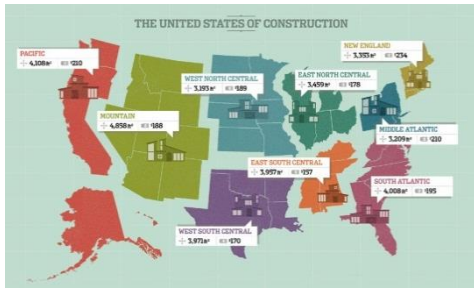


Mapping the Material World

What flooring do Floridians prefer? A survey of builders shows how tastes in finishes vary by region. Nationwide, granite is still rock-solid, and carpet keeps its footing; outdoors, high praise for the versatility of poured concrete

By [SANETTE TANAKA](#)



New Englanders go for chrome, while Texans live in the bronze age. When it comes to picking materials in home construction, it all depends on where you live. For the past 15 years, the NAHB Research Center, a subsidiary of the National Association of Home Builders, has been tracking construction materials in annual surveys of residential builders in the U.S. Below are nine geographical regions, broken down by the building materials that are most commonly used in luxury-home construction. (Percentages reflect market share in 2006 and 2011.)

The Mountain region often sees bronze finishes for kitchen faucets and nickel for the bathroom. This split is common in this area, says Lou Rohl, CEO and managing partner of Rohl LLC, which sells high-end, luxury faucets. Countertops, flooring and the overall aesthetics tend to drive the faucet finishes, Mr. Rohl says. A trend toward natural living materials in kitchens, like stone and exposed wood, tends to call for a more weathered finish like bronze, he says. In the bathroom, polished nickel is popular because it withstands tarnish, corrosion and water spots.

As the most popular patio material in the country, poured concrete is most commonly used in the West North Central region. Poured concrete is durable and low maintenance, says Zach Leo, owner of Midwest Concrete in Lee's Summit, Mo., a suburb of Kansas City. He adds that the majority of his clients opt for concrete because of its versatility. "You can make it look like brick or stone or even hardwood floors," he says.

Even with the trend toward wood, carpet still ties with hardwood as the most popular floor covering in the U.S., with 37% of luxury homes having carpet underfoot. But East North Central is the only region that did not see a decline in carpet use last year when compared with the year 2006. This region is known for bitterly cold winters, which may make carpeted floors seem more appealing, says Steve Revnew, vice president of product innovation at [Sherwin-Williams](#), the largest floor-covering wholesaler in North America.

New England leads in hardwood flooring. Architectural styles common in New England, like Cape Cod and Colonial-style homes, tend to adhere to a more traditional design with hardwood floors and wood siding, says Ed Hudson, director of the market research division at the NAHB Research Center. In the hardwood category, solid hardwood is more common than pricier engineered hardwood, in which a hardwood veneer is adhered to a core. Oak is the most popular type of hardwood, accounting for about half of the market, says Matt Zielenski, industry analyst at the Freedonia Group, a business-research company. Jeffrey Collé, a Hamptons-based designer/builder, says that the Northeast region has seen a trend toward old-fashioned wood flooring. To achieve the look, he has used resurfaced and restored wood from barns and antique homes.

KEY		Avg. Square Feet (Luxury Homes)		Price Per Square Foot		Kitchen Faucet		Bathroom Faucet	
		Kitchen Countertops		Flooring		Patio Material		Deck Surface	
NEW ENGLAND		MIDDLE ATLANTIC		SOUTH ATLANTIC					
Nickel	2011: 34% 2006: 42%	Nickel	2011: 39% 2006: 32%	Bronze	2011: 3% 2006: 8%	Granite	2011: 43% 2006: 42%	Granite	2011: 64% 2006: 76%
Chrome	48% 4%	Granite	42% 57%	Granite	62% 57%	Hardwood	43% 3%	Concrete Pavers	37% 14%
Granite	63% 73%	Hardwood	42% 33%	Hardwood	58% 3%	Plastic Composite	63% 39%	Treated Wood	42% 63%
Hardwood	63% 73%	Natural Stone	67% 68%	Poured Concrete	38% 58%				
Natural Stone	67% 68%	Plastic Composite	38% 29%						
Plastic Composite	38% 29%								
EAST NORTH CENTRAL		EAST SOUTH CENTRAL		WEST SOUTH CENTRAL					
Nickel	2011: 38% 2006: 39%	Bronze	2011: 53% 2006: 25%	Bronze	2011: 52% 2006: 34%	Granite	2011: 61% 2006: 63%	Granite	2011: 70% 2006: 75%
Chrome	37% 4%	Granite	53% 27%	Granite	61% 59%	Hardwood	48% 2%	Carpet	38% 42%
Granite	58% 52%	Hardwood	58% 4%	Hardwood	59% 4%	Poured Concrete	80% 73%	Poured Concrete	75% 73%
Hardwood	58% 52%	Carpet	5% 5%	Carpet	5% 5%	Plastic Composite	54% 3%	Treated Wood	52% 87%
Carpet	5% 5%	Poured Concrete	60% 60%	Poured Concrete	80% 83%				
Poured Concrete	60% 60%	Plastic Composite	54% 3%	Treated Wood	52% 87%				
Plastic Composite	54% 3%								
MOUNTAIN		WEST NORTH CENTRAL		PACIFIC					
Bronze	2011: 57% 2006: 21%	Bronze	2011: 34% 2006: 13%	Nickel	2011: 44% 2006: 25%	Granite	2011: 48% 2006: 48%	Granite	2011: 53% 2006: 52%
Nickel	42% 33%	Bronze/Nickel	35% 13% 33% 24%	Nickel	43% 23%	Granite	53% 3%	Carpet	46% 60%
Granite	58% 73%	Granite	50% 3%	Granite	53% 3%	Poured Concrete	80% 88%	Poured Concrete	80% 88%
Hardwood	43% 17%	Carpet	50% 57%	Plastic Composite	45% 33%	Plastic Composite	45% 33%	Plastic Composite	45% 33%
Poured Concrete	45% 45%	Poured Concrete	85% 88%						
Plastic Composite	45% 45%	Plastic Composite	45% 33%						

Mapping the Material World, cont.



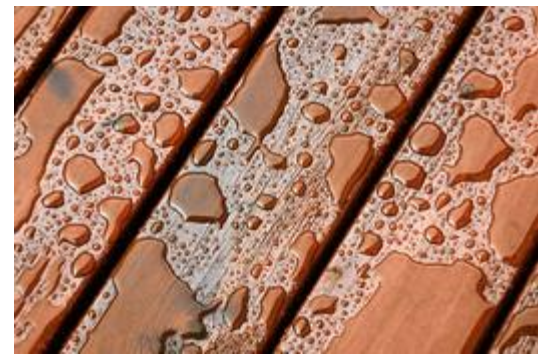
Pfister/Sea Pointe Construction

The Pacific region is the leader in nickel faucets in both the bathroom and kitchen. The sheen can vary based on the finish: brushed nickel has a matte finish while polished nickel can shine like chrome. Andrew Shore, president of Sea Pointe Construction, a design/build residential remodeling firm based in Irvine, Calif., says the choice of finish comes down to home style. "In Southern California, Mediterranean architecture and Tuscan-type homes lend themselves more to a satin nickel or oil rubbed bronze as opposed to a chrome finish," he says.



Bronze faucets reign in the Texas area. Bronze finishes fall in line with popular architectural styles in Texas, like Italian villas and French country-style homes, says Lauri Wells, showroom manager at Texas Bath and Kitchen, a subsidiary of Pittman Plumbing Supply, in Carrollton, Texas. A coating process called physical vapor deposition, or PVD, protects bronze finishes so they stand up as well against water as chrome does.

Treated wood, though less common now than in 2006, is still the most popular deck surface material in the East South Central region. Treated wood can contract and expand in areas with extreme heat and cold. But in this region, temperate weather makes this wood perfectly suitable, Mr. Zielenski says. To create treated wood, lumber is infused with chemicals, including copper azole, under high pressure to increase its strength and inhibit decay. Of wood types, treated yellow pine is the most commonly used material.



Granite has been hot in luxury homes for the past two decades and is most pronounced in the South Atlantic region, where 84% of new luxury homes sport granite in the kitchen. "When looking at a certain price point, virtually every house has granite countertops," says Mary Preston Yates, broker at Prudential Carolinas Realty. Known for its durability, granite is also extremely versatile in pattern and color, Ms. Yates says, fitting

well with the varying styles that define the area, from English country-style homes in the Carolinas to Spanish-style homes in Florida.

The Middle Atlantic region sees the highest use of wood-plastic composite decking, at 63%, a 24 percentage-point increase from 2006. Wood-composite is made by heating a mix of wood scraps, sawdust and plastic resins under high pressure and molding it into a desired shape. The composite tends to be more durable and moisture-resistant than traditional wood, making it ideal for seasonal changes, Mr. Zielenski says. Although composite decking is typically three to four times more expensive than treated wood, it tends to be lower maintenance, making it worth the extra cost, he adds.

