

# Floor Coverings

in the

## Livable Home

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Circular No. 342

**FLOOR COVERINGS IN THE LIVABLE HOME**

By **IDA C. HAGMAN** and **VIVIAN CURNUTT**

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5  
6 Floor coverings play an important role in home decoration.  
7 Next to the walls, they form the largest area of background in a  
9 room and help to create its atmosphere. The color, pattern and  
9 texture of the fabric influence the effect. The appropriateness of  
9 the style of the floor covering for the room in which it is to be used;  
9 the choice of color and pattern in relation to the style, size, shape  
10 and furnishings of the room; the expected wearing qualities in rela-  
11 tion to cost and the ease with which it can be cleaned are im-  
11 portant factors to consider when purchasing a floor covering. The  
12 investment in a floor covering usually means a considerable outlay  
12 of money and as such should give satisfactory service for a long  
13 period of time; and should be adaptable to the changing decorative  
14 schemes of the room.

**COLOR IN FLOOR COVERINGS**

14 Color contributes much toward the effect that the floor covering  
14 presents, be it cozy or otherwise. Changing fashions slowly affect  
15 the choice of color of floor coverings, yet a conservative choice is  
15 not outmoded as the years go by as noticeably as the one that was  
16 strikingly fashionable for a brief period.

16 The floor area of a room should appear "weighty" enough to  
16 support the furnishings. This weight is achieved by depth of tone  
18 and richness of coloring. The combined weight in color of wood-  
19 work and furniture influences the depth of tone in the floor. This  
19 should usually be the deepest tone in the room. There is a fashion  
19 trend toward lighter rather than very dark colors.

Subdued colors are usually more pleasing than those that are  
too bright. As floor coverings soon mellow, it may be desirable to  
get them slightly brighter than the intensity desired later. Intense  
colors stand out too prominently to make good background, while  
colors too dull may appear drab and depressing.

Brighter colors than those generally recommended are permissible in very large rooms, as they have a tendency to decrease the apparent size, and in rooms not occupied for long periods at a time. Warm colors, such as eggplant, brown, live-beige and dull henna, impart a cozy feeling to a room. Cooler colors, such as dull blue and soft, grayed-green, lend a restful air.

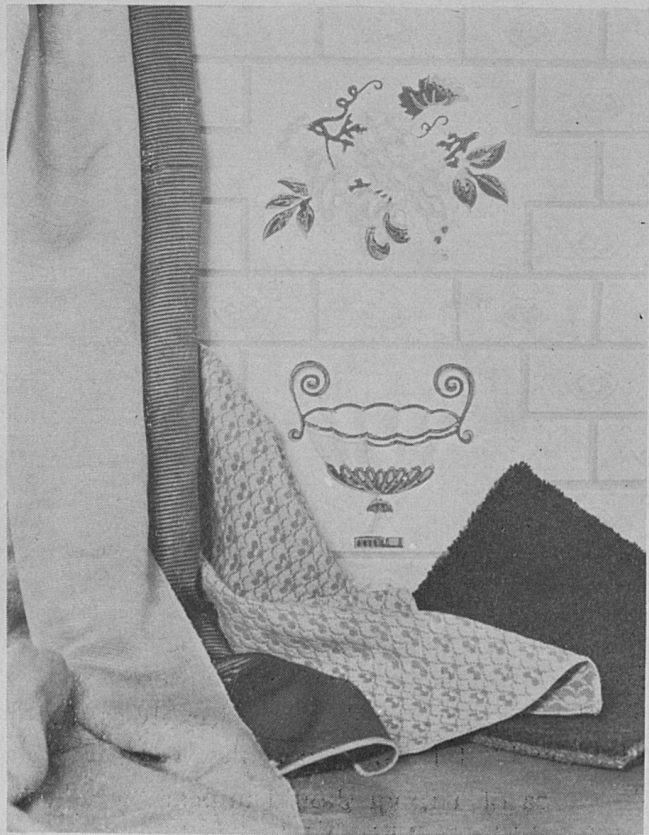


FIGURE 1. Pattern and color in wallpaper provide the inspiration for the decorative scheme of a dining room. The colors picked up in interestingly woven fabrics for drapery and floor covering and all-over patterned upholstery material repeating the forms in the paper, give pleasing emphasis to the paper.

Color influences the effect of pattern. When little contrast of tone or closely related colors are used, the pattern does not stand out in relief as it does when great contrasts of light and dark values and large areas of contrasting, bright, warm and cool colors are used. As a rule, it is not advisable to select a pattern that stands out and appears to leave the floor.

**PATTERN IN FLOOR COVERINGS**

Plain rugs and carpeting make excellent backgrounds, yet they may be impractical in rooms receiving hard wear as they show tracking and spots. See figures 1 and 2. Mixtures and closely related two-tone effects have the desirable features of plain ones and are less difficult to care for than are plain floor coverings. Small, all-over patterns appear indefinite and may be used in both large and small rooms. See figure 3. Large-scale patterns are out of harmony in small rooms.

When a more definite pattern in the floor covering is chosen, the decorator is faced with the problem of adapting other areas in the room to it. Much positive pattern may prove irritating, especially if it is not harmoniously combined, as is so often the case. One may wish to give more emphasis than usual to the floor, if the rugs or carpeting are distinctive and beautiful, as is possible with fine Orientals or lovely hooked or braided rugs. See figure 6. Usually, the room must be large to support much definite pattern in the floor covering. When there is a feeling of insufficient furnishings in a room, it may be less noticeable if decoration is provided by the carpet. In seldom-used rooms like halls and dining rooms, the pattern may be more definite than would otherwise be chosen.

Certain characteristics of good design should be applied to patterns used in floor coverings. See figures 5, 6, and 7.

A. Abstract and conventional designs are more appropriate for a floor covering than realistic ones.

B. The main lines of the pattern should follow the structural lines of the rug or room.

C. Compact distribution of pattern makes a better background surface than disconnected motifs. The latter may appear "spotty."

D. Definite up-and-down direction in pattern is unsuitable for a floor covering, as it appears up-side-down from certain positions.

E. A restful effect is achieved when there is a close relation of values and colors in the floor covering. Contrasts in tone or color make the pattern stand out from the floor or may cause a "busy" effect.

F. The width of the border should be in pleasing proportion to the size of the rug. It should not be dominant in color, pattern or width. A wide or striking border has a tendency to cut the size of the room.

### TEXTURE OF FLOOR COVERINGS

The effect created by the texture of the floor covering should bear a close relationship to the smoothness or coarseness of other surfaces in a room. The fiber, kind of material and weaving process used in the construction of the carpet influence its texture. Varying effects in texture are produced by two or three pile heights, by cut



FIGURE 2. A room scheme built around the figured drapery fabric combines interesting textured materials in harmonizing colors for wallpaper, carpeting and upholstery. A striped material repeating the colors in the drapery would be suitable for slip covering or upholstering one or two pieces of furniture.

and uncut pile, by hard-twisted yarns, by nubby, tweed and pebble effects, herringbone pattern and by two-tone designs. These effects, when well selected, give individuality and interest to the carpet without disturbing its harmony and restfulness. A great deal of emphasis is given to texture in present-day carpeting.

High-quality materials and a permanent twist are necessary re-

quirements for hard-twisted pile carpeting. The possibility that the twist may not be permanent but will unroll and the surface become shaggy if the rug is shampooed, makes it an important factor to consider when purchasing this type of carpet.

#### WEARING QUALITIES OF FLOOR COVERINGS

Price is no indication of quality; therefore, the homemaker should be able to judge and recognize materials and processes from which satisfactory wear may be expected. It is always wise to buy from a merchant of unquestionable integrity. Most manufacturers advise the purchase of better grades of less expensive weaves rather than poor grades of more costly ones. For instance, a high-quality Axminster would be a better buy than a low quality Wilton.

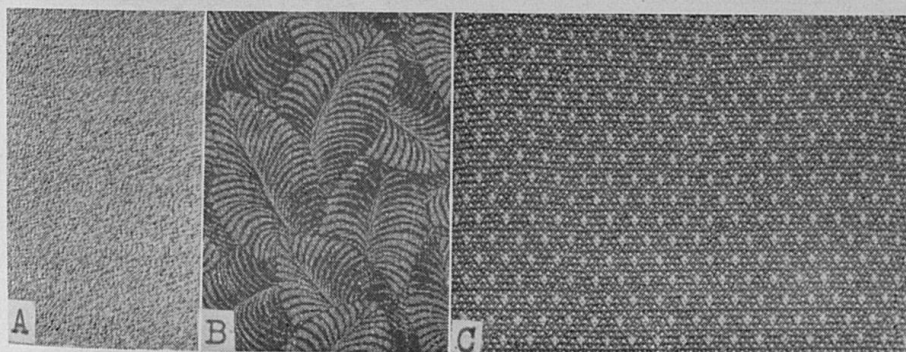


FIGURE 3. When plain rugs are impractical, select mixtures or two-tone patterns which have a plain effect. Patterns similar to B may appear "raised" or "busy," a quality undesirable in floor coverings. These patterns seem unfinished unless used as all-over carpeting.

When buying carpeting, it is advisable to examine the fabric carefully first noticing the closeness of the upstanding tufts of yarn, on the right side. These constitute the pile of the carpet. Their closeness affects wearing qualities more than the depth of the pile. Then turn the carpet over to examine the back. See figures 8 and 9. Each tiny square represents a tuft. Close tufts mean a dense pile. The material should be again examined on the right side and folded back sharply so that the density and depth of the pile may be noticed. Thick tufts give a denser surface than thin ones, even tho there may be the same number per square inch.

The pile should be made entirely of good wool as it is the most serviceable material from which carpeting may be made. Carefully chosen wool fibers possess a wiry, hard surface with a resilient, abra-

sion-resisting toughness not found in soft wools, cotton, hemp or jute.

Worsted yarns are made of long wool fibers laid parallel and lightly twisted. These have a slight luster and superior wearing qualities. Woolen yarns are spun from shorter, uncombed fibers,



FIGURE 4. The well-designed rug pattern with lovely coloring is the keynote for the decorative scheme of a room. A striped, two-tone wallpaper, plain drapery fabric with interest in texture, both plain and inconspicuously patterned upholstery material blend in color with the rug and enhance its beauty.

lightly twisted. They are softer and woollier than the worsted yarns, not as durable, but less expensive. Carpeting made from good woolen yarns gives satisfactory wear when other factors are favorable.

Jute and hemp are strong, durable yarns which are used in carpet backing to give strength and stiffness. Because they deteriorate



when wet, care should be taken to keep them dry. Paper yarns, sometimes used as a substitute for jute, hemp or cotton, mainly as stuffers, are fairly strong when dry but disintegrate when wet. Oversizing of backing materials gives temporary stiffness and is often found in cheaper rugs. An examination of the backing material will disclose strength of body or mere stiffness which will disappear with use.

Rubber and pyroxylin are sometimes used as a backing material which locks the pile so that the edges of the carpeting will not fray when cut. Because it is possible to cut the rug without fraying the edges, they do not require binding and may be cut to fit irregularities in the shape of the floor and for patches.

Carpet cushions used under floor coverings increase the wear of the coverings in proportion to the thickness and resilience of the lining fabric. Shorter-pile rugs show the greatest increase in durability. The best type of cushion is made of felted animal hair treated with a chemical solution that renders it permanently moth-proof. Cushions are available for all sizes of rugs, carpeting, runners and stair pads. The cost of the cushion should be considered as part of the outlay for the new floor covering.

### **TYPES OF CARPETING AND HOW TO KNOW THEM**

#### **Pile Weaves**

**ORIENTALS.** Few genuine Oriental rugs are now being made. They are works of art valued for age, rarity, beauty of color, pattern, sheen, quality of work, and fineness and quantity of knots. As each knot is made by hand, it takes years to complete these rugs. Oriental rugs over fifty years old are considered antique.

Modern Oriental rugs are machine made copies of genuine ones. The old, faded quality is produced by means of washing with chemicals, which unless skilfully done, may injure the fabric. Sometimes the dye fails to penetrate to the bottom of the tuft and the difference in shade may be detected by looking into a tuft. The luster of modern Orientals usually has an artificial appearance. It is a mistake to buy so-called Orientals from peddlers because the rugs are misrepresentations for which too high a price is paid.

**CHENILLE** is the most luxurious and the most costly carpeting manufactured in this country. It is made of the best quality of

yarns and has a pile sometimes one and one-half inches deep. The tufts are joined into furry ropes which are fastened to a woven wool backing. The material may be woven in seamless widths up to thirty feet wide and may be made in any shape to fit irregular floor spaces. The range of colors and designs is almost unlimited. The quality of Chenille carpeting depends upon the quality of the wool, the number of the fur strips to the inch and the depth of the pile.

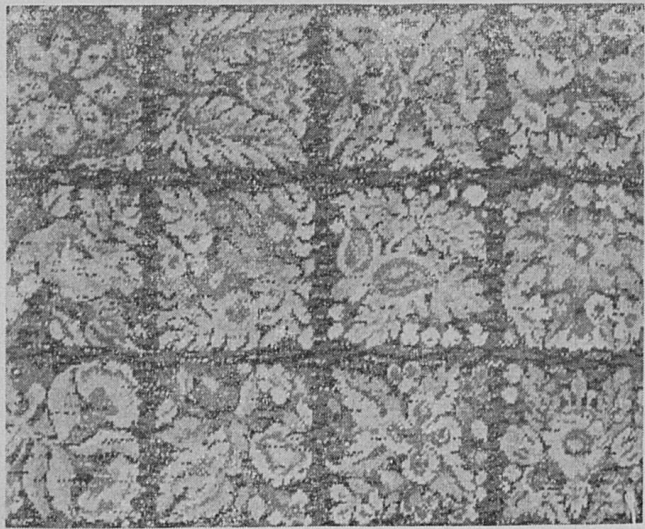


FIGURE 5. This rug pattern has been copied from an old hooked rug. It is nicely designed. The main lines of the pattern follow the structural lines of the room. The intersecting lines form squares which are compactly filled with motifs varied enough in form to provide interest yet presenting a feeling of similarity. A rug as definitely patterned as this one limits the amount of pattern that can be used elsewhere in the room.

SMYRNA rugs are double-faced, having pile on both sides. They are made of shorter fur than Chenille and are less expensive. The warp is usually of cotton and fillers of jute for which paper is sometimes substituted in low-grade fabrics. Some bedroom and bathroom rugs woven by this process with cotton yarns give very satisfactory service.

The Smyrna weave is used for weaving re-worked wool into carpeting. Little of the material sent to the factory is used in the construction of the new rug and only by chance does the one who sends the material get any of it in her rug. The coarsest wool rags are retained, others are sold and new coarse carpet wools supplemented for them.

WILTON carpeting is woven on a Jacquard loom and is characterized by a solid, close weave with a short pile, the tufts of which are crowded close together and held in place with stuffer and binder yarns. Colored wool yarns carried from one part of the pattern to the other are woven in the filling which shows on the back. See figure 8 A and 10. The Jacquard loom restricts the number of colors that may be used to five or six. However, others may be "planted."



FIGURE 6. An oriental rug with well-organized pattern radiating from a central motif. There is a pleasing interweaving of background and foreground areas, the background forming as beautiful shapes as the foreground pattern.

The quality of Wiltons varies from high to low grades. In the best quality Wiltons, three-ply worsted yarns are woven with approximately 120 tufts per square inch. Medium grades have about 90 tufts of two or three-ply worsted or woolen yarns and the poorest grades have as few as 25 tufts per square inch. In the poorer grades, crosswise yarns may be jute instead of cotton, as in better grades. A good Wilton has little or no glue on the back. The better quality Wiltons give long and satisfactory wear.

BRUSSELS carpeting is woven the same as Wilton except that the yarns are left in loops on the surface instead of being cut. It stands hard wear but is seldom used today because of its lack of

luxurious feel. Machine hooked carpeting is a Brussels which is woven with very heavy yarn and long loops.

AXMINSTER carpeting is one of the most popular pile fabrics on the market. It is available in a wide range of colors and patterns. The cost is lower than for the floor coverings already discussed and the better qualities give excellent service. The soft nap wears off and pulls out under long continued usage. Axminster floor covering is a tufted fabric made with a long, soft pile. The soft, woolen yarn that forms the tufts is looped individually around the weft and crosswise threads in the fabric. See figure 8 C and 10. It depends for durability upon the firmness with which the loops and binder threads are bound to the fabric of the rug and the quality of materials used in its construction. If threads are too thin, the pile threads pull loose. The jute used in the weft forms distinct ridges in the back and prevents the carpeting from rolling crosswise which is one means of identifying the fabric.

Axminster carpeting of fine quality has long pile and fairly pliable backing with about 77 tufts per square inch. Medium grades have shorter pile and approximately 63 to 56 tufts, while the cheapest grades have as few as 28 to 35 tufts per square inch. See figure 9.

VELVET AND TAPESTRY carpeting are both woven by the same method; however, they appear different on the surface as the pile of velvet is cut and the pile of tapestry is looped. Both fabrics have a lower pile than other types of carpeting described. The very best quality of wool is used, but because the method of weaving requires less wool than for Wilton and Brussels, they are less expensive. All the wool or worsted yarns in both velvet and tapestry are used in the formation of the pile tufts, in contrast to Wilton, etc., in which some of the yarns are buried. See figures 8 B and 10.

Most plain rugs and carpets are Velvet. If figured, the pattern is printed on the yarn before it is woven. The best qualities closely resemble Wilton and are often called Velvet Wilton. This is a misnomer ruled against by the United States Bureau of Standards, as it is a misrepresentation.

Best quality of Velvet carpeting has about 80 tufts per square inch while poorer grades have shorter pile and 56 or fewer tufts per square inch. The average quality of Tapestry has anywhere from 64 to 48 tufts per square inch.

A firm backing is important in this carpeting, as all of the wool goes into the pile. It is usually woven of cotton warp with weft and stuffer yarns of jute. There are no ridges of jute on the back. The weft jute yarns are heavily sized with glue.

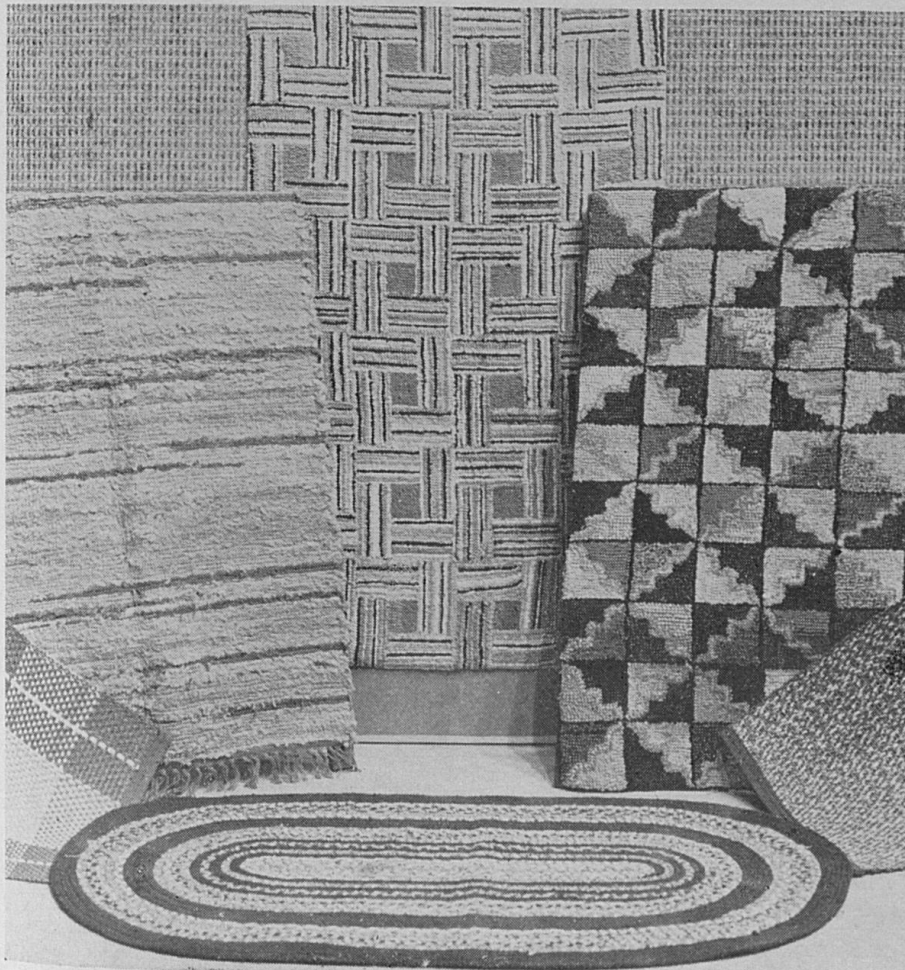


FIGURE 7. Examples of nicely patterned hooked, braided, woven rag and fiber rugs which could be used successfully in simple, informal surroundings.

Broadloom denotes width only and does not refer to a particular weave or quality of floor covering. Broadloom may be woven in any type of carpeting, 9, 12, 15 and 18 feet wide.

#### Flat Weaves

Unless one can afford a good quality of pile carpeting, it is advisable to buy one of the better grade flat-woven types of floor covering or to make rugs at home of discarded fabrics. See figure 7.

A low-quality pile-type carpeting is a poor buy. The durability of flat weaves depends upon the balance in strength of warp and weft threads, as an unequal pull in either direction of the fabric soon breaks. Firmness of weaving and sufficient weight are needed to make the rugs lie in place.

LINEN OR FLAX floor coverings are available in all rug and carpet widths. They are woven in plain weave with all linen warp and weft yarns. The material is reversible and very durable. The colors are seldom permanent, but they can be re-dyed.



FIGURE 8. The wise purchaser examines the back of the floor covering. The closeness of the weave has an important relation to its wear. Each square in the weave represents a tuft. The number of tufts per square inch varies according to the type of weave and quality. Variations in tufts per square inch of highest and lowest grade Wilton, Brussels, Axminster and Velvet are given in the text.

RAG carpeting is woven on hand looms, with the weft of rags and the warp of cotton threads. If firmly woven of good materials, it has body enough to lie flat. Sleazy, loosely woven fabrics do not stay in place and become a nuisance about the house. Rag carpets and rugs are reversible and are practical for use in many rooms, especially in bath and bedrooms. The best grades are color fast to sunlight and normal laundering. Cotton roving or frayed burlap strips are often used instead of rags for these rugs.

FIBER AND GRASS FLOOR COVERINGS. Fiber rugs are woven with a specially prepared and treated paper made from spruce wood. The fiber may be used for both warp and weft or it may be combined with cotton for warp and with woolen for weft. Still another combination is that of "wire" grass and fiber, the warp being of fiber and the weft of grass. Rugs are also made entirely of

"wire" grass bound into uniform strands with fine cotton threads. Both the warp and the weft are woven with these strands. Rugs of this group are suitable for porches, sun rooms and informal living rooms. The wire grass is naturally waterproof and frequently the fiber is treated to resist moisture.

Patterns such as plaids and geometric designs are made by using cotton warp threads of different colors. Stencil designs are often applied to rugs woven of wool, grass or fiber. As many of the patterns are poorly designed, it is advisable to choose simple ones, for they are usually best in design quality. The surface of the rugs may be varnished or repainted when worn.

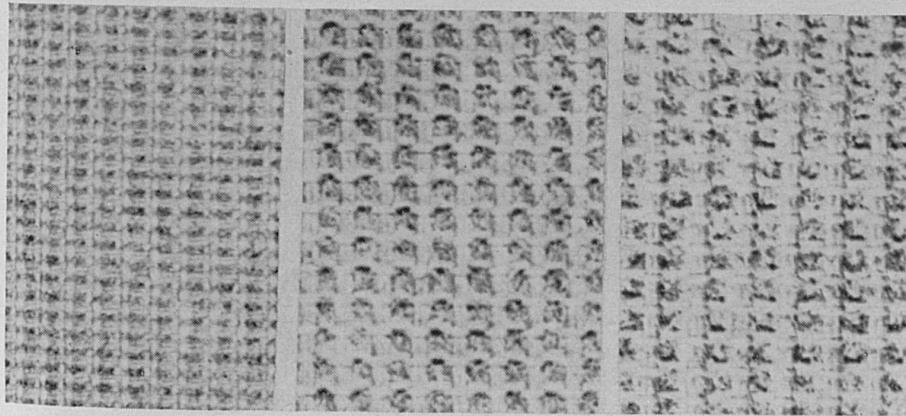


FIGURE 9. A comparison of the backs of high-, medium- and low-grade Axminster carpeting shows difference in closeness of weave. Ridges on the back of this fabric are a characteristic by which it can be identified.

**HOOLED AND BRAIDED RUGS.** A revival of interest has been created in hooked and braided rugs because of their beauty and charm. They are particularly nice with simple furnishings. However, hooked rugs of appropriate design and coloring may be used in the finest surroundings. These rugs are being made commercially by machine but, because of their precision, lack the hand-made quality. The best rugs are made of wool. They give longer and better service, clean more easily and hold the color better than those made of cotton, silk or synthetic fabrics.

**NUMDAH RUGS** imported from India are made of wool felted instead of woven and are slightly irregular in shape. Designs are embroidered with brightly colored wool threads on the surface. Background colors are usually cream and black. The patterns, when made with an up-and-down direction, are difficult to use. These

rugs are washable and for that reason are sometimes used in bathrooms and bedrooms. Cheap imitations, now on the market, are poor buys.

#### **PLACING RUGS**

A carpet from wall to wall gives a feeling of luxury and spaciousness to a room. All-over carpeting and room size rugs seem to unify the furnishings in living rooms and dining rooms. Scatter rugs in these rooms appear confusing, especially if there are many small ones. The margin of floor showing around room-size rugs should be neither too wide nor too narrow. Twelve to eighteen inches make a pleasing margin in small and average-sized rooms. Wider margins, up to three feet, are possible in large rooms. An oblong rug in a square room seems to elongate the room. In this case, the margin of floor will be wider at the sides than at the ends.

If a room is long and narrow, several arrangements may be made, depending upon the grouping of the furniture. In one arrangement, two large rugs of the same size and type are placed close together appearing as one large rug. Or a large rug and matching narrower one, at the end, might give the room better balance. Still another arrangement is the use of a large rug in the middle of the room flanked with matching narrower ones at each end.

Scatter rugs are practical for bedrooms and halls. Limit the number of rugs in a room to a few large ones as too many and too small rugs lack dignity and unity. The rugs used in the same room should be similar in design, color and texture and related in size and shape to the groups of furniture with which they are used. Rugs should be laid parallel with the structural lines of a room. This gives a feeling of restfulness while the diagonal arrangement appears confusing and disturbing. If possible, place figured rugs with the pile lying toward the light and plain ones with the pile lying away from the light. Change the position of rugs to equalize the wear.

#### **CARE AND CLEANING OF RUGS AND CARPETS**

Frequent cleaning keeps carpets and rugs in good condition. Remove superficial dirt with a carpet sweeper or soft broom. The deeper dirt and grit should be removed with a vacuum cleaner and then the nap brushed gently to make it lie in the same direction. If



a vacuum cleaner is not available, embedded dirt may be removed by placing the rug, pile side down, on the grass and by tapping it with a rattan beater held flat. Do not use hard beating strokes. Never beat a rug suspended over a line.

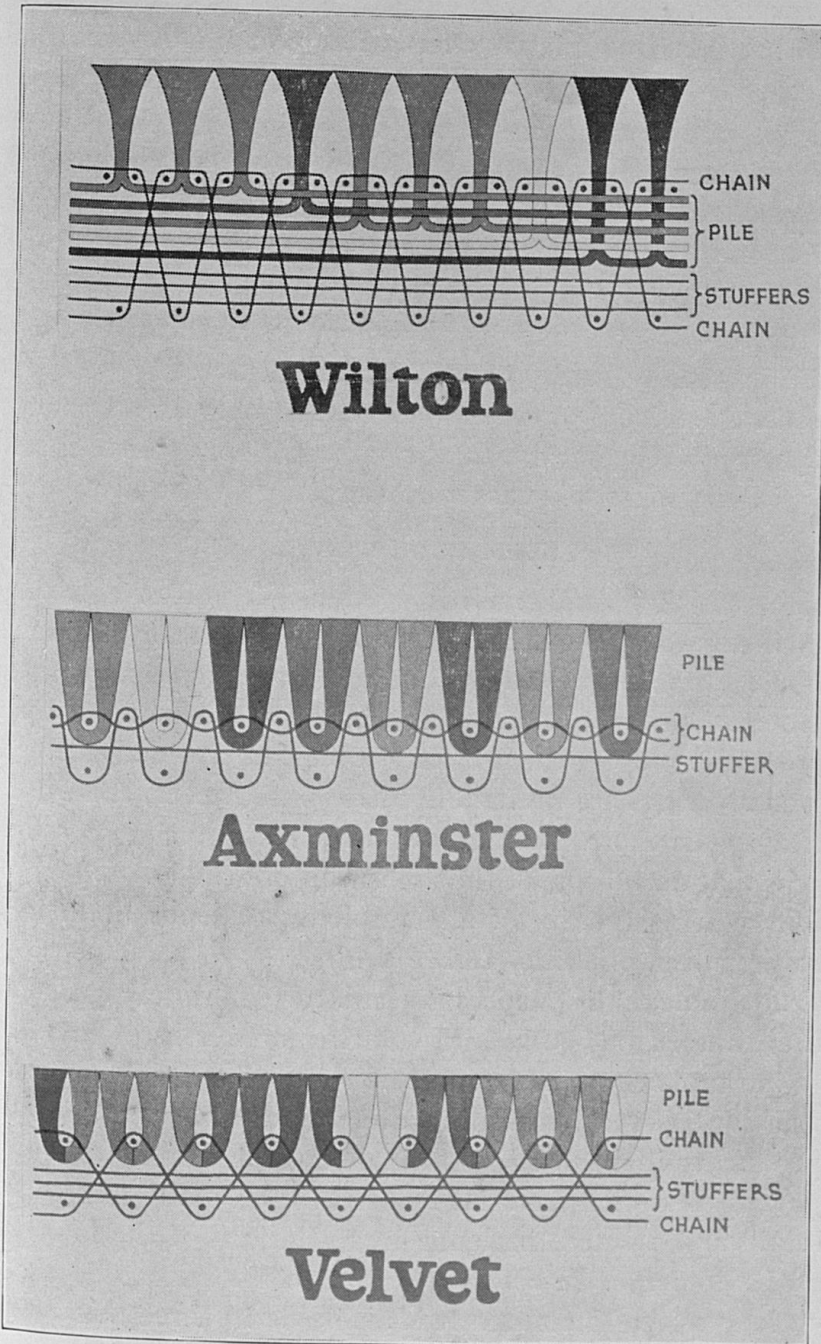


FIGURE 10. The construction of Wilton, Axminster and Velvet floor coverings.

Periodically, a floor covering should be completely cleaned by a reputable commercial cleaner. Dry cleaning, shampooing or spot cleaning may be the method used.

The use of glides or coasters under heavy furniture protects the floor covering. Marks left by furniture may be carefully steamed out with a hot iron placed over a damp cloth on the pile side. Curling corners should be steamed on both back and front.

As the pile of carpeting becomes brittle when in a dry atmosphere and the nap breaks off, rooms that are heated or closed should be supplied with moisture. Some authorities advise that a gallon of water be allowed for each room per day.

Rugs which have lost their body and have become flimsy can have the firmness restored by applying to the back, with a brush, a solution of one-fourth pound of flake glue which has been dissolved in two quarts of water and cooked over a hot water bath. Tack the rug to the floor or to a frame and apply glue with a brush. Allow the rug to remain tacked to the floor until thoroly dry.

#### LINOLEUM FLOOR COVERINGS

Linoleum and linoleum-like products are often used in other rooms than the kitchen. Those with a dull, satiny finish have a softer effect than shiny surfaces and appear less cold and forbidding in a room. Patterns of such character as are dependent upon the texture of pile to give them beauty should be avoided in linoleums. All-over coverings are preferable to rugs. However, there are times when a rug is more practical, in which event choose colors and patterns that do not break the area uninterestingly.

The wearing quality of any linoleum depends upon its thickness, type, finish, pliability and seasoning.

True linoleum is made of a mixture of finely ground cork, oxidized linseed oil, gums and coloring matter, pressed while soft into a burlap backing. The mixture should be deeply embedded in the backing. Careful seasoning under favorable conditions makes the product resilient, hard, yet pliable enough to roll without breaking. Poorly seasoned material is soft with an easily marred surface.

Inlaid and printed linoleum are variations of the same process. In inlaid linoleum the colors run thru to the burlap back and will last as long as the linoleum. It is available in three thicknesses, not standardized by different manufacturers. These are heavy, medium

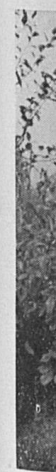
and thin. The choice depends upon the service desired, the thicker the linoleum the longer the wear.

PRINTED LINOLEUM has a burlap backing and base similar to that used for inlaid linoleum, tho thinner. The pattern is painted on with colored enamel. The thickness and quality of the enamel coating influence wear. This type of linoleum is considered desirable only on floors where wear is light and not much durability is expected. Wear can be prolonged by frequent coatings of clear, water-proof varnish, clear lacquer or wax.

FELT-BASE LINOLEUM resembles printed linoleum in appearance and wearing qualities, tho it does not have a burlap backing and, therefore, tears more readily. It is thinner and less resilient. Rags saturated with asphalt form the base, the upper surface of which is finished with enamel. It is relatively moistureproof. Kerosene spilled on the backing softens it.

RUBBER TILE is good looking but too expensive for the average home. It is slippery under certain conditions.

Linoleum and linoleum-like materials should be laid only over smooth floors. A felt layer cemented to the floor protects the linoleum. The linoleum should then be cemented to the felt. Cementing prolongs the wear, simplifies cleaning and makes for sanitation.



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