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STYLE | DESIGN

The Return of Wall-to-Wall Carpet: Why Americans Want This Soothing Luxury Now

In a noisy, nerve-wracking world, design pros and homeowners are rediscovering the calming luxury of broadloom carpet, as the industry offers more beautiful—and healthy—options

By Antonia van der Meer

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BROADLOOM, the cosseting wall-to-wall floor covering that cognoscenti refer to as W2W, is climbing out of basements and rec rooms. With its reputation rehabbed, against considerable odds, carpeting is once again finding its way into bedrooms, family rooms, dining rooms and even the occasional bathroom.

“Wall-to-wall carpet got a bad rap for a long time. In the 1970s or ’80s, we couldn’t wait to grow up and have wood floors,” said Oliver M. Furth, an interior designer in Los Angeles who has noticed the shift underfoot. “The outside world can be harsh,” said Furth. “Wall-to-wall carpeting is part of a larger movement to feel more snugly at home.” Said Kerri Pilchik, an interior designer in Ridgewood, N.J., “My clients used to say, ‘I don’t want to cover all the hardwood....’ I don’t really hear that anymore.”

Carpeting’s tidy look is helping fuel the trend. With no edges to trip over, and no unsightly pads peeking out from underneath, wall-to-wall suits the fastidious.

Meanwhile, the industry has recognized concerns about indoor pollution and the toxins that synthetic or treated carpeting have historically emitted. “The largest change in the last 20 to 30 years has been disclosure,” said Jordan Zambrana, a biologist with the Indoor Environments Division at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C. He says you can find lower-emitting, safer materials. Look for: Green Label Plus, Cradle to Cradle Certified, NSF 140 and NSF 332 labels. He also recommends natural, untreated fibers such as wool, a popular choice. At ABC Carpet & Home in New York, for example, 75% of broadloom

sales are wool, reports Suki LaBarre, vice president of merchandising. Zambrana also recommends natural and untreated carpet-backing material.

Here, some ways designers and homeowners are saying bravo to broadloom.

Engineer a Coverup

Beautiful wall-to-wall can erase flaws in floors. Pilchik recalls one foyer project where the owners didn't want to rip up stone she describes as "quite ugly." The fix: "Sisal was an elegant and neutral solution, and we installed it right over the tile."



Louisville, Ky, interior designer Bethany Adams's family insisted on wall-to-wall in their home. PHOTO: J.L. JORDAN PHOTOGRAPHY

In her own historic home in Louisville, Ky., interior designer Bethany Adams itched to rip out off-putting, old nylon carpeting and install wood. "My husband and two daughters, then 5 and 11, had grown fond of carpeting and put up a real fight when I proposed other choices." Adams waved the white flag when she found no finished flooring underneath the old carpet, and slumpy areas in which her 1896 house had settled. The surface, she says, had "slopes that would merit a black diamond rating." Her dream of parquet floors became prohibitively expensive and close to impossible.

The designer found a new love in a wool, tight-loop broadloom pattern called Jiya from Masland in a blue-gray shade. She ran it smoothly from the family room to the library next door, as shown above. The flatter surface let her toss an accent sheepskin rug on top. "Always choose wool for its stain and fire resistance, not to mention the luxury," said Adams, who admits to becoming an evangelist for broadloom. "It's also wonderfully insulating—fantastic in an older, drafty home."

Set a Stage

Especially when it covers a lot of territory, wall-to-wall brings drama. “It creates a special environment,” said New York designer Sasha Bikoff. In an apartment in a futuristic Manhattan high-rise designed by architect Zaha Hadid, Bikoff conjured an entire world by installing silk broadloom in every room, describing the result as “Mars in Manhattan.” Disco Dots—a grid pattern of giant silver circles on black shag from her own carpeting collection—now unfurls across the living and dining rooms. With plush oxblood-red chairs around a glass dining table, the result she says “is like entering a jewel box.”



New York designer Sasha Bikoff installed silk broadloom in every room of an apartment she calls ‘Mars in Manhattan.’ PHOTO: LESLEY UNRUH

Wall-to-wall can also wow in one standout room. A graphic, stonewashed flatweave—the Komodo design from Patterson Flynn—grounds a heavily patterned media room by New York designer Matthew Kowles. It sets the space apart from the rest of the historic house in Greenwich, Conn.

“Other rooms have area rugs, but I wanted this one to have its own opulence,” said Kowles. He achieved this with a combination of touchable textures: woven (not knotted) silk on the floor,

chenille stripes on the club chair, velvet ikat on the sofa and grass-cloth walls. “The whole room feels upholstered,” said Kowles.



Silk carpeting adds to the opulence of this den by New York designer Matthew Kowles. PHOTO: ETHAN DOMINGUE

Tidy Up a Tricky Room

A client of Pilchik’s was at a loss for what to do with a long L-shaped room with a sloped ceiling in her Hamptons, N.Y., beach house. Ultimately, Pilchik created a guest suite that sleeps six, barracks-style, laying down wool navy herringbone carpet from Stanton. “When you have a room with a lot of corners, area rugs look too messy,” the designer said. Broadloom offered the cleanest, best-looking and most economical solution.

“You don’t have to worry about moving or shifting, or furniture sitting half on and half off the rug.” Two more pluses for a beach house: Carpeting reduces the risk of sliding on a wet floor, and sand vacuums up easily.



Kerri Pilchik, a design pro based in Ridgewood, N.J., simplified a quirkily shaped room with herringbone broadloom. PHOTO: JACOB SNAVELY PHOTO

In her own home, New York designer Katie Ridder fit a wool-sisal blend of broadloom into all the nooks and crannies of her library, noting, “I love it because it expands a small room.”

Meanwhile, in a client’s home office in Manhattan, Ridder installed a custom sculpted-wool carpet by Studio Four NYC in a warm, wheat color that complements the deep raspberry, high-gloss walls and hyacinth-colored desk. “It’s very tactile and feels wonderful underfoot,” Ridder said.



'It feels wonderful underfoot,' said New York designer Katie Ridder of the sculpted-wool carpet she introduced in a client's office. PHOTO:ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO

Pad Your Sanctum

Broadloom was so popular in the '60s, '70s and '80s that using it now can evoke an era. Robin Henry recalls that when her team set out to decorate a Midcentury Modern home in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., "we knew that we would do wall-to-wall to reinforce the style."

The New York designer had a tight-weave wool laid in each bedroom in a different color—pink, peach and light blue. "I prefer a flat carpet. It feels more tailored than thick pile," said Henry, who opted for 40-ounce synthetic-jute padding underneath, the standard for most luxury installations, she says.



'This was my idea of what a grown-up bedroom would be like,' said homeowner Rachael Combe of her Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., sanctuary. PHOTO: ADAM KANE MACCHIA

Two years later, homeowner Rachael Combe couldn't be happier with her primary-bedroom rug from Radici's Abetone Collection, and says it still looks clean and luxe. "We never wear shoes in the bedroom," said Combe, who notes the sensuousness of the floor covering. "The carpet deadens sound and creates a protective feeling like a cocoon." The peachy color (officially Terracotta) jibes with the Hudson River sunsets Combe says she enjoys from her window, adding, "This was my idea of what a grown-up bedroom would be like."

Furth says he brought a 1974 house in Pittsburgh back to its former glory in large part by installing a tightly woven gray wall-to-wall carpet in the primary bedroom and shag carpeting (to add a big dose of "shhh") in the living and dining rooms. "The acoustics of wall-to-wall are great. These days there are so many noises and devices. Quiet is luxurious," Furth said.

The bedroom carpet is particularly muting, covering the large, open space including steps up to a platform bed, and its headboard. The takeover didn't end there. Walls and windows sport gray cashmere flannel. The result: "A peaceful, restful place that exudes modernity," said Furth.



Even the platform bed and headboard sport carpet in Los Angeles designer Oliver M. Furth's back-to-the-future design, as seen in his recent book 'OP! Optimistic Interiors' (Rizzoli). PHOTO: ROGER DAVIES

Consider Your Site

Designers choose judiciously where and how they deploy wall-to-wall. It's not right for every client or project, says Furth. Henry believes area rugs better suit the layouts of living rooms, especially if the room is open to other spaces. "It's easier to use wall-to-wall in spaces with smaller, more-defined openings," she said. Ridder likes it in bedrooms and other private spaces, and ABC's LaBarre confirms that bedrooms remain the most popular place for wall-to-wall.

When it comes to color and patterns, "people are getting more creative and making bolder choices," said LaBarre. Peter Touma, president of Patterson Flynn, sees greens trending: mossy hues, emeralds and more. Grays are giving way to creams and beiges. Retailers like ABC Carpet are also witnessing a move toward more-tactile, nubbier carpets, says La Barre. "Texture is as important as color," she noted.

Practical concerns also influence choices. Silk will not wear well in highly trafficked areas. And "if you have cats, don't get a carpet with a lot of loops," said Touma. "Look at cut-pile options instead."

Fully Covered / Five examples of anything-but-boring flooring

You'll need to budget \$.50 to \$1.50 a square foot for installation, according to HomeGuide.com, a platform that connects homeowners and professionals.



1. Stanton Carpet Feng Shui 100% Wool in Khaki Denim, \$80 a Square Yard at Redi-Cut Carpets & Rugs (Westport, Conn.)

PHOTO: MARCUS MCDONALD FOR WSJ, STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA



2. Nourison Home Odyssey 70% Wool, 30% Nylon in Thatch, From \$100 a Square Yard

PHOTO: MARCUS MCDONALD FOR WSJ, STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA

3. Fibreworks Cirque Collection Medallion 100% Sisal in Canvas, \$110 a Square Yard at Redi-Cut Carpets & Rugs (Westport, Conn.)



PHOTO: MARCUS MCDONALD FOR WSJ, STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA

4. ABC Carpet & Home Gem Custom Carpet Wool/Polyester Blend in Multi, \$22 a Square Foot



PHOTO: MARCUS MCDONALD FOR WSJ, STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA

5. Nourison Home Manhattan Tribeca MHT02 Hand-Carved 100% New Zealand Wool in Terrain, From \$180 a Square Yard



PHOTO: MARCUS MCDONALD FOR WSJ, STYLING BY
MARINA BEVILACQUA

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