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Color Selection: How it Affects Appearance Retention

Today's carpets are available in a myriad of colors, fiber types and constructions. Consumers looking to buy carpet can select from bulky, knobby looking Berbers, tightly twisted Frieze, textured cut-pile, velvet-smooth Saxony, patterned cut-loop, long napped Shag, versatile needlepunch, and hard wearing level loop styles. Dyeing technology continues to broaden the spectrum of colors and shades available using continuous dye, solution dye, space dye, beck dye and print dye options, in many cases incorporating different fibers and different dye methods to produce various tone on tone and multi-colored effects.

Available synthetic fiber types include nylon type 6,6, and 6, PET polyester, polypropylene (i.e., olefin), Corterra PTT in either continuous filament or staple form, and various less commonly used natural fibers, such as wool, cotton, hemp, jute and silk. Synthetic fibers have pretty much replaced natural fibers for good reasons. However, for the purpose of this Newsletter, natural fibers are harder to dye than synthetic fibers, they tend to fade quickly, are more easily damaged by cleaning agents, absorb considerable amounts of moisture, are an ideal food source for insects, are prone to attack by mold and mildew, and subject to degradation. With these limitations in mind, the focus here will be on carpet made from synthetic fibers only.

Based on fiber type and dye method used, today's synthetic carpets are protected against stains and soils using built-in technology, fluorochemical treatments, acid dye blockers, or a combination of these treatments. To help bolster the soil-hiding properties of carpet various shaped fiber cross-sections, such as delta, trilobal, octagonal and pentagonal are used to scatter more light and reduce the magnification effect of synthetic fibers. These fibers can be heat set to add twist retention properties or air-entangled to co-mingle colors.

From a realistic standpoint, although stain and soil resistance treatments are very rugged, reliable, and long lasting, the protection they provide diminishes with use. Traffic load, soiling levels and cleaning frequency all work together to decrease the effectiveness of these treatments over time. Dry dusts, grit and other type surface liter can do much to lessen the appearance of a carpet by fiber abrasion, causing a once vibrant colored carpet to change in appearance ranging from dark and dirty to yellow. Wet and oily soils mask color, which causes a carpet to appear dull and delustered. Because of this, considerations for cleaning frequency, including reapplications of these treatments after cleanings is an important aspect of the long-term appearance retention properties of a carpet. So too is color!

In the eyes of most consumers color is the key ingredient in regard to the carpet they select. It also has much to do with the appearance retention capabilities of the carpet they select. Choose the wrong color and you will significantly increase the challenge to maintain a carpet over the long-term use. With lighter shades and colors continuing to be in vogue, the lively look they are meant to provide can change considerably and result instead in a gloomy atmosphere if the wrong shade and color is selected for the end-use, despite the stain and soil resistance capabilities of the advanced treatments used today to protect our carpets. If one considers how a white or light-colored garment (that is exposed to far less soils and spills than the everyday walked on carpet) looks after use it is only reasonable to expect white, light-colored, and some pastel colored carpets to appear dull, dark and dingy when installed in areas subject to higher traffic. Certain other colors, such as shades of blue, burgundy and green respond to heavy soiling by actually taking on a yellowish cast over time.

For heavy use areas earth tone shades remain the best choice. Various shades of tan and brown, both in solid and multi-color assortments still seem to hide soil and maintain their original appearance longer.

The carpet industry has always been committed to providing consumers with warm and inviting carpets that are capable of providing many years of full functional use, including optimum appearance retention properties. Still, each carpet has its place and it is only reasonable to consider what carpet will be used where and how, especially in regard to color selection.

Technical Services
800-944-2840 or www.beaulieu-usa.com
Mark Johnston
Tonya Monk
Tammy Smith