



Use pale colours to make small spaces appear bigger

GROUND EFFECTS... THE FOUNDATIONAL TOPIC OF FLOORS

Though it's often the last thing tackled when upgrading a rental property, flooring should nevertheless be one of your initial renovation decisions, writes **Liesl Johnstone**

THE EXPANSE OF a floor is crucial to first impressions. Floors either attract or deter tenants. They're also an important part of your property strategy. Choose the wrong products for floors, and you'll suffer financially from every careless tenant.

Say you've just bought a grotty investment property or three. Just because you're upgrading something that's currently substandard doesn't mean you can't get a beautiful, transformative result from a flooring change. Think big!

Resene's Liz Kirkness cites the example of an old and unattractive ceramic tile floor becoming utterly as-new after being treated by the owner with Resene Uracryl 402 semi-gloss and (temporary) masking tape. Now the commercial space has the effect of an old-fashioned black and white tile design, executed brand new.

However, it's good to have clues on what to tackle yourself, and what to leave to professionals. You may have bought a modern apartment, but fear the concrete floor could become easily marked. Applying Resene Concrete Wax between tenancies

will provide a coating to cop inevitable wear and tear. That's something you can do yourself – with online help from the Resene website.

Some investors even teach themselves to lay ceramic tiles. Surprisingly, this is simpler than laying thinline hardboard then vinyl, according to property investor and flooring expert, Rob Lee.

He cautions investors to commission experts to lay hard-wearing, textured vinyl sheets or planking. "I'd strongly advise against trying to install anything with adhesives, because the job is more technical than people realise. Okay, it's easier laying ceramics, but even then do-it-yourselfers often forget to finish the job properly with metal or rubber strips or nosings in doorways, or where the tiles adjoin another material like carpet."

When laid by an expert, though, vinyl planking (which looks great staggered like timber floors) is a great choice. Sheet vinyl and vinyl plank prices can be bought new for under \$50 per square metre. Similarly, for a product price of under



Mid-toned neutrals work well

VERY DARK FLOORING WAS A RECENT TREND, BUT NOW SEEMS PASSÉ

\$100 per square metre, you could have a commercial-grade parquet-look vinyl, which looks spectacularly similar to the real thing. However, do stress to tenants that they shouldn't steam-clean or water-mop floors, in case this re-activates the adhesives. Mostly, vacuuming will suffice, and applying pressure with a slightly damp sponge.

Remember to buy planks and tiles in greater numbers than initially needed. When there's a stain or a water-mark during a tenancy, just one or two tiles or planks will need to be lifted and replaced. Insurance need not be touched. And each tenancy can begin with pristine floors.

BEIGE? CHARCOAL? CREAM?

It's a difficult one when you're thinking about flooring longevity. Do you try to deter visible marks and stains by choosing dark carpet, ceramics, vinyl or timber? Doing so will also visually reduce perceived areas. Using paler colours visually enlarges room space, increasing your rental's desirability.

As group franchise manager for Harrison's Carpet One, Rob Lee says selecting very dark flooring was a recent trend, but now seems passé. Now he says investors are opting for mid-toned neutrals,

which he agrees work better than either very dark or very light floors.

Usually, however, colour isn't the only consideration. It's a good idea to start with a thorough floor assessment. Get down and examine an old wooden floor up close. Are there rotten boards? Does any section of it smell? If the floor is sound but varies in colour, Resene stains (colorwood interior wood stains in 40 different shades) will right the problem.

Before laying anything on top of a timber floor, Christchurch property investor Jarrod Purdue urges investors to replace any boards with rot or borer problems. And, heaven forbid, if there's an animal urine smell, laying products on top is not going to negate it. The only answer is to "rip up the problem floor sections and replace them, sealing the new floor properly before putting carpet or vinyl over top."

This also applies to both carpet and underlay, where a property has been tenanted by an indoor smoker. The smell will have seeped into even the underlay, so if odour is an issue you probably need to replace every element of your soft furnishings.

But where stinks or stains are localised, could carpet tiles be the answer? Rob Lee

TAKE TIMBER FLOORS TO THE TOP:

- 1** Prep your old timber floors to last and look good. Resene Walk-On is especially good for entrance-ways and porches.
- 2** Lighten up to enhance the whole house. Resene Colorwood Whitewash makes previously dark spaces more inviting and clean, and retains the woodgrain look.
- 3** Need a polyurethane coat without the smell? Quick tenancy turnaround? Resene Qristal ClearFloor gives the durable clear finish without solvent odours. It can be applied over the top of a Resene Colorwood wood stain to alter your flooring shade perfectly to your taste.



Examine old wooden floors closely to see if boards need replacing

says he wouldn't use them in a residential property setting. With an adhesive backing of their own, they're not typically bolstered by underlay, nor are they cut-pile, so the comfort factor is lacking, Rob says.

When carpeting rooms, choices are almost painfully plentiful; far more than when you last shopped for carpet. It used to be that everyone wanted wool underfoot. Now both polypropylene and nylon have risen in popularity, and account for at least 70% of the carpet market. The latter are superior when it comes to

stain-removal and fade-resistance, but can flatten a little over time. Steam cleaning between tenancies restores bounce to fibres.

Buying a quality underlay is a canny move. This will increase the life of a more modest grade of carpet at surprisingly little extra expense than if you'd selected the very cheapest underlay option. It will provide superior underfoot comfort for tenants. In this post-minimalist era, both owners and tenants are "going for comfort;" wanting high-density carpet and

spongy underlay.

Jarrod selects a mid-grade underlay when he replaces carpet, as he prefers its cushioning feel to that of the densest grade. For the carpet itself, he's found a textured loop pile nylon called "Newport" to be a high performer. Graded both 'extra heavy duty' and exceeding green label requirements, Jarrod finds it lasts for years, while resisting stains and fade.

As with all renovation projects, buying second-hand or very cheaply could easily prove to be a false economy. ■