

# Foot to the floor

Ditch the floorboards and carpet and soothe your soles with a bamboo, leather or Marmoleum surface.

**Words** Siobhan O'Brien

Flooring deserves some thought. You walk on it every day, it takes up a big chunk of space in your home and it has a significant impact on domestic comfort.

The type of flooring you select depends on factors such as: where you live (the coast, bush, inner city), your lifestyle (do you have lots of parties or despise cleaning?) and whether you have kids or pets. For example, a fully carpeted interior is not recommended if you are a beach-goer or allergy-sufferer.

Acoustics is another consideration. Timber floors look fabulous in apartments, but your neighbours will hear every move. Polished concrete can regulate your home's temperature, but is cannot be laid in some properties. Below is a guide to three interesting new flooring solutions for your home.

## Marmoleum

Marmoleum is to floors what Gucci is to handbags: both are made in Europe, they incite jealousy and they are available in mock-crocodile skin. However, Marmoleum provides something Gucci does not: this new-age linoleum is 100 per cent guilt-free.

Environmentalists love Marmoleum: it is made from renewable raw materials such as linseed oil, rosin, wood flour, limestone, pigments and jute. This means that after a long and eco-friendly life on your floor (up to 40 years), this product can be safely returned to nature where it will decompose without emitting harmful substances or gases. This has earned Forbo Floorcoverings (the company that distributes Marmoleum) a raft of eco-awards.

"Marmoleum is one of only two flooring products in Australia which has attracted the Australian Good Environmental Choice label from the independent, not-for-profit group Australian Eco-Labeling Association," says Edie Nyers, the marketing manager for Forbo Floorcoverings.

But there is more to Marmoleum than these eco-friendly characteristics: it is beautiful to look at; lovely to touch; it comes in sheet or tile form; and it is available in a rich and diverse palette. Its natural components also means that unlike its synthetic cousins, such as vinyl, the product breathes, so does not feel warm underfoot.

Cameron Bruhn, editor of architectural title *Artichoke*, is a big fan of Marmoleum. He used a jet-black mock-croc version for his inner-city flat.

"I trained as an architect before I went into magazines, so it was a bit of a DIY job but I found it easy to install," says Bruhn. "What I love about Marmoleum is the crispness of a matt black floor, the tactile quality underfoot, it is soft, easy to clean and if you drop something, it doesn't break."

Marmoleum starts from \$95 a lineal metre or about \$49 per square metre plus installation.

For more information about Forbo Floorcoverings, phone 1800 224 471 or 9828 0200.



## Leather

Leather means different things to different people. Fashionistas associate it with handbags and stilettos; bikers equate it with jackets, knee pads, and seat upholstery; while vegans can't move beyond the image of a dead cow.

Jacqueline Loughray, design enthusiast and founder of Ivy House, an online source for interior products, has found a new use for this ancient material: floor and wall tiles.

According to Loughray, leather tiles are durable, versatile and easy to clean. "Leather is a surprisingly hard-wearing floor covering. Our manufacturer gives them a life of more than 50 years. When it comes to cleaning, you simply wipe them down as you would an upholstered couch."

"There's so much you can do with this product," she says. "It can be custom-dyed, custom-cut or embossed with one of hundreds of patterns. The leather can be etched or cut by laser, making it perfect for company logos, family crests and such. The leather tiles can be

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Paula Taylor, managing director, Eco Flooring



hand-coloured to give it craft-like appeal or it can be finished with an antique or a distressed look."

Ivy House sells these tiles in a wide range of sizes and provides a design and fitting service.

"There's an art to laying leather properly and we use the specially formulated adhesives and wax," Loughray says.

Floor tiles start from \$800 sq m, wall tiles start from \$500 sq m.

For more information about Ivy House, phone 1300 730 372 or 9363 9321, or see [www.ivyhouse.com.au](http://www.ivyhouse.com.au).

## Bamboo

Bamboo divides opinion. In the east, it is revered as a symbol of long life and reviled as a sign of impending famine. In the west, some whisk this fast-growing plant from their gardens at the first sign of spring, while others claim bamboo is like gold in a world that consumes timber faster than it can be replaced.

Paula Taylor, the managing director of Sydney company Eco Flooring, is part of the latter group. "Bamboo is a fast-growing, sustainable and renewable alternative to conventional timber floorboards," she says. "Not only that, it looks fantastic and it is

stronger, harder and more stable than most other timber floors."

Interior designer Hannah Tribe, from Tribe Studio in Surry Hills, is another fan. She recently installed bamboo in Marcus Hafner's Bondi Junction home. "[Marcus] adores that pale Scandinavian look and the blonde bamboo floors go beautifully with this," she says.

Dale Jones-Evans, director of Dale Jones-Evans Architecture, agrees bamboo floors are a good choice in the right context. "I personally love black polished timber floorboards, but bamboo is brilliant over timber-framed floors," he says. "It is great for coastal properties, and it's cost-effective as its prefinished."

Most tongue-and-groove bamboo floorboards come in standard packs that are ready to install.

But before you part with your hard-earned cash, Taylor offers this word of warning: "The flooring industry has suffered from a flood of cheaper options that have come onto the marketplace. Customers should be looking for a reliable, consistent, high-quality bamboo flooring without problems."

Bamboo starts from \$75 sq m, plus installation. Eco Flooring Systems, supplier of BT Bamboo, phone 9402 6050, or see [www.ecoflooring.com.au](http://www.ecoflooring.com.au).

Ground level ... clockwise from top, Marcus Hafner with his bamboo flooring; Cameron Bruhn's Marmoleum; and Ivy House leather tiles. Photos: Quentin Jones, Diana Snape.