're concerned about pets and kids. Luxury vinyl tile flooring is a great choice for kitchens and bathrooms, as well,

because it's "no wax" and easy to keep clean. It's durable, affordable, water resistant, easy to install and doesn't fade or stain.

LVT flooring comes in many colors, textures and patterns and can imitate wood grain, tile, even marble. Since it also comes in sheets, planks and tiles, there's lots of room for self-expression. A talented installer can use contrasting sheet vinyl for large patterns. Tiles can be arranged any way you want, from checkerboard to stripes to diagonals. Plus, LVT are flexible and soft to walk on. They have a cushy "give" underfoot.

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