



A photograph of a modern library interior. The floor is covered in a vibrant blue carpet. On the left, there are several red armchairs with orange accents. In the center, two large, light blue beanbag chairs are placed on the carpet. To the right, there are tall bookshelves filled with books. The ceiling is white with recessed lighting. The overall atmosphere is bright and modern.

transforming interior spaces

WITH CARPET AND FLOORING

by David Vinson, PhD

British painter Francis Bacon's (1909-1992) legacy consists of disfigured and abstract human subjects often enclosed in a cage-like geometry. Bacon's work is not for everyone, but I find it endlessly brilliant, not least of all because of how he uses interior space to create a unity of feeling, one best described as suffocating and nightmarish. (If you're curious, perhaps start with the remarkable *Study for the Nurse in the Film 'Battleship Potemkin'*, 1957, or the oft-referenced *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962.)

Interior design, whether we realize it or not, is closely linked to our psychological state. It is a very real, physical component of our lives, just as it is a psychological and symbolic component. In addition to paintings, we can turn to literature and film to explore this correlation.

Featuring distinctive, purposefully bland design is something we see again and again to evoke and direct emotion. From the simple and non-descript kitchens and bakery back rooms of Raymond Carver's "Beginners" and "A Small Good Thing" to the lavish, highly-detailed descriptions of Fitzwilliam Darcy's estate at Pemberly in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, we see the design of interior spaces playing key roles in the emotion and development of story. In Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining*, there is something unnerving about the extended scene in which Danny rides his big wheel through the Overlook Hotel. The interior space of the colossal hotel is a labyrinth, and the viewer gets a sense of how easily one might get lost inside, both literally and figuratively.

With respect to interior design at our universities and colleges, my point is rather simple: the

materials we select for our interior structures go a long way to impacting how occupants feel. If a space is drab and lonely, this will understandably inform the feelings of those who occupy it. Conversely, if an interior space is warm and inviting, there will be a desire to seek it out.

Carpet and flooring are design elements that are key not only to the functionality of a space but also crucial in determining its look and feel. Universities and colleges are using carpet and flooring to appeal to campus communities, and subsequently, these institutions are discovering the far-reaching impact that such design elements have. Enhancing carpet and flooring can drastically improve user experience, and this should always be a priority, particularly with structures most essential to campus life, whether a residence hall, a classroom, a library, or an office.

The Comfort and Cost-Effective Value of Carpeting

In the past, many different materials, such as carpet, ceramic or porcelain tile, and vinyl composition tile (VCT), have been the leading flooring materials in residence halls. Today,

facility operators are looking for flooring products that are easier to maintain and provide more flexibility and comfort to student residents.

Students prefer to live in an environment similar to the home they left behind. This is an issue of comfort but also one of familiarity, and the type of flooring installed plays a significant role in how quickly they can adapt to a new home on campus. Carpet can be installed to add aesthetic value and to stay on trend with colors and style, and when it comes to thermal resistance (R-value), carpet is superior to most hard-flooring products. Carpet with thermal resistance can go a long way to creating inviting and cozy spaces. It can improve the energy efficiency of buildings, offsetting the cost of material and installation for years to come.

Soft surfaces like carpet improve noise absorption, as well. In a sound absorption study by the American Society of Interior Designers, carpet was compared with hard flooring options. Its findings determined that carpet absorbs sound 10 times better than the tested hard flooring options. Quiet spaces also enhance comfort and

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concentration, and this is more important than ever because many residence facilities now have a living-learning environment where students and faculty can immerse themselves in learning beyond the classroom.

Easy Installation and Healthier Spaces with Carpet Tile

Both broadloom and carpet tile provide comfort, but only carpet tile can provide the ease of flooring replacement desired by facilities maintenance personnel at higher education institutions. Pressure adhesive carpet tiles are simple to remove and replace, and if there is a wear and tear problem in one area, one can avoid recarpeting the entire room. Innovations in adhesive methods have reduced or eliminated VOC (volatile organic compounds) content while increasing the ease of both initial and replacement installation. Further, today's carpet tile is more durable than the carpet tile of the past; it is as much as 40% lighter than traditional carpet tile backing, which makes it easier to transport from storage facilities to residence halls or other buildings.

Enhancing carpet and flooring can drastically improve user experience, and this should always be a priority, particularly with structures most essential to campus life, whether a residence hall, a classroom, a library, or an office. If a space is drab and lonely, this will understandably inform the feelings of those who occupy it. Conversely, if an interior space is warm and inviting, there will be a desire to seek it out.

Carpet backings also have added antimicrobial properties, which help to destroy or inhibit the growth of microorganisms such as fungi and bacteria. When vacuumed regularly, carpeted areas also have a lower concentration of dust, dirt, and allergens than areas with hard flooring. Another benefit of carpet tile is that many backings consist of high recycled content, which makes them a more sustainable option for flooring.

Ideal User Experience with Antron® Carpeted Flooring

Higher education institutions all want flooring that remains easy to clean, looks great, offers durability, reduces environmental impact, and provides superb long-term value. Look no further than the carpeted flooring at Antron®.

John Kim, Senior Technical Marketing Manager for Antron®, explains that Antron® develops carpet fiber consisting of “the strong

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molecular bond of type 6,6 coupled with an innovative four-hole hollow filament shape.” What this means is that customers can expect carpets of Antron® nylon to last up to 75% longer than the majority of competitive nylon carpets—a benefit that reflects an ethos at Antron® in which “carpet should be durable, not disposable.”

When specifying carpet, there are two choices for Antron® carpet fiber. The first is Antron® Lumena™ solution dyed nylon type 6,6, which is available in two deniers of nearly 300 colors. Antron® Legacy™ fiber is another option, and this is a white dyeable nylon that offers the ultimate in color and styling flexibility.

Antron® carpet fiber is designed with the overall well-being of its users in mind, and it is uniquely ideal for residence halls and other highly trafficked spaces on campus. In addition to facilitating a clean and aesthetically appealing indoor environment, Antron® carpet provides an acoustic advantage that can contribute to student learning and listening. Moreover, it can “cushion footsteps, thus reducing foot and leg fatigue, [and] can also help minimize impacts from slips and falls.” For higher education institutions located in colder climates, Antron® carpet works to “maintain warm air longer, potentially providing an added energy benefit.”

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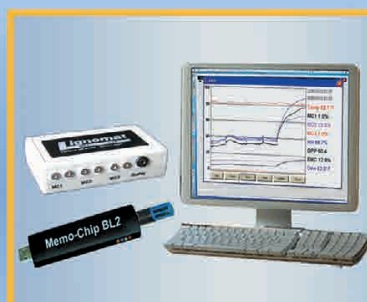
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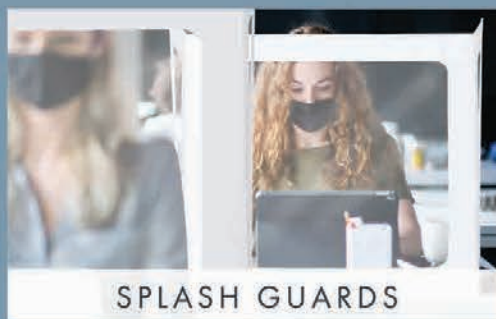
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While some facility managers may be anxious about investing in carpet due to concerns with maintenance and durability in highly trafficked spaces, Kim advises to specify the right carpet fiber and shape: “Specifying a high-performance carpet fiber that has built-in stain protection and soil release capabilities makes carpet a clear choice for higher education. Fiber shape can impact how clean the carpet looks and how easy the carpet is to clean.” The design of Antron® Nylon Type 6,6 allows for fewer places in which soil can accumulate, helping soil to be released more readily during vacuuming. This combination results in better texture retention, and it helps carpet to look new for a longer period of time. Carpets of Antron® nylon can have 65% better soil resistance and 2x better texture retention than carpets of the leading competitive nylon. Further, carpets of Antron® Lumena™ nylon can have up to 10x better stain resistance than carpets of the leading competitive solution dyed nylon.

That all carpets of Antron® nylon are subjected to a rigorous certification screen process ensures

long-lasting performance. Facility managers offer better insight into how carpet performs in a real-world setting. Jake Grant, former Chief Operating Officer from Oconee School District in Georgia, explains, “I learned that selecting the right fiber coupled with a maintenance program does impact how long carpet will stay newer looking. If you specify a carpet based solely on price, you cannot expect to have long term durability.” (To watch Jake’s video testimonial head over to antron.net)

Antron® believes the longer a carpet can last, the more sustainable it is. This longevity drives meaningful sustainability and supports long-term value.

The Durability and Design Options of Luxury Vinyl Tile (LVT)

For years, vinyl composition tile (VCT) has been the most widely used product for facility managers who prefer an alternative to carpet. The issue with VCT, however, is that it is impersonal as well as commercial in look and feel.

Luxury vinyl tile (LVT) is a sound option. LVT provides a visually warmer environment, and can be more comfortable to the touch than standard VCT or sheet vinyl. Further, LVT is versatile in both appearance and surface material. Whether it is for a student bedroom, a classroom, a library, or office space, LVT is designed to accommodate a wide variety of desired aesthetics. One can transform a space with a “wood” or “stone” look, and these come in dozens of shades and finishes. Also, surface types can be textured, smooth, embossed, distressed, or hand scraped. An added benefit of LVT is it provides a kind of blank canvas for the user. For instance, if a student has LVT in an on-campus residence, he or she can express individual preferences by bringing along a rug to compliment the flooring. The same idea applies to an office or even a classroom.

Hard surfaces like LVT are also potentially more durable and easier to clean in environments where students or faculty and staff may track in dirt or spill food and drink. In many college and university residence halls, for instance, the cleaning staff enters student bedrooms only at the end of the school year; as such, flooring that needs less frequent cleaning can prove cost-effective over long stretches of time. When properly installed, LVT can prevent water from leaking through the joints and down to the substrate, another cost-effective asset in locations where spills are likely to occur. Of course, it is much easier to clean a spill on a hard surface than to contend with scrubbing a carpet; this fact supports the likelihood of the floor being in good shape at the end of the year when the cleaning staff arrives. Also, because students may place an area rug over the hard flooring, it is the rug that endures most of the wear and tear from shoes, spills, and furniture rearrangement.

Versatile Interiors at the Residence Halls of Bennington College

With increased design options to transform interiors into beautiful, long-lasting, and sustainable spaces, it is no surprise that residence halls are exceeding students’ expectations at Bennington College (Bennington, Vermont). What makes the residences at Bennington so special is that students actually live in houses rather than dorms. The largest houses are sizeable enough to accommodate 35-40 occupants, and they range in style from modern to “1930s New England.” Each one is also equipped with kitchens, common areas (many with fireplaces), a laundry room, as well as private showers and bathtubs.

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The interior flooring of each house (or set of houses) aligns with a particular design aesthetic. The Woo Houses, which were designed by esteemed Korean American architect Kyu Sung Woo, each have three floors with elevators, living rooms with a fireplace, and kitchens with dishwashers. The walls are soundproof and the rooms flood with natural light. The flooring is versatile given the size and architectural scope of the houses, and they consist mainly of carpet tile and LVT.

The Barnes Houses, known also as the Milk Crate Houses, offer some of the largest rooms on campus, and their rustic appearance is paired with hardwood floors and LVT in a “wood” style. Carpet tile is selectively located throughout the houses as well.

Several other housing options are available at Bennington, among them the Colonial Houses, the Shingle Cottage, and the Welling Townhouse, to name a few, and each are designed with particular aesthetics in mind. The flooring installed within provides beauty, comfort, and aesthetic harmony.

Mediterranean-Style Design at Scripps College

Scripps College is a small (approximately 1,100 students) liberal arts women’s college located in Claremont, California. It offers a beautiful campus and also one of the most impressive housing options for college students anywhere.

Take, for instance, the Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Residence Hall, which echoes the traditional Mediterranean Revival style and interior elements of the first four historic halls at Scripps by architect Gordon Kauffmann. The hall includes a double-height foyer, a grand staircase, a spacious living room, a browsing room on the second floor, as well as two external rooms that are used as an open courtyard and a raised terrace, respectively. The residence houses 86 students in singles, doubles, and suites, and throughout the structure one encounters flooring that enhances the other design elements. The large common rooms are comprised of gorgeous off-white tile that match the walls; combined with the rustic wooden ceiling beams, the flooring and walls create a clean, Mediterranean-style aesthetic. The bedroom flooring varies, but many are carpet tile, gray in color and soft to the touch so that occupants remain comfortable and feel at home.

The Importance of Look and Feel

A space can be defined by its flooring. Just as the size and placement of rooms are essential in the design of on-campus structures, especially with residence halls, so are the interior finishes that can make any room comfortable and aesthetically pleasing.

Flooring is one of the first interior components that people notice. We want our on-campus community to feel at home, and careful attention to flooring as a unifier of aesthetic elements can make such a difference in the minds of our students, faculty, and staff.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: PUPN staff writer Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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