

Quick Facts – Cork



- Cork is the bark of the Cork Oak tree. Cork forests cover 5.4 million acres around the world, with the primary areas being the Mediterranean region of Europe (Portugal, Spain) and northern Africa.
- Fifty per cent of the world's cork production is in Portugal, mostly because of the climate and soil conditions that make Portugal a prime area for the growth of cork oak forests.
- Cork is meticulously harvested by hand. Trees are not harvested until they are mature — about 25 years old, on average. The bark is then stripped on 9-year cycles. No cork trees are ever felled during harvesting, and only 50 per cent of the bark is removed at one time. This enables the cork oak tree to use its own natural defences to protect itself from disease, etc. Cork oak trees live 150 to 200 years.
- After cork bark is harvested and aged for 3–6 months, it's cleaned and boiled for production. The rough exterior is cut off and the rest is ground up and mixed in a binder. A paste is added to cork granules, and then the cork is molded into large blocks and baked. Once the cork is baked, the blocks are sliced to make cork planks or tiles.
- Light, medium and dark cork colours are achieved by baking the cork at varying temperatures. Stains for custom colours are applied just prior to the application of UV Acrylic Varnish.
- Cork has a lot of high visual appeal created by the unique look that its natural grains create. The natural grains of the cork mean that no two tiles or planks look alike.
- Cork is quiet and resilient (it “gives” under normal pressures) because there are 100-million plus, prism-shaped, air-filled cells per cubic inch of cork. Cork has an insulating factor of about R-2.8 per inch. Its natural insulating properties mean cork flooring can help reduce heating and cooling costs.
- Cork is naturally fire retardant. It's used by NASA as an insulator on space shuttles and unmanned rockets. (A ¼” thick layer of cork, for example, is used on the Delta II rocket — the Mars Rover II — to prevent rocket fuel from becoming too hot during engine ignition.)
- Cork is hypoallergenic. Cork, because of its natural properties, resists mold, mildew, bacteria.

- Cork has been used as a flooring for over 100 years. It was first used in the United States in 1890.
- Some famous examples of buildings where cork flooring was used — the First Congressional Church in Chicago (1890); the Mayo Clinic and Plummer Building (1912); the U.S. National Archives (1930); the U.S. Library of Congress; and Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania (1930). In Canada, a famous example is the old Toronto Stock Exchange (although the cork floors used there were the old massive cork tiles that could be sanded and refinished, like hardwood).
- Cork was extremely popular in the U.S. for almost the entire first half of the 20th Century, from 1900 to 1945. It was popular and widely used in both residential and commercial applications.
- From 1900–45, cork was a common flooring choice for government buildings, banks, universities and houses. (Some examples have been cited above.)
- The use of cork flooring actually peaked in 1927, when 2.9 million square feet was sold in the United States. Renowned American architect Frank Lloyd Wright chose cork flooring for many of his home designs, including his famous “Falling Water” home in Pennsylvania.
- Cork is available in a range of textures for different décor needs and styles. Cork tiles or planks can be mixed and matched to enhance different décor styles and create customized looks.
- Cork flooring is popular again today because of its looks, ease of maintenance, and environmental qualities.
- Cork floors work really well in spaces that get used: entrances, hallways, kitchens, family rooms, and bedrooms.
- CASUAL interiors: Cork pulls together mix & match patterns ie. furniture, creating a warm, comfortable look. A “Casual” style, for example, is a “Roots” kind of furniture look, or an “Ikea” kind of casual look. Furniture can be mixed, but the cork floor pulls all the room elements together.
- MODERN interiors: Modern interiors have sharp lines, and minimalist looks in terms of furniture. The modern look can be stark, but the use of cork textures warm up the room and prevent starkness. Cork also adds a dramatic touch to a modern interior.
- Although Cork is resilient flooring, certain care must be taken to prevent damage from furniture feet, pet nails, etc. Furniture feet should have pads on them; pet nails must be kept trimmed. Minor scratches in cork floor can be camouflaged.
- Because cork is a natural product, it is affected by humidity. Cork flooring expands and contracts. Humidity levels need to be between 40% and 60% to prevent cork flooring from either drying out or becoming too moist.
- Cork is a natural product with shade variations that enhance its look. Also because Cork is a natural product, fading will occur with exposure to sunlight.