



BRIGHTON PEACE & ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

CARPETS AND FLOORING

Everyone loves the sensation of a deep shag, but what are the environmental costs of that luxurious rug? Among the issues we can count are: the use of child labour; poor working conditions for those employed in manufacture; and environmental and health concerns in the production process. Alternatives which address these issues are fair trade or RugMark carpets, and natural carpeting. Cork and bamboo are also ethically sound alternatives. Always be aware of the source of the flooring, and where possible avoid PVC (AKA vinyl).

Carpets and Rugs - Child Labour

- The **RugMark** label can be found on carpets made without child labour - www.rugmark.org.uk. **Allied Carpets, B&Q, Carpet Right, Debenhams, House of Fraser and Laura Ashley** have committed to stocking only **RugMark** certified rugs from India, Nepal and Pakistan. They can also be found in many independent stores
- **Mala Carpets** are a fair trade and charitable trust selling natural fibre carpets - www.malacarpets.co.uk
- **One Village** sells fair trade carpets and rugs - visit www.onevillage.org for more information.



Picture courtesy of Mala Carpets

Environmental and Health Issues

- Transportation of carpeting across the world emits extra carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions which exacerbate global warming
- Wall-to-wall carpets harbour dust and dust mites, which can trigger asthma and other allergies. Dust may also

absorb toxic pollutants. In this respect, smooth flooring is an alternative. However, the cheapest smooth floorings are made of PVC, a major source of toxic substances. Better alternatives include wooden flooring, linoleum, cork and laminate flooring (provided they are ethically sourced)

- Many carpets and their backing materials which are stuck on with glue emit Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) amongst other potentially harmful chemicals. Woven carpets have their own backing, and so use a minimal amount of adhesive
- **Duralay Treadmore** (various stockists) and **Interfloor** (www.interfloor.com) both produce carpet underlay with the environment in mind
- For laying carpets, it is best to use traditional fitting methods such as tacking, rather than glueing

Natural Carpets

The following are environmentally-friendly choices, but most have latex rubber backing glued on and are therefore not biodegradable.

- **Coir** is hard wearing and slightly coarse. It is not suitable for the bathroom or kitchen as it doesn't respond well to water
- **Jute** is softer than the other natural floorings and is suitable for the bedroom
- **Seagrass** is strong and resistant. It is hard to dye so mostly comes in a natural green or light brown shade. It can be laid throughout the home
- **Sisal** is the most durable of the natural carpets and comes in many different designs, colours and weaves
- You can get natural and organic wool carpets with woollen felt, jute or hessian backing

Wood Flooring



It is best to reuse old floorboards, or use reclaimed pine, beech or oak which are widely available. If buying new, check products are **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)** certified. Look for the FSC logo/certificate number and ID code on the specific product. To vet companies, visit www.fsc-uk.org/product-search.

Simon Counsell (Director of Rainforest Foundation UK, and one of the founders of the FSC) has criticised the FSC for certifying forests where logging damages the environment and displaces local communities. Additionally, there are significant CO₂ emissions produced from transporting wood across the world. FSC themselves say that they are trying to improve their systems.

Laminate wood flooring can be made from recycled waste wood. Ask the manufacturer about the percentage of recycled materials used. See also our 'Wood Products' factsheet for more information.

Other Flooring

- Avoid PVC (vinyl). Linoleum is a better alternative. When laying the flooring, ideally use a plant-based adhesive rather than a solvent-based one. When finished with, linoleum can be made into carpet underlay
- Cork is a very good natural flooring, and also acts as an insulation material. Ideally, try to buy unvarnished cork tiles, and seal them yourself with a water-based varnish or beeswax polish. Many carpet shops stock cork flooring
- Bamboo flooring is available from **The Bamboo Flooring Company** - www.bambooflooringcompany.com, Tel: 0845 0092222
- For more information on bamboo, see our 'Wood Products' factsheet

Some Local Stockists

- **Blatchingtons Ltd**, 60-62 Blatchington Road, Hove. Tel: 01273 735329
- **Bond Street Carpets**, 93 Boundary Road, Hove sells natural carpets and linoleum. Tel: 08456 834 792
- **Brighton & Hove Wood Recycling Project's Wood Store**, Municipal Market, Circus Street, Brighton is a not-for-profit environmental organisation that sells floorboards - www.woodrecycling.org.uk, Tel: 01273 570500
- **Brighton Carpet Centre**, 102 Preston Drove, Brighton sells natural carpets, Marmoleum lino and cork tiles. Tel: 01273 564037
- **EC Forest Product Sales Ltd**, The Woodland Centre, Whitesmith (A22), near Lewes has FSC certification and stocks wooden floors from European managed resources – www.ecforestproducts.com, Tel: 01825 872025



Picture courtesy of the Wood Store

- **Harmony Carpets**, Bute Hall, Sutherland Road, Brighton sells natural carpeting, Marmoleum lino, reclaimed pine floorboards and wood block, and laminate wood flooring - www.harmonycarpets.co.uk, Tel: 01273 602370
- **Kemp Town Flooring & Lancing Carpet Planner**, 86 St James Street, Brighton sells natural carpets, wood laminate, linoleum and cork flooring. Tel: 01273 698672
- **The Natural Flooring Centre**, Peter Davey & Son, 18 Sydney Street, Brighton sells natural carpeting and fits both Marmoleum and wood floorings - www.daveyflooring.co.uk, Tel: 01273 690512

What you can do right now.....

Reuse cuttings from old carpets as scratching posts for cats (attached to blocks of wood, sofas etc), welcome mats or rugs, and inlay for the car floor.

Resources & Further Information

- 'A Good Life', Leo Hickman, 2005
- Ethical Consumer, 102 Sept/Oct 2006; 103 Nov/Dec 2006; 110 Jan/Feb 2008
- 'Green Living', Sarah Callard & Diane Millis, Carlton Books Ltd, 2001
- 'Organic Living', Lynda Brown, Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2000
- 'The New Green Consumer Guide', Julia Hailes, Simon & Schuster, 2007