

eco TAKE THE FLOOR

Going green with your flooring isn't as hard as you might think – *Reclaim* explores the options

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Choosing the flooring for your home is an important decision and, if you want to be environmentally friendly, needs careful consideration. Reclaimed wood and tiles are fairly easy to come by and have the added charm of their provenance and history. Every floor tells its own narrative through worn and weathered markings resulting in a unique patina that won't be repeated. Or, you could go the sustainable route with new flooring sourced from fast-regenerating trees or plant fibres, then decorate with handmade rugs crafted from reclaimed or recycled materials. Here, we discover what's available.

'years of seasoning makes reclaimed floorboards much more stable than buying new'



Classic chevron-patterned parquet flooring looks beautiful in this London property.



Reclaimed wood is essential for authenticity if you're undertaking a restoration project

Ensure you engage a fitter who has experience working with reclaimed wood



Reclaimed wood

During the 18th and 19th centuries, wood was used to construct our public buildings and homes and sometimes the timber would be shipped in from cold climates, like North America and the Baltics. These slow-growing trees produced a strong, tight grain, made more resilient over time. 'Years of seasoning makes reclaimed floorboards much more stable than buying new,' explains Wayne Coleman, owner of Reclaimed Floorboards UK. 'They are less likely to shrink or expand and result in a density of colour and grain.'

Specialist companies sell and install reclaimed timber flooring, like Eco Flooring UK, who can also cut planks into narrower pieces to make chevron and herringbone patterns. Root around a salvage yard, like Retrouvius, and you might turn up a gem or contact Community Wood Recycling who can advise on where to find your local wood recycling centre.

Pine and oak are the most common reclaimed boards – Canadian or Baltic pine, Baltic fir, Douglas fir and French oak, to name a few. Sara Cox, director of

Parquet-Parquet, says they regularly source pitch pine and beech wood blocks, with tropical hardwoods – such as panga, Rhodesian teak and Rhodesian mahogany – harder to find. 'After World War II there was a shortage of British timber so a great deal of wood came from our African and Asian colonies,' she explains.

Parquet and planks tend to be sourced from public buildings that are being demolished or updated, like schools and churches, while The Reclaimed Flooring Company also source from demolished factories, warehouses, mills and railways in the US, Eastern Europe, France and the industrial north of England.

'Some of the most unusual wood we've sourced is 200-year-old pine from American Amish communities and mid-century reclaimed pine from cotton mills in Manchester,' says Andres Felipe Uprimny, marketing director of The Reclaimed Flooring Company. The firm also make their own blend of hard wax oil using natural ingredients, giving a Victorian hand-waxed finish.



This Victorian pine adds instant character to a modern extension in a period home

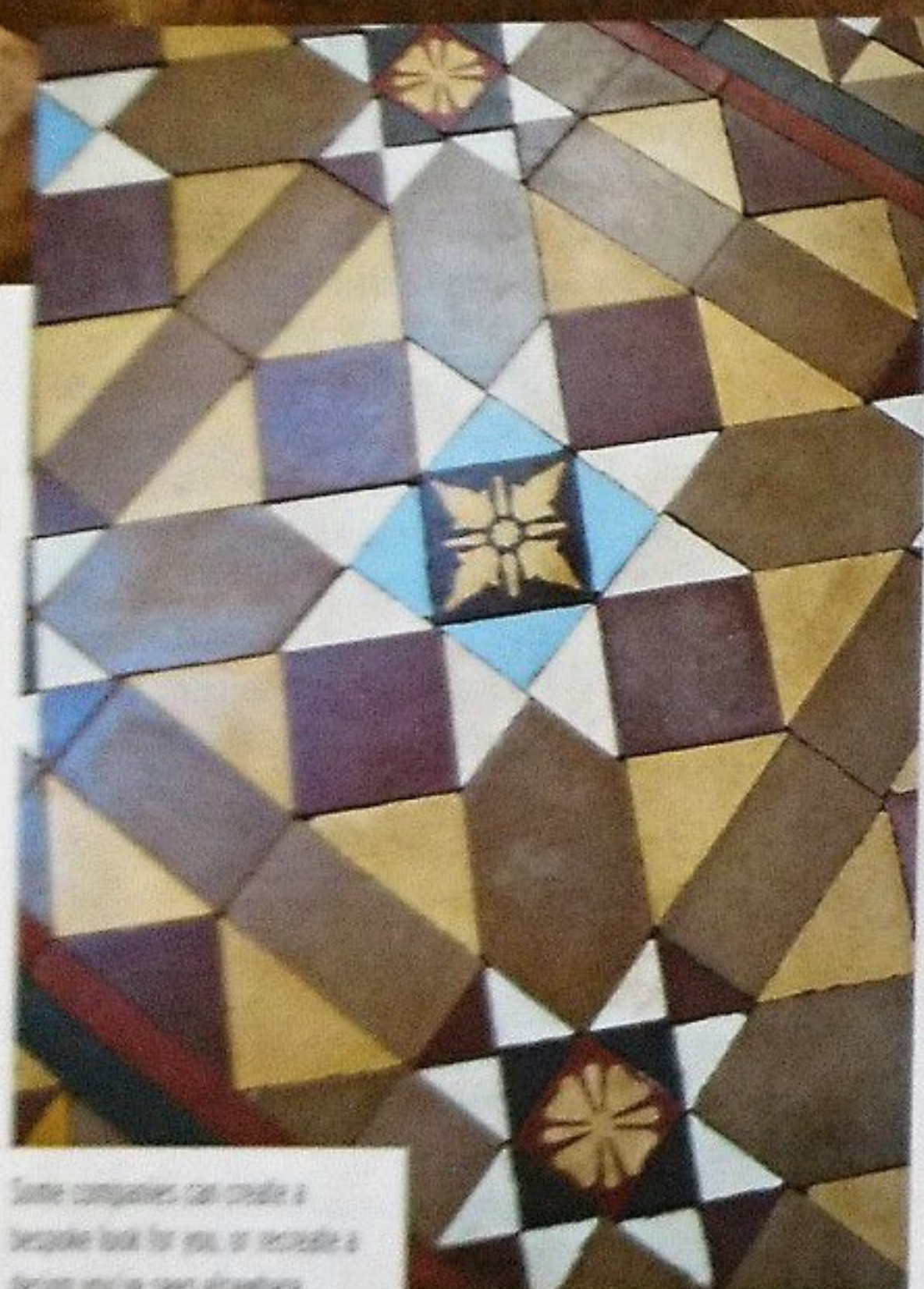
TOP TIP

Inspect reclaimed wood or tiles first-hand rather than buy based on a picture you've seen online – then you can check the whole pack is as good a quality as the top layer. Hire a recommended tradesperson who knows what they're doing and can advise on the quantity required. 'An inexperienced floor fitter might reject a reclaimed board because of its appearance, whereas we work with every board we supply,' says Emma Sanderson, director of Eco Flooring UK.

Reclaimed tiles

Reclaimed floor tiles have a similar provenance, sourced from France, Spain and in the UK, where they were originally used in grander buildings, like stately homes, churches and cathedrals. Brick, limestone, terracotta and clay quarry tiles are readily available, as are the patterned geometrics of the Victorian and Edwardian encaustic clay floor tiles. Often these are sourced to

repair existing floors, and companies like The Vintage Floor Tile Company can work with a photo to be sure of a match. They also provide a restoration service. 'We clean up the reclaimed tiles and can make a floor look as though it's always been there,' says director Fiona Tripplow. 'We can also customise a pattern based on floor pictures the customer likes.'



Some companies can create a bespoke look for you, or recreate a design you've seen elsewhere

If you like colour and pattern, choose vintage tiles for hallways, kitchens and bathrooms



Coir carpet has its roots in the husk of coconuts, a hand-spun option with a highly textured feel

Sustainable flooring

If you prefer to be green and new, bamboo flooring should be on your list because it's fast-growing and can be harvested within three to five years. Look out for companies like Simply Bamboo, who source their materials from strictly monitored forests.

Cork is another great eco choice because it comes from the bark of the cork oak tree, so the tree doesn't need to be cut down. The bark can be harvested every nine years or so and each time the tree absorbs more carbon dioxide than usual to help regenerate. Siesta Cork Tiles sells natural and

coloured cork floor tiles, so there's plenty of choice to suit your scheme.

If carpet is more your thing, then you might want to consider 100 per cent biodegradable sisal, seagrass, coir and jute from sustainable farms where plant fibres are made into coarse yarns – jute is ready to harvest within four to six months. Check out the range at Sisal & Seagrass, who sell such carpets and rugs, and also a chemical-free wool carpet range. There's the option to make your own sustainable rug using their online rug creator too – also available at the Naked Flooring Company.

'cork comes from the bark of the cork oak, so the tree doesn't have to be cut down'

Sisal is one of the most popular natural flooring choices, with great strength and durability



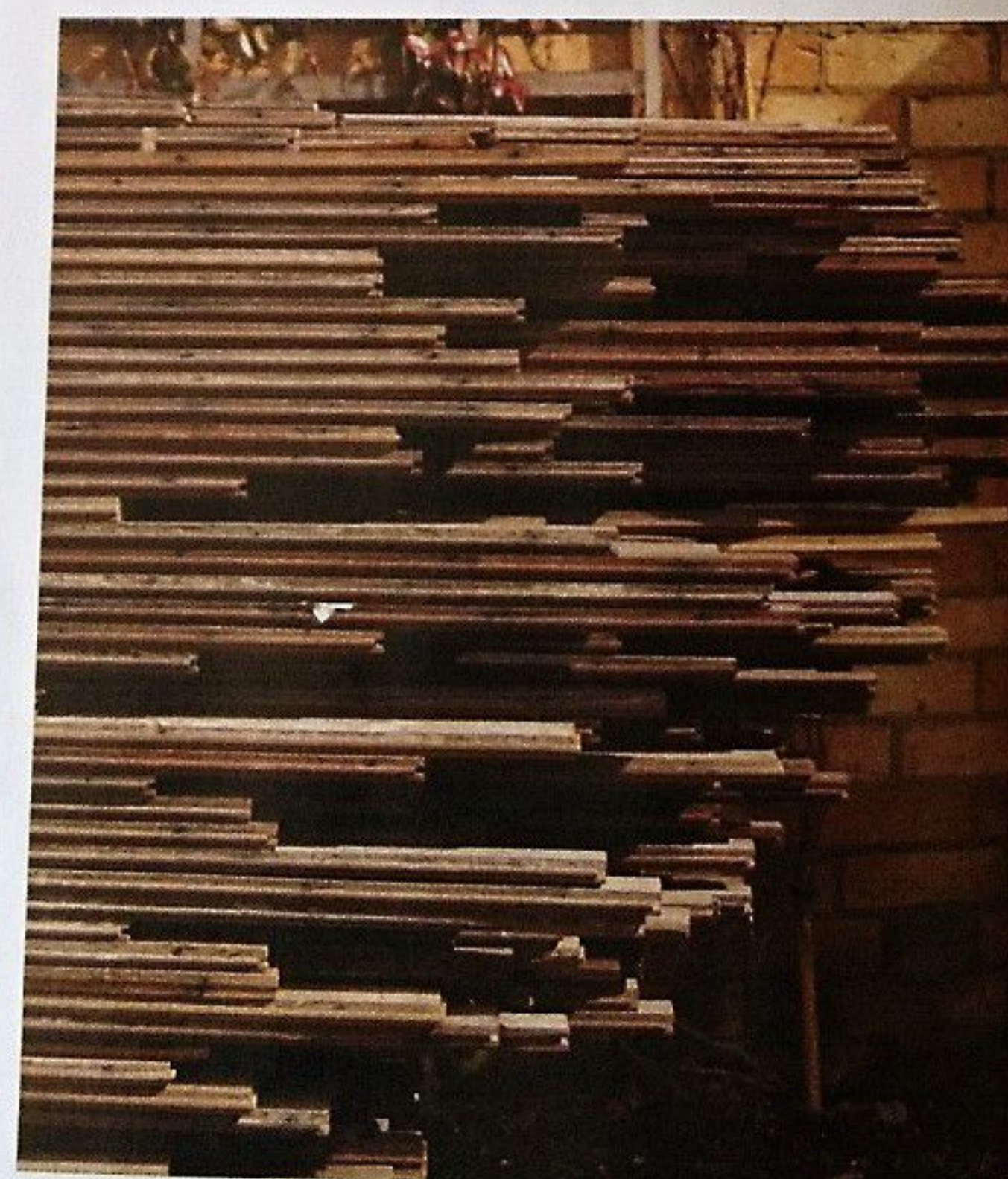
A braided rug made from upcycled fabric is an economic way to add warmth and texture to hard floors

Recycled flooring

Eco Friendly Tiles produce tiles with up to 40 per cent recycled content, fired in solar-powered ovens, with a collection of colours, finishes and sizes to rival their competitors.

Then there are rugs that make use of materials destined for landfill. Elvis & Kresse rescue high quality leather offcuts and handcraft stylish rugs in three colours and three sizes with the option to buy bespoke. They also sell the leather pieces separately

if you fancy making the rug yourself. Second Nature Online do something similar with brightly coloured rag-rug kits using fabric offcuts – or you can buy a rag-rug from India already made. Friends of the Earth sell kilim rugs made from recycled plastic bottles, rugs using recycled cotton and also recycled yarn. So, whatever your preference for flooring, there are plenty of eco-friendly options to choose from.



SOURCEBOOK

- **Authentic Reclamation**
authentic-reclamation.co.uk
- **Bert & May** bertandmay.com
- **Community Wood Recycling**
communitywoodrecycling.org.uk/buy-wood
- **Eco Flooring UK** ecoflooringuk.com
- **Eco Friendly Tiles** ecofriendlytiles.co.uk
- **Elvis & Kresse** elvisandkresse.com
- **Naked Flooring Company**
nakedflooring.co.uk
- **Parquet Parquet** parquet-parquet.co.uk
- **Reclaimed Floorboards UK**
reclaimedfloorboardsuk.co.uk
- **Retrouvius** retrouvius.com
- **Second Nature Online**
secondnatureonline.co.uk
- **Siesta Cork** siestacorktiles.co.uk
- **Simply Bamboo** simplybamboo.co.uk
- **Sisal & Seagrass** sisalandseagrass.co.uk
- **The Reclaimed Flooring Company**
reclaimedflooringco.com
- **The Vintage Floor Tile Company**
thevintagefloortilecompany.co.uk



A decorative and practical choice, parquet flooring also lends itself well to awkward spaces