

DESIGN & DECORATING

THAT'S DEBATABLE

Does Wall-to-Wall Carpet Drive You Up the Wall?

NO **SOMETIME** around the end of the last century, our attitude toward wall-to-wall carpet grew jaundiced. The culprit: inexpensive nylon broadloom that had given rise to tacky bicolor shags and multishaded, sculpted cut pile. These overshadowed the legitimately chic use of wall-to-wall by arbiters of style, like interior designer Madeleine Castaing, who swathed her 1940s country-home living room with leopard-spot wool, and Yves Saint Laurent, whose 1971 Left Bank apartment featured a sea of cut pile in white silk. Today, wall-to-wall carpeting is taking back the narrative.

"One of the biggest developments in the industry has been the rising popularity of hand-woven broadloom carpet that incorporates naturally occurring irregularities normally found in hand-knotted rugs," said Haynes Robinson, senior vice president of product development at home furnishing retailer ABC Carpet & Homes. "This has contributed to an explosion in materials, constructions and textures in the wall-to-wall format."

Think natural, organic fibers like knobby, knotted wools, mohair, jute or sisal and lush, lustrous cottons, linens, cashmeres and silks.

"My children may think of carpeting in reference to their grandmother's home in upstate New York, but I dream of the white cut pile in the Coco Chanel suite at the Ritz Paris," said New York interior designer John Gachot. "It feels luxurious...and, like wood, acts as a base to layer other materials into the room."

Other full-coverage options in vogue are rich saturated hues of cut pile (shorter than shag) and loop-pile carpet in patterns ranging from subtle tone-on-tone to tight geometrics, like those newly released by Stark in collaboration with



SOFT CELL In the living room of a midcentury house in Pittsburgh, interior designer Leanne Ford installed creamy wall-to-wall wool carpet. It was the best option for bringing warmth to the original stone and wood throughout the home, she said.

Jeffrey Billhuber. Note, too, that the bold animal and botanical themes of Madeleine Castaing are still produced by PFM.

Designers champion wall-to-wall's ability to make a small room appear larger, hide damaged flooring, unify an irregularly shaped space or absorb sound. Others speak more emotionally.

"Open the door to luxurious carpeting and the urge to take your shoes off is immediate," said Charleston, S.C., designer Elizabeth Stuart. "Some of my very best thinking—and kissing—was done on wall-to-wall carpet. If it were to return, then I wouldn't need to wear slippers and, who knows, maybe I would think and kiss more."

YES

MUCH CARPET criticism can be summarized as "ick" and refers

to the cleaning challenges of wall-to-wall.

Some claim that carpeting harbors dust mites, mold spores and mildew, and, though these charges have been discounted as rumors started by wood-flooring

manufacturers, they actually do hold water, because carpet is tough to maintain.

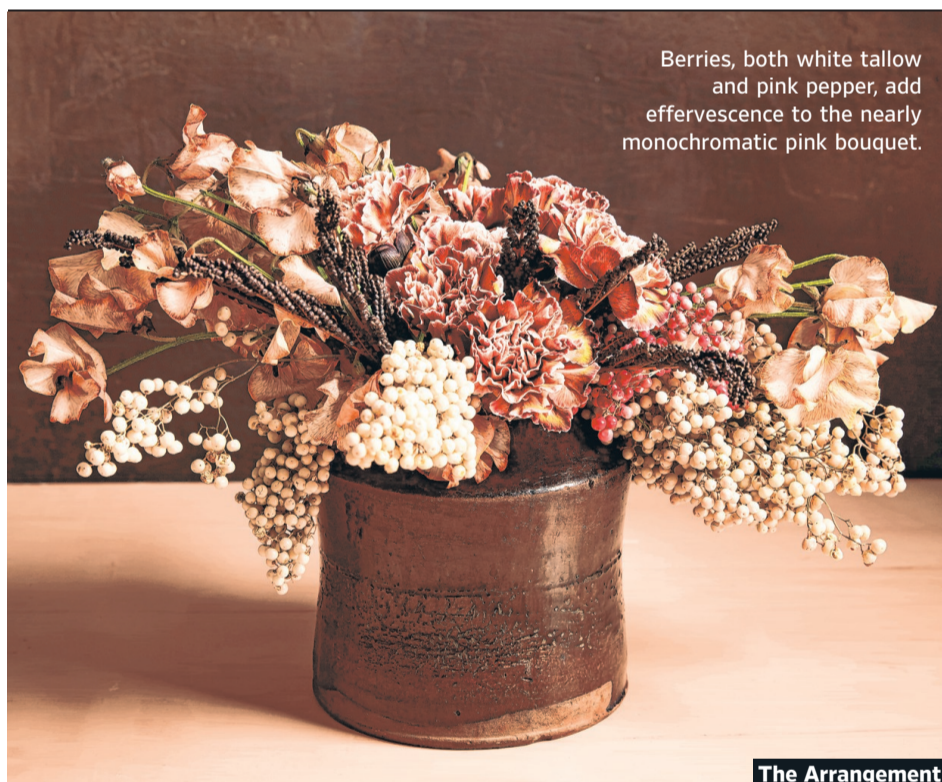
"Area rugs are more easily manipulated," said Kellie Sirna, co-founder of Studo 11 Design, in Dallas. "It's not only easier to clean them, it's also easier to rotate them more frequently." And shuffling rugs around helps them wear evenly.

Bob Margies, director of installation services at textile brand Merida, has more than 30 years of experience installing both types. "I've installed area rugs and wall-to-wall carpeting in homes at the same time and been called back 5-7 years later to replace the wall-to-wall sections, while the area rug is still in excellent condition," he said.

While generally lower-priced and easier to maintain, synthetic material can contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs). "The off-gassing can be quite toxic to sensitive people," said Los Angeles designer Marissa Zajack. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends that customers request suppliers unroll and air out carpets in a clean, dry area before bringing them into the home. VOCs are nearly nonexistent in carpeting made from natural fibers like wool, silk, linen or cotton.

That said, luxe materials like silk typically require specialty (read: pricey) handling. "There are lots of ways a wall-to-wall installation can go south, and mistakes have lasting repercussions," said New York interior designer Jessica Shaw. "We once ordered a beautiful silk rug but didn't know silk stretches. The general contractor on the job tried to install it and made a mess, so it had to be ripped out and replaced. It was a very expensive mistake."

New York designer Hilary Matt has conjured a compromise. She places carpet a few inches from each wall to mimic the warmth of wall-to-wall carpeting while still showcasing the detail of underlying wood flooring. "It's an updated look for someone not yet sold on wall-to-wall carpet," said Ms. Matt. "Usually that's my younger clients." —Allison Duncan



Berries, both white tallow and pink pepper, add effervescence to the nearly monochromatic pink bouquet.

The Arrangement

FLOWER SCHOOL

The Tints of Tides

Floral designer **Lindsey Taylor** plays with a seashell's palette

MY SISTER recently traveled to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark to see the retrospective of Marsden Hartley, which closed last month. Sharing images of the show, she introduced me to this modernist American artist and poet (1877-1943) whose painterly, unfussy way of depicting his subjects I found both satisfying and moving. A small canvas of a seashell, "Still Life No. 4" (1929), particularly spoke to me. Measuring about 10 by 13 inches, the work is executed in a palette of pinks, corals and rich chocolaty shades.

Its sense of immediacy suggests that Hartley, his eye caught by the shell, felt a need to transcribe it in paint without hesitation.



The Inspiration

Hartley reportedly loved to paint and was at it constantly. I, too, often experience an urgent need to respond to nature, compelled to make an arrangement wherever I go. These arrangements—big or not-so-big or simply a couple of sprigs—are rarely intended to mark an occasion but are rather a spontaneous reaction when an intriguing

branch, color or flower shape grabs my attention. They can change my mood in flash.

To riff on Hartley's canvas, I gathered mottled carnations in the fleshy pinks and deeper rose colors of the shell. Pink sweet-peas tipped in tan, dark brown ostrich-fern seed-heads, pink pepper berries and matte creamy white tallow berries came together in an almost monochromatic way. I cut the stems to a variety of lengths and tightly fit them into a deep chestnut glazed ceramic vessel, keeping the shape fairly horizontal to mimic the lines of the artist's still life, a painting that reminds us of the beauty around us, worthy of study.



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