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THE MAGAZINE OF SUSTAINABLE FLOORING

## NeoCon PREVIEW

# GREEN INTENTIONS pure or pure profit?



## CARPET TILE

blends style  
with sustainability

## PET:

carpet industry's  
600-pound gorilla?



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# CARPET TILE: MIXING SUSTAINABILITY WITH style & PERFORMANCE

Carpet tiles, also known as modular carpet, have been around since the mid 1950s when the Dutch company Heuga, now owned by Interface, introduced the first true product of this kind. Other companies have emulated the process over the years and started to manufacture their own types of carpet tiles along with the traditional broadloom for which they were known.

The original European products were used in residential settings as smaller homes and apartments made modular carpet easier to install, as well as to transport, due to the ease of carrying a few boxes instead of a huge roll, which had to be cut and fit it into place.

Carpet tiles became an obvious choice for commercial buildings when it

was realized that a few tiles could be replaced in lieu of an entire floor.

If there was one downfall when it came to carpet tile it was aesthetics. In many cases carpet tile mimicked broadloom, but today's modular offerings are not only unique in design, they are moving to a whole new level and doing so with sustainability in mind. Most manufacturers offer products that not only include recycled materials, but can also be taken back and recycled themselves – either into new carpet tiles or other products.

“Styles have evolved from the broadloom look into those that embrace and emphasize the bold patterns and checkerboard effect of the finished installation,” explained Robert Murdoch, vice president of flooring contractor M.E. Sabosik







FAR LEFT: Colacion Studio in Long Beach, Calif., was among Shaw Contract Group's 2012 'Design Is... Award' winners for the offices of Tamdeen Group, Safat, Kuwait.

FAR LEFT, BOTTOM: Tandus Flooring's HalfTone features expansive repeating color gradations as yarns in high/low contrasts produces the pixilated look of a halftone print.

LEFT: The Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City features the rich colors of Milliken's award-winning Allum e collection.

Associates in Point Pleasant, N.J.

Regarding design, Tim Baucom, Shaw Industries' vice president of commercial sales and marketing, said, "When carpet tile was first introduced, it was fusion bonded. With tufted technology, we were able to produce texture. Innovative design has now added even greater opportunity to create interesting visuals and custom floors with running line products. We've continued to innovate, including introducing 18 x 36 rectangular tiles. And now, our LokDots pressure-sensitive adhesive system makes selective replacement easier and virtually eliminates VOCs."

Terry Mowers, senior vice president of product development for Tandus Flooring, said the market has moved from a 20<sup>th</sup> century solid/monolithic aesthetic to sophisticated patterning techniques. "For example, our Sero Design Technology produces fluid transition of pattern and color, allowing images to shift, flow and pool across the floor plane for design that transcends modular boundaries."

As the market has evolved, Mark Oliver, senior director of product management, Mohawk Group, said the company has focused on designing specifically for each platform and leveraging their individual design attributes. "As an example, we see the corporate market right now mov-

ing away from cubes and offices toward a true flexible and open environment. As the walls go away, designers are unlimited in the surfaces with which they have to work and, therefore, the floor is becoming even more important - and more fun. The flexibility of the carpet tile platform enables this freedom and creativity."

When it comes to design flexibility, David Vita, executive vice president for Beaulieu Group, said modular carpet offers so many more options - and it has nothing to do with mills having more styles in tile than broadloom. "You can take the same carpet tile and quarter turn it or ashlar (offset) the squares or plank them. There are so many design advantages and options now."

And, he added, when it comes to using the quarter turn method, it makes replacement much easier because the tiles are already arranged in an offsetting pattern. If the carpet gets stained, replacing one or two new tiles, even if in the middle of a room, will not look out of place. "Whereas with broadloom, you have to cut out the section and then you have an almost quilt-like appearance. Plus, it's much easier to store an extra box or two of tiles than it is a roll of carpet."

Dave Triepke, president of Universal Metro, a flooring contractor in Santa Fe

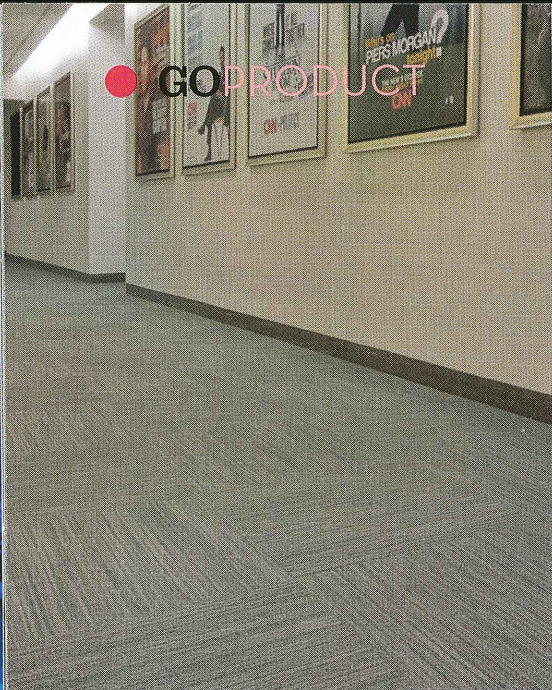
Springs, Calif., noted it is the numerous improvements made by manufacturers - from pattern to construction - that created not only flexibility for the designer, but "cost effectiveness for the owner; quick installation for the builder; efficiency of handling for the subcontractor, and ease of maintenance for the tenant."

"Now manufacturers are developing glueless installation systems," he added. "In a recent project for Southern California Edison (SCE) we were able to lay over the existing VCT with a glueless system, therefore creating less demolition and waste as well as more flexibility for the client long term. SCE can utilize VCT in the rooms in the future by simply removing the carpet tile as there was no adhesive to damage the VCT. Additionally, SCE can reallocate the carpet tile to other areas as needed."

Peter Greene, Interface's vice president of marketing, noted the glue-free process Triepke mentioned serves two important purposes in today's competitive business environment: sustainability and design. On the design side, it allows companies to "selectively replace damaged or soiled tiles," thus maintaining the overall pattern of the space and giving it "demonstrably lower environmental impact" because the

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entire space does not have to get replaced. “And, increasingly, many designers are exploiting modularity to create sophisticated, custom designs that incorporate branded cues, wayfinding needs and design aesthetics all while using standard products.”

**ECO FRIENDLY**

Replacing one or two carpet tiles rather than a whole section of broadloom is actually a small part of why modular products are environmentally friendly.

The largest factor addresses the construction of carpet tiles compared with wall-to-wall, from the use of recycled materials to compose the tiles to their ability to be taken back and either recycled into new tiles or backing materials or used as components and fillers in products for other industries.

Sabosik’s Murdoch noted when it comes to the sustainability conversation, “due to the higher costs of the products involved, they are normally set at the A&D level directly with the manufacturer reps. But we do have a few healthcare clients that require low VOC products where we have specifying power.” In areas such as offices, which “require a carpet tile-based solution, we have been emphasizing the Mohawk/Lees What Moves You Collections with the SmartStrand Contract fibers made by DuPont.”

Bill Blackstock, business manager for Milliken’s hospitality business, said the company has “taken great efforts to include materials in our carpet tile that is comprised of environmentally kind content. All of our North American products are PVC free and certified to ISO 14001 through third party auditing.”

FROM TOP: Consolidated Carpet installed Lees’ The Field Modular carpet in the CNN building at Time Warner Center in New York; Tibetan Wool from Mannington Commercial’s Lhasa collection expresses pattern through the use of long-tonal gradients; and this pattern in Interface’s Urban Retreat line is reminiscent of lengths of rough-hewn hardwood.

Natalie Jones, Mannington’s vice president of commercial brand development and creative product, pointed out, “Many sustainability stories are well-known, for example end-of-life options, including recycling reclaimed modular tiles into backing. At Mannington we’ve extended these capabilities across product platforms, also recycling reclaimed carpet into our hard surface flooring.”

Baucom said in the late 1990s, Shaw approached carpet tile with a blank slate. “Sustainability was a requirement from the outset, and in developing EcoWorx we created a PVC-free backing that contained recycled content, allowing the phase out of our PVC-tile backing. Both our EcoWorx backing and our Eco Solution Q nylon fiber are designed to be recycled into the same materials over and over. Shaw supports recyclability with an environmental guarantee program. We will collect and recycle EcoWorx products at no cost to the end user. All our carpet tile products are Cradle to Cradle certified, ensuring safety for human health and the environment.”

Mannington is “also bringing choices for people looking for a vinyl alternative backing for modular carpet” with its rEvolv backing, said Jones. “Mannington has completed an Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) for rEvolv, making it a choice for specifiers and facilities managers wanting a high performance, non-vinyl option. rEvolv is thermoplastic polyolefin backing that carries the Mannington Commercial performance, innovation and commitment to the world we share,” noting the company spent four years of research, development and extensive testing on it.

Dave Meberg, president and CEO of flooring contractor Consolidated Carpet in New York, said there is one other area where carpet tiles are more environmentally friendly—maintenance. “They are easier to maintain. This means they require less water and shampoos/cleaners to clean them” He added, this also helps extend the overall useful life of the product, which means in the long run less energy and raw materials need to be used.