

Comparing Floor Finishes - Porcelain Tile vs LVT vs Laminate vs Engineered Wood vs Carpet vs Sheet Vinyl

Choosing a floor finish is one of those decisions that looks simple until you get into the weeds. On the surface it is about appearance, but in reality it is also about moisture resistance, durability, comfort underfoot, installation, maintenance, budget and how the room is actually used. A lovely-looking floor that hates wet shoes, pets, chair legs or children with the coordination of a dropped spanner is not always a great choice.

This guide looks at six of the most common domestic floor finishes used in the UK: **porcelain tile**, **LVT**, **laminate**, **engineered wood**, **carpet** and **sheet vinyl**. The aim is not to crown one universal winner, because there isn't one. The aim is to help people make a better decision based on what matters in the real world.

What the products are generally used for?

Porcelain tile is commonly used in kitchens, bathrooms, hallways, utility rooms and open-plan living spaces where durability, water resistance and easy cleaning matter. Many UK porcelain ranges are also listed as suitable for underfloor heating, which is one reason they remain a go-to finish for modern homes.

LVT (luxury vinyl tile) is used in kitchens, bathrooms, hallways, living areas and increasingly throughout whole houses. It is popular because it gives a wood or stone effect finish without the same maintenance demands as real timber or tile. Retailers position it as a practical choice for busy households, especially where moisture resistance is important.

Laminate is generally used in living rooms, bedrooms, dining rooms, hallways and other dry or moderately exposed areas. Water-resistant laminate has widened its use into kitchens and some bathrooms, but it is still most commonly thought of as a cost-effective hard floor for general living spaces.

Engineered wood is typically used in living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms and higher-end domestic interiors where people want the appearance of real timber. It is also used in kitchens in some cases, but usually with more care around moisture and maintenance. It is often chosen where warmth, character and resale appeal matter.

Carpet is mainly used in bedrooms, lounges, stairs and landing areas where softness, comfort and acoustic benefit are priorities. It remains a staple in family homes because it is warm underfoot and tends to soften noise better than most hard finishes.

Sheet vinyl is commonly used in bathrooms, kitchens, utility rooms and lower-budget refurbishments. It is often chosen because it is inexpensive, easy to clean and more forgiving on budget than many other resilient finishes.



Why each one is used?

Porcelain tile is used because it is hard-wearing, water resistant and long-lasting. It suits areas with wet foot traffic, regular cleaning and heavier wear. It also works very well with underfloor heating because tile is an efficient heat conductor compared with softer finishes.

LVT is used because it balances practicality and looks. It can mimic timber or stone convincingly, is easier to live with than many natural materials, and is designed for everyday family use. A durable wear layer is one of the big selling points, especially in households with pets, children or high traffic.

Laminate is used because it gives a hard floor look at a friendlier price point. It is popular where people want a clean, modern timber look without paying engineered wood prices. Click-fit systems also make it attractive for DIY or faster installation.

Engineered wood is used because it delivers the look and feel of real wood with better dimensional stability than solid timber. It tends to appeal to people who want a more premium finish and are willing to accept a bit more care and a bit more spend to get it.

Carpet is used because it is soft, warm and forgiving. In rooms where comfort is more important than wipe-clean practicality, carpet is still very much in the game. It is often the preferred finish for bedrooms for exactly that reason.

Sheet vinyl is used because it is affordable and practical. It can be a smart choice in rooms where splashes and spills are common, and where the customer wants a cleanable finish without stepping up to LVT or tile pricing.

Ease of use

Porcelain tile is usually the least forgiving to install. It needs a sound substrate, proper adhesive selection, cutting, levelling and grouting. Once installed properly it is excellent, but it is not the easiest finish for a casual DIY approach. It is also harder underfoot than the other options.

LVT is generally easier to live with than tile or timber. It is easy to clean, available in click and dryback systems, and repairs or plank replacements can be simpler than with some other finishes. Installation standards still matter, especially with dryback products where subfloor prep is critical.

Laminate is often one of the easiest hard floors to install because of its click-fit format. That is a major part of its popularity. It is also low maintenance day to day, though it is less tolerant of installation shortcuts or prolonged moisture than people sometimes assume.

Engineered wood can be relatively straightforward in click formats, but it is generally less foolproof than laminate or click LVT because it is a real wood product and site conditions matter more. Humidity, subfloor prep and correct underlay all play a bigger role.



Carpet is comfortable to use and quite forgiving in service, but proper fitting usually needs grippers, underlay, stretching and trimming. In other words, easy to live with, not always the easiest to fit properly without experience.

Sheet vinyl is easy to clean and practical in use, but neat fitting can still be trickier than it looks, especially around toilets, pedestals, corners and awkward room shapes. Cheap vinyl is often where people learn that “simple” and “good” are not automatically the same thing.

Technical characteristics that matter

For **porcelain tile**, the key technical points are hardness, wear rating, thickness and slip resistance. Tile Mountain lists many porcelain floor tiles at roughly **8–12mm thickness**, with **PEI 4–5** often referenced for floor durability and interior slip ratings such as **R9** on example products. That makes porcelain one of the most robust common domestic finishes.

For **LVT**, one of the biggest technical indicators is the **wear layer**. Amtico’s ranges show how this changes by collection, with **0.3mm** wear layers on Amtico First, **0.55mm** on Spacia, and **1.0mm** on Signature according to its consumer guidance. Thicker and tougher wear layers generally mean better long-term resistance to everyday wear.

For **laminates**, abrasion class and water resistance are major talking points. Quick-Step technical literature for one current range lists **AC4 abrasion class**, **8mm thickness** and a **72-hour stagnant water resistance** claim, while UK Flooring Direct also positions many water-resistant laminates as suitable for heavy residential use with **AC4 and AC5 ratings**.

For **engineered wood**, the important bits are total thickness, wear layer and stability. UK Flooring Direct examples show **14mm engineered boards** with **2.5mm to 3.2mm real oak top layers**, while Kährs positions engineered wood as more stable than solid wood and suitable for underfloor heating in many cases. Wear layer matters because it affects longevity and the potential for refinishing.

For **carpet**, the technical picture is more about pile type, fibre, softness, stain resistance and underlay combination than a single headline number. Twist pile polypropylene carpets remain common because they are practical and budget-accessible. In plain terms, carpet performance is strongly tied to the exact specification and underlay, not just the colour someone liked in the showroom under suspiciously flattering lighting.

For **sheet vinyl**, water resistance, slip resistance, wear suitability and backing type matter most. Retailers regularly position it as water resistant and easy to maintain, with ranges filtered by use level and backing options. It is not usually bought for prestige, but for practicality per pound it can be very effective.

Approximate costs of the product

Prices move around with brand, style and quality, but these are sensible UK guide ranges for the product itself rather than fully installed project cost.



Porcelain tile commonly spans from around **£20 to £40+ per m²**, with higher-end feature and large-format products moving beyond that. Example Tile Mountain products reviewed here sit around **£40.99 per m²** for one modular porcelain range.

LVT generally lands in the mid-range. Retail guidance reviewed here puts LVT at around **£20–£40 per m²** for good-quality product in many domestic scenarios, while some premium options cost more. Installation cost guides put overall installed pricing higher again.

Laminate is usually one of the more affordable hard floor options. Retail sources reviewed here show entry points around **£9.99 per m²**, with many mainstream products sitting broadly in the **£10–£30 per m²** bracket.

Engineered wood typically sits above laminate and often above many LVT products. Installed cost guides reviewed here place engineered wood broadly around **£45–£100 per m² installed**, with product-only costs varying heavily by timber species, board format and wear layer.

Carpet can range from very cheap to very premium, but common retail price points start around **£4.99 per m²** at the low end, with many mainstream twist pile products in the **£10–£30 per m²** bracket. Example Tapi listings show carpets at **£15.99 per m²** and upward.

Sheet vinyl is usually one of the budget winners, with broad retail bands commonly starting around **£10 per m²** and moving upward depending on design and wear level.

How they tend to be sold and availability

Porcelain tile is usually sold by the square metre, by box, or occasionally by tile for calculator purposes. It is widely available through tile retailers, merchants and online suppliers. Samples are also common because nobody sensible wants to commit to a whole floor based on a thumbnail on a laptop screen.

LVT is widely available through flooring specialists, national retailers and online suppliers. It is usually sold by pack or square metre and is available in click and dryback formats, depending on brand and product line.

Laminate is one of the easiest finishes to source in the UK. It is generally sold by pack or square metre and is heavily represented in both merchant and direct-to-consumer retail channels.

Engineered wood is widely available through specialist flooring retailers and online suppliers, though choice tends to be more style-led and grade-led. It is generally sold by pack or square metre, often with strong emphasis on sample ordering.

Carpet is widely available and often sold by square metre with fitting, underlay and accessories priced separately. In-store browsing still matters more here than with some hard floors because texture and softness are a big part of the decision.

Sheet vinyl is readily available through flooring retailers and is commonly sold in sheet widths and priced by square metre. It is often positioned as a practical, quick-choice product for bathrooms, kitchens and utility spaces.



Other points a customer should know before choosing

If the room is **wet, high traffic or likely to need regular mopping**, **porcelain tile** and **LVT** are usually stronger contenders than carpet or standard laminate.

If the room is **a bedroom or lounge where warmth and softness matter most**, **carpet** is still difficult to beat for comfort. Hard flooring often wins the Instagram shoot; carpet usually wins the barefoot reality test on a cold morning.

If the brief is **real wood appearance with genuine material value**, **engineered wood** usually sits above laminate and LVT in perceived quality, but it also asks for more budget and a bit more care.

If the project is **budget-led**, **laminate** and **sheet vinyl** often come out strongly, with **carpet** also competitive depending on range and underlay choice.

If the floor will run over **underfloor heating**, check the manufacturer's guidance for the exact product, not just the material category. Many porcelain, engineered wood, LVT and laminate options are suitable, but not every product behaves the same.

Subfloor condition matters more than many people expect. A beautiful finish on a poor substrate is just an expensive way to discover dips, movement and noise after you've already paid for it. LVT and vinyl in particular can be very unforgiving of poor prep.

Conclusion

If you want the blunt version: **porcelain tile** is the hard-wearing, moisture-resistant workhorse; **LVT** is the versatile all-rounder; **laminate** is the value hard-floor option; **engineered wood** is the premium natural-look choice; **carpet** is the comfort specialist; and **sheet vinyl** is the practical budget player.

The best choice depends on the room and the priority. For wet and busy spaces, porcelain tile and LVT usually lead the conversation. For warmth and comfort, carpet still has a strong case. For lower-cost hard flooring, laminate remains popular. For a more upmarket finish, engineered wood stands out. And where the budget is tight but practicality still matters, sheet vinyl earns its place.

The smart decision is not just choosing the floor that looks best in a sample. It is choosing the one that will still make sense after months of foot traffic, cleaning, furniture, pets, spills and day-to-day life. That is where the real comparison starts.

Want to make better product choices across the full project? Visit www.helpme-buildit.co.uk to explore more comparisons, guides and practical advice covering materials, systems and build-ups from the ground up.

