

Decor Score: This vinyl will floor you

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: We are redoing an old farmhouse in the country using a shoestring budget, so we need ideas that look great but don't cost much. For example, we can't replace the wood floors - they were lost to a fire before we bought the house (the reason we could afford it in the first place). What do you recommend? My husband knows how to install ceramic tiles, but aren't they out of character for an early 19th century farmhouse?

A: Unless you're in the Sun Belt, yes. In the rest of the country, ceramic tiles are just now coming into their own for floors other than the kitchen or bath. However, there are tiles that look like wood, but they are expensive, relative to other lookalike flooring products.

FAUX FLOORING - This handsome parquet floor from Armstrong looks like it came right out of a castle. Faux flooring is better than real flooring in several ways: it can be self-installed, it looks great and an aluminum oxide 'wear layer' on top makes it almost impervious to scuffing. CNS Photo. Today's technology offers some nice surprises. Take the handsome parquet floor in the room we show here. What looks for all the world like real wood parquet - the stuff with which kings' castles and nobles' manor houses were floored with - is actually a manmade vinyl. This one's from Armstrong's new MODe collection (which stands for "My Own Design expression," they explain).

Besides its authentic good looks, faux flooring is superior in some ways over real wood. For example, these can be installed by the homeowner. They also have a wear-layer that's infused with aluminum oxide. That makes the floor virtually impervious to scratches and wear. You can check out the details at www.armstrong.com.

Q: We want to put an outdoor addition on our home, but are a bit shocked by our contractor's bid. My husband is now saying we shouldn't do it. Yet, I've read that outdoor amenities do great things for the resale value of your home. Is that true?

A: Yes, true. Some realtors have even put a number on the enhanced value of a home with outdoor living spaces: they say it can increase the value of your property by almost one-third.

More important, chances are it will double your own pleasure in your home. All over the country, Americans are expanding their lifestyle to the great outdoors. In fact, says a recent study by outdoor textiles manufacturers, more than half the homes in the U.S. now have some sort of exterior entertaining area.

As a result, any number of home furnishings manufacturers are racing to perfect products that go outdoors, too. Fabrics are just short of phenomenal: nevermind that they shrug off sun, rain, dirt and wear, you'd be hard-pressed to tell them from the most luxurious of drawing room materials. That goes for the trimmings and tassels, too. Take a look at one resource at www.chellatextiles.com.

Moreover, complete kitchens are migrating into the backyard. And not just yesteryear's grill. Today's outdoor kitchen includes refrigerators, freezers, wine coolers and pizza ovens. One place to check all this out is www.kalamazoogourmet.com.

Not that this is such a new thing for Kalamazoo: they built their first outdoor grill in 1906, back when the company fabricated sheet metal in their namesake city in Michigan.

The bottom line here: reassure your husband that you can have your outdoor living space to enjoy now - and also cash in on when you sell.

Bet that whets his appetite for your al fresco addition.

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