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THE PERFECT MATCH: CARPETS BUILT ON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

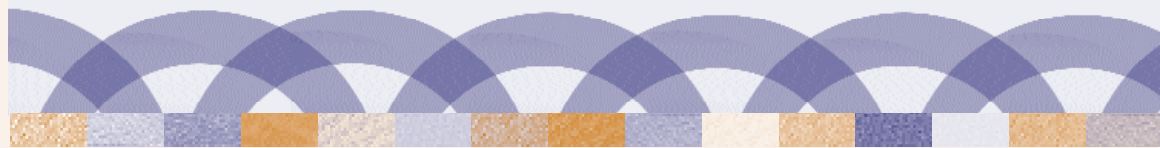
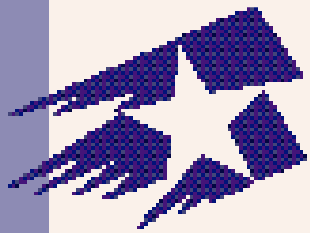
Patterned carpet now accounts for over 90% of commercial carpet installations, especially in high profile locations. The broad array of available styles and customized treatments defies description. Designers and facility managers know that patterned carpet has practical and aesthetic benefits. Functionally, patterns conceal seams, hide traffic lanes and wear, disguise stains and faded areas, and are easier to patch if damaged. Visually, patterns have evolved beyond the simple pin dots of yore to include intricate geometrics, free flowing waves, texture on texture, and truly custom design, not just custom color. Because many interior designs use the floor covering as the starting point for coordinating other finishes, patterned carpet creates exciting new design possibilities for commercial spaces.



Patterns hide wear, soiling, fading and damage better than solid colors.



Patterned carpet colors and textures set the stage for other interior finishes and furnishings.



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS



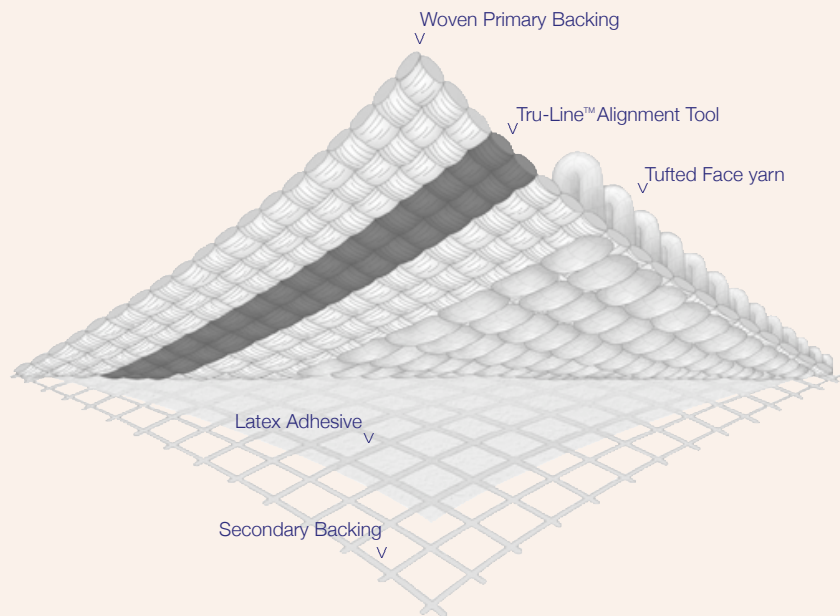
The carpet industry is one of the most pro-active in the area of environmental initiatives. This also holds true for backings manufacturers. Many polypropylene backings are made from post-industrial recycled material. Some backings are woven with fiber made from post-consumer polyester recycled from plastic soda bottles. Perhaps the area of greatest environmental impact is the advent of low to no VOC adhesives. These next-generation adhesives have no negative impact on indoor air quality and cause no environmental harm in the disposal process. If environmentally friendly materials and/or eventual disposal are driving your specifications, ask your StarNet Member for more information about products and programs offered.



THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG - CARPET STYLE!

Did more sophisticated design expectations drive the growth and changing face of patterned carpet, or did new carpet backing technology enable it? Whichever came first - the desire for endless pattern options or the ability to successfully produce them - backings aren't taking a back seat in providing solutions for designers, facility managers and installers. In fact, upgraded backings are becoming the rule rather than the exception.

CARPET ANATOMY



Illustrations and photos courtesy of: SI Flooring Systems and The StarNet Design Awards.



WHY UPGRADE CARPET BACKINGS?

Specifiers are more educated about the features and benefits that backings provide. Better backings allow designers to realize their most creative vision, allow the mills to improve construction quality, allow installers to minimize installation issues, and allow facility managers and end users to realize improved product performance. All this - at only a few pennies more per yard than standard backings - make upgrades an intelligent and value-driven investment. While choosing the right backing system is critical, it is also complicated, due to the expansion of backing manufacturers, backing construction, and backing materials. Play it safe by specifying a branded system.

The benefits of upgraded carpet backings begin at the carpet mill, continue during the installation process, and ultimately improve end user performance and satisfaction - all for only pennies a yard.

I. Better Look and Quality From The Mill

Upgraded backings provide a better foundation for eliminating needle deflection during the tufting process, crisper pattern definition, more precise pattern alignment and less yarn damage. They help avoid bow and skew (pattern distortion) across the width of the carpet for straighter patterns in large commercial installations. They improve



BACKING BASICS - WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Somewhere between “this is more than I ever wanted to know about carpet construction” and “what do I need to know about carpet construction” is the happy medium for making an educated backings choice during the specification process. Your StarNet Member can help you understand and specify the right backing or combination of upgraded backings to ensure a quality carpet installation.

A few years ago, most architects and designers did not understand nor specify carpet backings. A recent survey conducted by *Floor Focus* magazine reveals that now, 79% of the nation’s top 250 firms say there are technical details about backings they need to know.

Standard and Upgraded Backings

Carpet backings are synonymous with carpet foundations. The terms are used interchangeably. Primary backings are the initial carrier for the fabric tufts. They are responsible for stability, pattern straightness, pattern clarity and tuft bind. Secondary carpet backings are laminated to the primary backing with an adhesive during the final stages of the carpet manufacturing process. Secondary backings contribute a number of benefits including additional dimensional stability, cushioning,

Understanding some basics about carpet construction and backing upgrades will help you specify the right combination of fiber and backing systems.

delamination strength and seam integrity. These backings form the foundation for tufted broadloom carpets, which represent approximately 80% of commercial installations. (The other 20% is axminster or wilton weave, which is a higher end method of manufacturing carpet employing a loom.) The pros to standard backings are that they are economical, and perform adequately in low-traffic areas. The cons are that they can

compromise intricate patterns, they won’t stand up to high-traffic, and they can break down during the cleaning process.

Standard:

- Woven fabric: Defined by pick (yarn) per inch. Carpet mills match the number of picks in the backing in relationship to the number of tufts per inch of face yarn construction. More intricate patterns require a higher pick backing, which can range from as low as five to as high as twenty picks-per-inch.
- Non woven fabric: A newer technology that improves tufting integrity.
- Latex: A first-generation material that relies on a glue-like method of anchoring tufts into place.

Upgrades:

- Upgraded backings include primary and secondary systems that have value-added features. Newer backing technology and materials contribute to carpets that excel in design, appearance retention and comfort.
- Composites: Composites combine the production characteristics of a woven and non-woven fabric to improve dimensional stability. An example is Patternlok™ from SI Flooring Systems.
- Attached Cushion: These carpets offer the advantages of carpet installed over cushion, including comfort underfoot, better appearance retention, plus improved tuft bind and lamination strength between the primary and secondary backing. Unified cushion systems create a functional liquid barrier that prevents moisture from penetrating to the subfloor. An example is THE ENHANCER® polyurethane carpet backing from Dow.
- Resins: Polymers including thermoplastics and polyurethanes that form a tough, moisture-resistance backing that locks in carpet tufts. These carpets resist “zippering” and runs that can happen when paper clips get caught in carpet tufts in schools, offices and similar environments.



Commodity level backings have a high incidence of needle deflection causing yarn damage and poor pattern definition.



Branded backings provide a foundation that eliminates needle deflecting yarn damage, providing crisp pattern definition and greater appearance retention.

tufting performance on even the most intricate patterns. They contribute to a more dimensionally stable construction between the backings and face fiber.

2. Easier Installation at the Jobsite

Upgraded backings ensure better roll conformity for the installer. Flatter rolls reduce the need to trim a bulky selvedge edge, which speeds installation time and reduces waste. Plus, the lack of bow and skew makes it easier for the installer to align carpet rolls with a better pattern-match and virtually invisible seams, even on the largest installations. Upgraded backings contribute to more professional installations that have reduced errors and reduced callbacks.

3. Better Performance, Durability and Ergonomics for the End User

Upgraded backings improve initial appearance and appearance retention over time. They provide improved dimensional stability for a long life cycle. They improve maintenance characteristics by resisting the effects of moisture and cleaning solutions better than standard-backed carpets. They have better resistance to crushing and mechanical damage caused by high foot traffic and cleaning equipment. Cushion-backed carpets improve ergonomics and absorb sound, improving personal comfort and reducing noise in the workplace.



SPECIFY BRANDED BACKINGS

Although the surface of beautiful patterned broadloom carpet gets most of the attention, there's no doubt that the foundation - the backings - deserve much of the credit. Backings manufacturers have made a sincere effort to educate mills as well as downstream customers about the features and benefits of their products. The once-commodity backings are now as brand-recognizable as the face yarns and carpet mills. How to make sense of all your options and how to specify the best choice to meet your performance and budget needs? Ask your StarNet Member for assistance. That said, backings alone won't guarantee a problem-free installation. For that you need skilled installers working for your local StarNet Member flooring project expert.



Patterned carpet now accounts for over 90% of commercial carpet installations, especially in high profile locations.

For more information about StarNet, visit us online at www.starnetflooring.com or call 1-800-787-6381.

One in a series of Bulletins from your Commercial Floorcovering Professionals at:



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