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The Business of Design / designcurial.com / May/June 2023 / £10



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Q&A

Imaginative flooring can help define and shape an interior space as effectively as any physical barrier, explains Andrea Hickey, associate and senior architect at Nissen Richards Studio...

Which flooring materials do you particularly like working with and why?

I have an affinity for more natural and eco-friendly materials such as timber, stone or rubber due to the textures, warmth and colour they can bring to a space. I love it when the flooring really sings to a space and merges with other architectural features like the joinery. I'm particularly obsessed with white oiled douglas fir finished boards at the moment and love how the wide and long boards can bring uninterrupted drama to the simplest of spaces.

How do you keep up-to-date with the latest flooring products on the market? Is there scope for using some of the very latest material technology in projects or do clients tend to have a preference for more traditional solutions?

We have a number of great resources in the office which I regularly use to find out about new products on the market: journals, our material library and even just talking to my colleagues. The diverse range of project types we work on in the office means that our material library is continually



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growing and evolving – it's normally my first port of call when developing material palettes and designs. You can also never beat a good Google search or Pinterest splurge.

From permanent gallery design to temporary exhibitions and multi-unit housing to bespoke one-off homes, our diverse projects allow us to experiment with variety of different flooring products. In every project we need to understand a client's priorities carefully and balance our design ambition with a material's durability and cost. We feel that it's important to test ideas and, in all our projects, we use a combination of visuals and physical samples to explore our ideas with clients and during the decision-making process.

We often end up leaning towards what we call 'timeless classics' on our more straight architectural projects, which contrasts with our exhibition work where we might explore more experimental or bespoke solutions.

How can designers look to exploit the potential of creative flooring, both in terms of design ideas, and material choices, in a range of different applications?

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In exhibition and gallery design, the floor can be used to in a creative way to strengthen the narrative of an exhibition or even a single object. It can be used as wayfinding tool, to help to create immersive environments or as a surface to hold graphics. In complete contrast, we sometimes might want the floor to merge into the background as if it has disappeared completely to ensure the focus within a space is on a special artefact, painting or object.

Thresholds between spaces (for example, the threshold between galleries, between the inside and outside, or simply between rooms) are critical in creating good flow or separation between spaces in the work we do at Nissen Richards Studio. These could utilise different materials to signal movement between space or a more subtle approach we use deploy is to use the same flooring material in a different way, perhaps changing the orientation or direction of the floor material or bonding it in a different way? As designers, we tend to steer away from standard or off the shelf solutions and often look to capitalise on bespoke solutions.

What would be your dream flooring material and how would it make a difference to your projects?

A flooring material that's already had a life – something that has a history and story to tell. While existing flooring materials can sometimes be tricky to work with, there is beauty and texture to be found in a pre-loved material.

nissenrichardsstudio.com



DAN DUNKLEY

Left, top Nissen Richards Studio's work for Opplyst, a permanent exhibition at The National Library of Norway

Left The creative flooring of the exhibition for Electricity, The Spark of Life is a perfect example of how floor design can offer that extra bit of charge to a space

Above, right A close up of the hand-built block-end larch flooring of the Opplyst space