

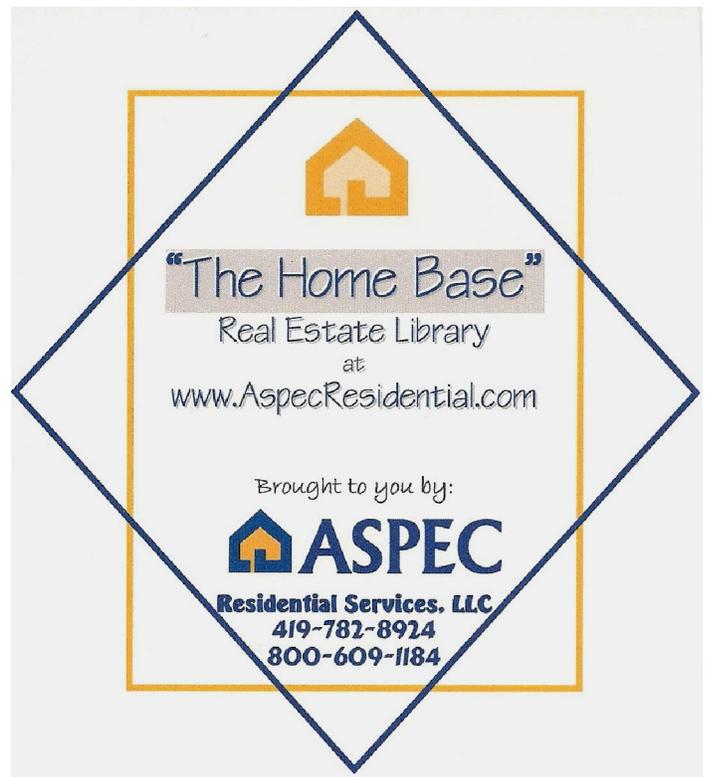
Floors

The sub floor framing typically is not visible for inspection due to floor coverings (carpet, tile, etc.). Carpet, vinyl, and wood floors near water sources (kitchens, laundry, bathrooms, etc.) need to be monitored regularly for wet conditions where mold/mildew can thrive. As vinyl ages, it has a tendency to curl at the edges and is particularly prone to trapping moisture under the vinyl, so they specifically need to be monitored regularly for curling and deteriorated grout or caulking. If you notice a discoloration of the vinyl, it is likely that moisture is under the vinyl. Determine where the moisture is coming from and repair whatever is causing it, and then have the flooring inspected by a qualified flooring professional.

With wood floors in kitchens, laundry areas, and bathrooms, even a very minor leak can destroy it very quickly. I read a story, a few years ago about another inspector who inspected a beautiful home that had over 3,000 square feet of cherry wood floors in the kitchen, pantry, dining room, living room, foyer, and hallway, with all the wood slats very intricately interwoven. Unfortunately, this inspector noted many of the wood slats were bulging at their ends, not much, but definitely noticeable in certain areas where the lighting was very good. A qualified flooring professional was recommended for further evaluation of the flooring, which upset the sellers because they had spent \$147,000 having the cherry wood flooring installed only one year prior. The flooring professional removed a slat from the pantry closet and found that the underside of the slat was virtually destroyed by wood rot, indicating a significant source of moisture from somewhere. And it was just a matter of time before the rot reached the surface. Further detective work found that there was a leak behind the dishwasher, so every time the dishwasher ran, the wood flooring in the kitchen was soaking up water. The wood flooring in other areas was getting soaked due to capillary wicking action. They determined that the wood floor, while beautiful on the surface, was a total loss. Fortunately, the sellers had some good home insurance that paid for replacing the floor.

I do not pull back permanent floor coverings to inspect the underside of the floor covering or the sub flooring itself, so any sub floor damage would not be detected during a visual home inspection, unless viewable from the crawlspace/basement. There is always the possibility that moisture has penetrated beneath any floor covering, particularly in a kitchen at the dishwasher and sink, and in bathrooms at the bathtub/floor junction and the toilet/floor junction, and that any sub floor damage would not be detected during a visual home inspection. Destructive testing or remodeling would be required for a conclusive determination. If renovation is contemplated for any area where vinyl, carpet, or wood floor coverings exist, I highly recommend adjusting your budget to compensate for unforeseen conditions. Trust me, you will find unexpected conditions that will cause your budget to inflate.

I also recommend regularly monitoring all water supply lines and drainage pipes in areas where carpet, vinyl, or wood floors exist to help prevent moisture penetration into sub floor framing and resulting water damage. Grout and/or caulking at floor/wall junctions also need to be monitored regularly to help prevent moisture penetration into sub floor framing and resulting water damage.



More on Floors....

Floors can be covered by a variety of materials. Maintenance of the most common floor materials - carpet, wood, resilient flooring and tile - are discussed separately below.

Carpeting

You can extend the life of your carpets with proper care. The single most important thing you can do to maintain your carpets is frequent, thorough vacuuming. In addition, clean up spills immediately by blotting the spill.

Never rub your carpets. A little ice water or an ice cube applied to a fresh spill will often loosen the stain enough to blot it up easily and reduce staining.

Use mats, runners or throw rugs to protect your carpets from dirt and excessive wear in high traffic areas.

They are easy to clean and can be replaced when necessary.

If deep cleaning is needed, you should hire a professional who uses the extraction method of deep cleaning or the rotary method followed by extraction. If you want to do the job yourself, extraction devices are available for rent at many retail stores.

Wood Floors

Modern wood floors are coated with a polyurethane coating to protect the wood. Do not sand or use commercial refinishers on the floor. Instead, have wood floors refinished by a flooring contractor. Although the job is simple, special tools are required. This is not a do-it-yourself job. You should be able to walk on the floor 24 hours after refinishing. Under normal wear and tear, your floor should be able to go 5 years between refinishings.

Normal maintenance of your wood floor should include regular vacuuming or dry mopping to remove surface dust and dirt. Water can be used to clean your wood floors but be careful not to flood the floor. Excess water can damage the wood. Protect the finish on the floors by attaching furniture rests to the bottom of your furniture legs.

Resilient Flooring

Resilient floors are a popular floor covering. The most common resilient floors are vinyl, polyurethane, linoleum and rubber. Resilient flooring comes in two forms, sheets and tiles. Sheets are popular in areas where the floor may get wet, such as kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms and entry ways, because it usually requires few if any seams. Although tiles have seams, they are easy to install.

Follow the manufacturer's care recommendations. Most resilient floors should be finished with Acrylic High-Gloss Floor Finish. No-wax, linoleum and bathroom floors are discussed below. Before applying finish for the first time, seal the floor with a penetrating sealer (not a surface sealer). You should seal the floor after stripping it for the first time if you do not know whether it has been sealed before. Strip and refinish the floor as needed to keep the floor looking like new.

You do not need to finish no-wax floors with acrylic finish if you sweep, vacuum, damp-mop, and wash the floor regularly. However, dirt and grime will wear down the floor's finish. If you know you will have problems keeping the floor clean at all times, you may want to finish the no-wax floor. A sealer is not necessary on no-wax floors.

Because bathroom floors are exposed to a lot of moisture, it is difficult to maintain a finished floor. Just seal the floor and keep it clean.

True linoleum is usually found in older homes on floors and countertops. It should be sealed with a wood sealer and finished with wax, not acrylic finish.

Tile Floors (Walls & Countertops)

A silicone grout seal is applied to tile surfaces to protect the grout between the tiles from staining. Grout seal should be re-applied every year to renew the protection. To apply, simply sponge grout seal over the entire surface, wipe off the excess and allow to dry for two hours. Grout seal can be purchased at any tile supply house.

Clean ceramic tile by wiping with a damp cloth or an occasional wet mop. If necessary, a more thorough cleaning with detergent or ceramic tile cleaner will remove grime. Staining agents should be mopped up promptly. Under normal conditions, some staining is likely to occur. Often stains can be bleached out with household bleach.