

Decor Score: Several wood surfaces may work well in certain homes

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We want to take up the worn-out carpeting in the front hall of the Tudor-style house we recently bought. The real estate agent says the floor is old chestnut that matches the paneling in the hall. We know chestnut is rare, but we are concerned about having too much wood. Even the ceiling beams are chestnut. What if we don't like the effect of all that wood?

There's no such thing as too much of an item, especially when it comes to the rich old woods that warm this grand entrance hall. Photo courtesy of Marco Ricca. A: The best way to find out is to find out, and I'm not trying to be a smart aleck.

For many people -- especially men, it seems -- there's no such thing as too much wood. That's not hard to understand: Wood is probably humankind's most familiar material. Warm to the touch and comforting to the eye, wood fits our body chemistry; it naturally makes us feel at home.

Consider the warm glow that emanates from all surfaces of the pictured entry hall, which is located in Paris and from "Bringing Paris Home" (written by designer Penny Drue Baird and published by The Monacelli Press). Wood has been inviting guests into this grand old house for centuries.

The hallway illustrates another great advantage wood enjoys over many other decorating materials -- it can be refinished time and time again. Here, the old oak wood has recently been renewed to bring up the beauty of the floors, paneling, beams and staircase. So pleased were the homeowners that there's not even an area rug to break the glow of the polished floor.

You don't have to travel to the Old World to appreciate the beauty of old woods. For example, the entry hall at Shirley Plantation, Charles City, Va., near Williamsburg, dates to 1723. Despite centuries of wear, the original heart pine floors and hand-carved paneling are still welcoming visitors after 11 generations of use (www.shirleyplantation.com).

My bottom-line advice: Take up the carpet. Refinish the hallway wood and then decide whether or not it could use some softening. You can always add area rugs and good lighting, but you'll never find that precious chestnut wood again.

Q: My kitchen door, originally opening to the outside, has a 23-inch by 33-inch window that now looks out to the added-on utility room. What can you suggest, besides a curtain, to cover the window but transmit some light? Something translucent, perhaps, but visually interesting?

A: Frost the glass. There are a couple of ways to go about it. Try spritzing white paint lightly through a paper doily, just enough to mist the glass in an attractive pattern. I've seen this technique applied effectively to New York City apartment windows that overlook the proverbial brick air shaft. The frosting obscures the scenery and still lets in the light.

You can also apply frosted film that makes the glass look etched -- visit www.brume.co.uk as a source. Or you could even try etching with acids.

Film or spray paint is quicker and easier. Easiest of all, you can take the door off its hinges and work outside in the fresh air.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas.

Copyright 2009 Creators Syndicate Inc.

Decor Score: Several wood surfaces may work well in certain homes by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert