

# CHOOSING YOUR KITCHEN FLOORING

**When it comes to choosing flooring for your kitchen the choices are wide. How do you know what is best suited to you, your lifestyle and your budget? Also, when in the renovation process should the flooring be put down? Before the kitchen is in place or after?**

Flooring should account for approximately 7% of the greater remodelling budget. Flooring and cabinet carcassing need to be installed before the countertops, backsplash and appliances. There is a lot of debate as to whether the flooring should go under the kitchen cabinets or not. This is an important consideration because it affects the overall look and functionality of the space.

Many companies recommend that the cabinets are installed before the flooring. This is because it allows the cabinets to be properly levelled and secured to the subfloor, which ensures stability. Here the flooring is cut and fitted around the cabinets, leaving a small gap between the cabinets and the flooring. This gap is usually hidden from view by a kick plate.

If you replace both your cabinets and flooring, installing the flooring first may be the most viable option. Installing flooring under your kitchen cabinets has several advantages. It creates a seamless look throughout your kitchen, very important in an open plan design. This also avoids visible gaps between the cabinets and the flooring. This makes cleaning your kitchen much easier as there are no hard-to-reach places for the dirt to accumulate. It also gives you the design flexibility to mix and match flooring and have cabinets on legs.

There are also disadvantages of having your flooring under the cabinets. Firstly, it makes the flooring more expensive because you need more of it. It also makes cabinet installation more challenging. Depending on the type of flooring it may be a lot harder to secure and stabilize the cabinets. Also, should you need to access electrical or plumbing you may need to remove both cabinets and flooring to do so. There is also the potential risk that the weight of the cabinetry and appliances cracks or buckles the flooring.

It is also vital to remember to use a good adhesive when installing the flooring and to ensure

the sub floor is in good condition.

As the kitchen is one of the highest traffic areas in the home, your flooring choice needs to be able to stand up to the daily wear-and-tear. Common kitchen flooring options include hardwood, linoleum, vinyl, laminate, natural stone, and ceramic/porcelain tiles, but concrete, brick, bamboo, and cork flooring also feature. Your chosen material should be heat, moisture, staining, and impact resistant to ensure longevity. Let's take a look at some of the more popular options here in South Africa.

## CERAMIC AND PORCELAIN TILES

While not being the hardest flooring available ceramic tiles are very durable. The tiles are made from clay then shaped, glazed, and fired under extreme heat. This flooring is impervious to water and stains and is highly heat resistant. This all means there is a low possibility for breakages. From a longevity perspective these tiles can last a long time with minimal change to their appearance or function.

Your colour and pattern selection is vast and the tiles can imitate other materials like wood and stone. The other option is to look at porcelain tiles – with the rise in popularity of sintered surfacing in the kitchen porcelain tiles have grown in popularity. They have all the same qualities as ceramic except that they are a bit more brittle and easier to chip if hit with something heavy. Bear in mind that tiled floors can become very slippery when wet which can be a hazard.





These tiles are also now available in large format which helps created a larger sense of space as there are fewer joints or grout lines.

## CONCRETE

Sadly, concrete flooring is too heavy for use in many homes, but if your kitchen is at ground level and there is no basement you should be good to go. This material is fairly inexpensive and long-lasting. It is however quite porous so will need to be sealed to protect it from water damage and staining.

You can give your concrete floor various finishes - polished, stained, or creatively treated with colour. This ability to add a bit of creative flair and give a more industrial look makes it an appropriate choice for a modern home. The aesthetic is very much a personal taste so bear this in mind when thinking of the possible impact of the resale value of your home. It can also be quite cold underfoot so is not the best if your home is naturally cool.

## NATURAL STONE

Natural stone is luxurious and gives a high-end aesthetic. It is probably one of the most durable and long-lasting options available. The amount of maintenance that it needs will depend on the stone used as different stone has different properties. Granite offers you a hard durable option with minimal maintenance other than sealing every few months (like you would with granite kitchen countertops). Limestone, on the other hand is soft and offers far less durability as flooring. It is advised to rather use it for low traffic areas than high traffic areas like the kitchen. Marble has many similar attributes to granite and is known for its stunning veining and colourations. It is, however, softer and more porous than granite so higher maintenance, and will need

to be polished and sealed on a regular basis.

Sandstone is not the longest-wearing natural stone, but it will cope with the wear and tear of a kitchen. Slate will offer a long-lasting solution if sealed and maintained. Travertine is known for its elegant, textured surface, but is not that longest wearing.

The major disadvantage to stone is that it is porous and therefore susceptible to water marks and staining which can be a problem in the kitchen especially with young children or messy cooks. All stone flooring should receive a good coating with a penetrating stone sealant at least once a year. This should preferably be applied by a stone specialist. It is also susceptible to cracking if exposed to sudden extreme temperature changes (we call this thermal shock).



## HARDWOOD

This is one of the most traditional flooring options. It is not waterproof but if finished and maintained correctly it is water-resistant, but spills should be cleaned up immediately to avoid damage. Hardwood floors can be revitalised and refinished

to change their look, which makes them idea for someone who like to change with the trends or if doing a renovation rather than new build and you opt to keep existing flooring. Modern applications include using reclaimed and recycled hardwood where the floor is lain to include patterns and sometimes other materials.

It is important to note that colour can change and that natural woodgrain patters are inconsistent. If a new section is added it is hard to get a colour match and the flooring needs regular maintenance. It is also slippery if wet.

## VINYL

Engineered vinyl flooring is available in tiles and planks that mimic the look of hardwood and stone. It's completely waterproof, has an almost springy feel underfoot, is incredibly easy to clean and is one of the best kitchen flooring options if you want to take the DIY route. The biggest drawback of vinyl flooring is that it is softer than other options. Large appliances can dent or scratch it, so use caution when moving or upgrading things in the kitchen.

## LAMINATE

Laminate offers a similar look to hardwood but at a far more accessible price point. Of course, you do get various levels of quality within the laminate sub-sector. Unlike Vinyl it is not always waterproof, but waterproof versions are now available. Although it mimics hardwood it not as durable. This is also a viable DIY option. The planks can be attached to one another and glued down or “floated,” allowing them to be put over an uneven subfloor – an engineered laminate flooring will have more durability than a standard laminate but it should only be installed by a professional and not DIY.

To conclude – when making your flooring choice consider durability, style, maintenance, and cost. While DIY is an option for some flooring types, a professional installation will ensure you have recourse should something go wrong. Take advice from the flooring and kitchen experts on whether they recommend flooring to run under your counters or not – each job will be unique and rely on the experts to guide you.

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