

FLOORED — by choice

Flooring, off the back of the juggernaut building industry which shows no sign of slowing down, is doing very well. What has radically changed in a very short time are the flooring options on offer. **Terry Herbert** reports.

A SCANT YEAR ago, commenting on the wider flooring market, **Kari Percy**, CEO of FloorNZ, reported that all flooring product areas had been performing well, but also singled out a rise in demand for wooden flooring products.

In the short space of 12 months, the flooring category has changed its spots and its stripes and its wood grains as new technologies and options are being rapidly deployed into the market. And sales uptakes are reflecting the popularity of these new product choices.

IS CARPET STILL THE FLOORING OF CHOICE?

When we check in with **Margaret Ross**, Marketing Manager at Harrisons Carpet One, to enquire about the demand in wooden flooring products, she tells us that flooring option barely gets a mention today.

“Carpet is still our biggest seller,” Ross says emphatically, “although we are also seeing a growing demand for vinyl planks, timber look products that are durable and impervious to water so suitable for any area in the home including bathrooms. Solution-Dyed Nylon (SDN) is the bulk of those carpet sales. That’s a massive change from say 10 years ago when it was mostly wool.





“SDN is a very versatile fibre which gives those products a luxurious feel and look. The key benefits are their fade and stain resistance and also their affordability.

Speaking of flooring choices, we ask Margaret Ross about market share and whether the concept of mobile showrooms is growing in popularity.

“We’re having a very good year across the group,” she tells us. “We do a lot of quantitative research and we know that the mobile service is what people want. We have 49 franchises that cover New Zealand. They want us to come to their homes so they can view samples in-situ.

“Our owner-operator franchisees can discuss and demonstrate colours and options in their home. Customers make better decisions when they actually see how everything matches in the home. We have a huge range in our vans, so the customer doesn’t miss out on choice.”

Market share? “There is no published data like supermarkets. We can safely say we are one of the leaders in flooring, but no-one is going to give you exact figures. It’s a great Kiwi success story.”

CARPET COURT SETTING NEW RECORDS

Crossing the floor to a more traditional physical showroom model we speak with **Sheryll Basham**, Manager at Henderson Carpet Court, one of 60 Carpet Courts nationwide, who enthusiastically tells us: “It’s going very well. Out west we continue to set new store records.

“Certainly our biggest seller is the Mohawk range. That’s the rhino you see on TV. All the Carpet Courts have exclusive rights to that in New Zealand. We bring it in from the States. It’s Solution-Dyed Nylon and made from recycled plastic bottles. Mohawk comes in a range of 50 styles, colours and weights.

“It has multiple price points so we’re always competitive. We start at \$120 a lineal broadloom metre, up to the plush Elite which is \$400 a metre for the 75 ounce weighted carpet. Price is

“In West Auckland, people are busy selling homes and colours are too personal. We get a lot of refurbishes too. Here the market changes by the day!”

dependent on the quantity of fibres in the carpet. We cover the spectrum, from the budget, first home or rental buyers, up to your top end.

“We also stock NZ-made Cavalier Bremworth [of which more below], Norman Ellison and a smaller volume from Irvine’s. We’re still selling wool carpet, just not as much. That superior performance and durability is reflected in the fact we offer up to a 25-year wear warranty for Solution-Dyed Nylon and a 15-year warranty for wool.”

MORE THAN A NIGHT ON THE TILES

With Made in New Zealand very much in mind and wanting to

find answers to “hard” questions, we hunt down the country’s only tile manufacturer and speak with the philosophical owner of Middle Earth Tiles, **Jeff Roberts**.

Somewhat resignedly he tells us: “We’re the last local tile manufacturer. Tiles are imported from Italy, China, Brazil – you name it.”

In contrast, all of Middle Earth Tiles’ clay comes from Matakana, north of Auckland and the tiles themselves are manufactured and kiln-fired in Warkworth. What’s Jeff Roberts’ secret of lasting success? “We survive and thrive by offering more choice than our competitors.”

In which respect the firm offers what it says is the biggest range of colours in Australasia. “That’s because most tiles are made in highly automated plants so customers are limited by volume. We’re flexible and we carry a huge range.

“Because of our range we get orders from around the world. These orders are usually for hotels but we supply restaurants and high end homes too. We’re even looking at a job in Ibiza. We’ve done the longest tile delivery in the world to a place in Norway that’s 400km north of the Arctic circle.

“We’ve just supplied a restaurant in Hong Kong, another in Indonesia, several in Malaysia and quite a lot in Australia,” he continues. “We’ve just had an enquiry from Bordeaux in France and I’ve suggested we supply our tiles for a decent supply of wine!”

And what of tiling trends? “Colours are back in. It’s been a grey world for a few years. Our customers choose by colour and texture. A lot of new textures have come into the market place. Honeycomb shapes or hexagonal shapes are popular. Terracotta is back too.”

GOING WAY OUT WEST

Middle Earth Tiles’ intimate showroom is just a few doors up from the Lamborghini showroom in upmarket Grey Lynn.

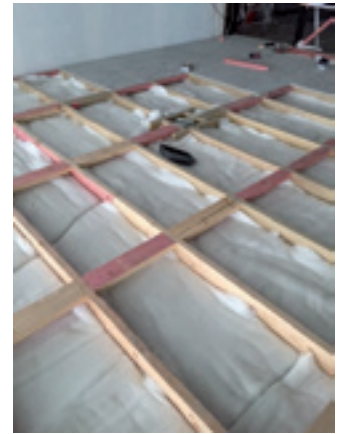
From there I need to seek input with a broader reach so I travel west to the capacious Mitre 10 MEGA in New Lynn, from whence flooring guru **Brett Aitken** treats porcelain and ceramic tiles as “everyday sales”.

Colour? “No, we tend to sell the neutrals out here. White is still the most popular.” Do I read that as a décor statement about Westies or does it reflect other priorities?

“In West Auckland,” says Brett Aitken, “people are busy selling homes and colours are too personal. We get a lot of refurbishes too. Here the market changes by the day. We get the tradies here Monday to Friday and over the weekend it’s all about the DIYer.”

When I ask about carpet, the effusive Aitken gets a little cagey: “Our carpet comes from a reputable carpet firm, we sell it as a house brand, but we’re not allowed to disclose who. We’re one of the few MEGAs with the space to sell broadloom carpet. We stock polypropylene, wool and Solution-Dyed Nylon carpet, which is by far the most popular.”

What does he put this down to? “With Solution-Dyed Nylon you get more durability – you can move furniture on it and walk



James Hardie Optimises Acoustic Performance in NZME Media Centre

PROJECT DETAILS

Location: 151 Victoria St West, Auckland
Project Type: Commercial building
Builder: Alaska Interior
Specifier: Telco NZ
Acoustic Engineers: Marshall Day Acoustics
Developer: Manson TCLM

PROJECT OVERVIEW

New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME.), formerly APN NZ, is the anchor tenant in a media centre in central Auckland. The company occupies 8,300sqm across three floors, and has integrated all its operations into one area, including the NZ Herald and The Radio Network.

THE CHALLENGE

For media studios, a very low background noise is desirable. If studios share a common floor slab with other activities then sound transmitted via the floor slab can be problematic. Potential sources of noise are footfall, sound from nearby offices, equipment noise, and sound from other studios.

THE JAMES HARDIE SOLUTION

Architectural designer Telco NZ and acoustic consultants Marshall Day specified an acoustic structural flooring solution by James Hardie to optimise acoustic performance and enable

its radio, publishing, and digital operations to operate side-by-side in this state-of-the-art media centre.

HardiePanel™ Compressed Sheet was installed on timber battens and a rubber cradle to minimise noise transference.

Technical Support Manager, Singh Kamboj, at James Hardie explains how the system works; “impact noise is absorbed into the rubber cradles, which means no echo or squeaks for optimum acoustic performance – critical to this studio setting.”

Nick Brkan, Alaska Interiors Project Manager, says it was his first time using this system for this type of application. “The flooring system was installed in four studios downstairs and one room upstairs. The installation was a simple process, despite the fact that no rooms were square.”

While the HardiePanel Compressed Sheet flooring system provides the necessary acoustic performance required of a commercial building of this nature, it exceeds the minimum Impact Insulation Class (IIC) of 55 for floors as specified in Clause G6 of the New Zealand Building Code and Sound Transmission Class (STC) when used on almost all available structural floor systems. The use of the HardiePanel Compressed Sheet flooring system reduces the need for impact underlays and high performance ceiling systems.

James Hardie fibre cement products are also manufactured using low-toxicity raw materials. The new media centre has been designed to a 5-Green star rating and the specification of this James Hardie floor system will help achieve a sustainable, healthy, and high-quality environment for NZME.

10 times further on it than wool. It's resilient, something spills and you vacuum it or wipe it off.

"Bearing in mind that carpet is not a mainstream seller for us, to give you an idea, in the three years we've been open, we've only had only one wool carpet sale compared to over 230 Solution-Dyed Nylon sales."

Are they all soft out west? What about other hard flooring types? For Mitre 10 MEGA New Lynn, "Laminate flooring is the big one for us, especially bamboo. Laminate flooring is basically a photograph on MDF board. It's not designed for wet areas.

"Bamboo is pure wood – a solid plank of bamboo," says Brett Aitken. "It's not designed for wet areas either but it's more tolerant. The main brand we sell is called Kaindl. It's German manufactured and very hard wearing. The locking system is very tight. You can actually spill liquid on it and wipe it off. What you cannot do is let water get under the floor."

MORE SPACE MEANS MORE FLOORING

For **Dee Lal**, General Manager of Botany and Henderson MEGAs, flooring is his "baby" and has been for a long time. "We continue to see flooring growing in our stores," he says.

"The biggest challenge is space, I'd love to have the room for carpet but it's too limited." Lal says he is always looking for new

product – in particular laminate flooring, new tiles and vinyl: "What we look for in our stores are flooring products that our DIY customers can lay themselves," he says.

What's hot out west? "Tiles are still the biggest sellers with the biggest growth. Laminate is growing but a lot of people still think it can get ripped or that spillage stains. They think tiles are more durable. For entrance ways, kitchens, bathrooms, laundries, tiles are still the preferred option."

Is laminate flooring too hard a pitch? "We're always educating consumers and laminate is certainly taking off. There are printed instructions and the 'Easy As' videos too. We sell the underlay, we sell the laminate cutters, it's a floating floor, no glue and it's easy to lay. I've done it myself so I can confidently talk to customers about it."

LOCAL CARPET MAKER ADOPTS RECYCLED MATERIAL

Having heard from NZ's only tile manufacturer, we thought it only fair to contact our largest local carpet manufacturer. We spoke with **Rochelle Flint** from Cavalier Bremworth, famous in the past for its broadloom products.

When we ask Flint how wool carpet sales are faring, she quickly responds with: "First, we should clearly establish that Bremworth have a 'dual strategy'. We are very actively marketing wool and Synthetic-Dyed Nylon carpet."

We suspect that Cavalier Bremworth belatedly woke up to the fact that its nylon carpet competitors were pulling the wool over their eyes and stealing their market share and they decided to do something about it.

That something took the form of Econyl a 100% recyclable plastic product made partly from recovered fishing nets and Cav Brem is making a big deal of it.

In a statement, Cavalier Corporation CEO, **Paul Alston**, says: "The deal to use Aquafil's Econyl fibre is a bit of a coup for the company and symptomatic of a broader re-invention. Cavalier Bremworth is back, but with a fresher more modern perspective."

Let's hope so. Very few of us watching prime time television could have avoided Cav Brem's recent beautifully crafted but somewhat esoteric 60 second TVCs that had a beautiful young woman draped in wool or swimming underwater in swirling fishing nets.


If even 2% of the viewing audience actually realised that Cavalier Bremworth was promoting wool and synthetic-dyed nylon carpet I would be very surprised.

Hopefully, those wool broadlooms will get back to capacity and the "dual strategy" of importing nylon carpet will help Cav Brem regain share let alone the market dominance they once enjoyed. They need it.

Meanwhile the rest of the flooring industry have been doing very nicely thank you.

What's very obvious however is that change happens quickly. Today it's carpet made from old plastic bottles and fish nets and laminates that look like wood and tiles.

Who knows what will be popular in another 12 months?

What we can safely predict is that the demand for flooring will still be there and still growing. 



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