Decor Score: New vinyl flooring goes down - and comes up - quickly

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: We have painted ourselves in a corner, so to speak, redoing our master bath. We spent most of our budget on a very contemporary tub, sink and toilet ensemble (from Duravit), and now can't afford the marble we'd picked out for the floor. While we save up again, can you suggest a flooring material that will work with our contemporary "furniture" and not cost the earth?

COOL VINYL - Vinyl flooring is inexpensive, and does a terrific job of looking like you spent a bundle on a costly flooring. For instance, this textured faux stone vinyl looks real chic in a master bath. CNS Photo courtesy of Armstrong.

A: So you, ahem, took a bath on your fixtures? Relax. It will probably turn out to be a fortuitous miscalculation.

Your high-quality, high-style "furniture" will last a lifetime, and you'll have the daily pleasure of intimate contact with design ideas from one of the world's edgiest manufacturers. Hornberg, Germany-based Duravit (www.duravit.com) draws design talent from top thinkers around the world, among them, zany French architect Philippe Starck.

Starck not only creates chic bath furniture for Duravit, he designed their headquarters in Hornberg, setting a surreal toilet, three stories tall, into the front facade. It's also an observation deck, so one looks up to see people peering over the toilet rim into the Black Forest beyond. It's an ongoing visual joke that's totally typical of Starck's humor.

But back to your floor: as you plan to trade it out, think surface covering, not integral structure. For example, sheet resilient vinyl flooring goes down - and comes up - quickly and easily. It's also relatively inexpensive, and does a terrific job of emulating more costly materials.

The floor in the bath we show here is a vinyl that's textured and colored to look like natural stones, but it's warmer and softer underfoot than stone or ceramic tile, and also resistant to stains and scratching. In fact, resilients like this ("Bleecker Street" by Armstrong, www.armstrong.com) can be so handsome and easy to live with that you just might decide to forgo that marble after all.

GOING 'GREEN' DOESN'T MEAN SERIOUS AND GRIM?

We've come a long way from the days when "eco" meant all-natural and often plain dull. Forget cardboardish cloth woven from nettles and aluminum can tabs recycled into curtains. Today, you can pamper both the environment and your aesthetics. Mirabile dictu, you can even have fun furnishing your eco-savvy home.

Proof positive was all over the place when this year's International Contemporary Furniture Fair unfolded under the glass expanses of the Javits Convention Center in New York. Freethinking designers from all over the globe gathered to test their latest inspirations. Inspired was definitely the operative word.

For the perfect dining room chandelier, British designer Ali Siahvoshi hung dozens of (presumably recycled) knives, folks and spoons from a rectangular rack with lighting inside and named it "Hungry." (More about the designer at www.fabbian.com.) Sibir Design, another British firm (44-1237-42977), created hanging lamps from interlocking CDs, 180 of them to make one large, gleaming globe.

Still the brightest recycling idea had to be from Thailand: Angoworld displayed stainless steel lamps with shades made of used silk worm cocoons or mulberry tree bark (www.angoworld.com).

More innovation from London, designer Inghua Ting's reclaimed seat belts were woven into brightly colored, indestructible hammocks, hassocks and pillows. She also used old leather belts to make area rugs, wall tiles and place mats. "I get to the belts before they hit the vintage clothing shops," she explained. (www.tinglondon.com).

For furniture, designers left few stones unturned. Toronto designer Zac Ridgely (

www.ridgelystudioworks.com) bound river stones in a cage of galvanized steel for an indoor/outdoor lighting cube that was a natural wonder, indeed. From Staten Island, N.Y., came long console tables filled with sea stones and glass (www.jamesmurphydesign.com), and the Philippines sent indoor/outdoor running water fountains crafted from lightweight, constituted stone (www.jireh-forge.com).

It's fair to say that at this year's ICFF, nature rocked, literally.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas. Please send your questions to her at Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190, or online at copleysd@copleynews.com. Â© Copley News Service

Decor Score: New vinyl flooring goes down - and comes up - quickly by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert