

How To Shop For Carpet

By Chad Hammond

If there's one word that covers the major new trend in carpeting, and home decorating in general, that word would have to be *texture*. Though many of today's interior designers still favor neutral color schemes, those subtle earth tones and their compliments can now be had in a range of patterns and textures you can mix and match with a certain amount of confidence. This makes home decorating even more exciting for the do-it-yourselfer, since once you've decided upon your color palette, you can select textures and patterns from floor to ceiling that create a truly personalized environment. And of course, one of the first and best places to start exploring pattern and texture is with new carpeting. Carpet manufacturers and dealers are presenting more variety in pattern and texture than ever before, allowing consumers to avoid that old "acres of beige" rut without compromising on durability, longevity and adaptability, no matter what the surrounding décor or location.

Of course, the first thing to consider when choosing carpet is where you're going to put it. High traffic areas, places with an entrance from the outdoors or rooms with a lot of direct sunlight all dictate that you choose a carpet with a high durability factor. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute, whose website provided all the information here, you should look for carpeting rated at least four or five on the five point performance scale used by manufacturers. This is basically your family room, home office, and dining room if you use it on a daily basis as well as stairways and hallways. Other rooms of the house, from bedrooms to more formal living and dining areas used more occasionally can use carpeting with a lower rating.

Though the carpet rating required will narrow down your choices somewhat, next you want to decide on both color and texture. Think of your carpeting as a backdrop for the rest of your decorating options, it should complement without overpowering. Though there are almost as many textures and colors as there are people, many homeowners still are opting for neutral shades but adding pattern and texture in the form of tweeds, or varying levels of pile. Keep in mind that in general more neutral color schemes tend to stand the test of time a bit better and, depending upon the overall quality of the carpet and how it's maintained can help retain or even enhance your home's retail value. One of the first things that you see when a home has been on the market for a while is the seller offering a "carpet allowance," meaning either the existing carpet is in bad shape, or nobody was interested in making an offer on a home with pink shag wall to wall. Find the drama you need in subtle pattern and texture and save the wild colors for accessories that are more easily changed when you tire of them.

Wool has long been universally recognized as the luxury fabric for carpets and rugs: it's soft, it's warm, and it's durable. However, 97 percent of today's carpeting is made from synthetic fibers like nylon, polyester, olefin (polypropylene) and blends of these synthetics. Each of these fibers alone or in combination has excellent stain resisting and colorfast characteristics: check with your dealer if you have any questions about one over the other. In determining quality, look how the carpet is made. Density, or how much pile per square inch is in the carpet, and how close together the tufts of pile are, is a good indicator of quality, as is how tightly the yarns is twisted and how it is attached to the backing: heat set is most common.

Whatever carpet you choose, select the best carpeting you can afford, since you're going to be living with it for quite some time. And don't skimp on the padding and professional installation, both can have a detrimental effect on the life and wear of your expensive carpeting if not done correctly. Though they're often offered, make sure that if your carpeting comes with "padding and installation" included that the padding is not substandard for the carpet you've purchased and that installation will be experienced and professional.

Copyright © 2006 Publishers-Edge

 **Publishers-Edge**