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Worn finishes: A case for restoration - by Melissa Cyr

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New carpet, pristine resilient flooring and fresh, grime-free stone, tile and grout can make a huge impact on the successful overhaul of an existing space. While much of the excitement of renovation comes with choosing new finishes, they also add cost and waste. For those managing or selling commercial spaces, renovation is often a necessity in maintaining your investment. But along with renovation, a smart plan should always consider restoration of long-lasting finishes. How to decide the renovate vs. restore question? The answer comes down to preference, cost and a perception of finishes being too far gone to save.

Renovation may be a function of design preference in creating a “new” space. However, restoring existing finishes and incorporating them into a newly designed space is becoming increasingly popular. Restoration is key when preserving vintage finishes or historical details. From a Green building perspective, restoration uses fewer resources and less energy than typical renovations. Updates in the chemistry and procedures used in restoration and maintenance have greatly reduced, or even eliminated, waste water and indoor air pollutants. Restoring finishes also allows owners to avoid waste associated with end of life cycle costs, such as demo and disposal.

“Operational interference, sustainability and cost are key issues to consider,” said Dave Beedie, president, NeverStrip Floor Coatings. Material and labor costs are many times lower in restoring flooring or tiling than in replacing it. There are various budget flooring materials on the market today, but vinyl finishes, in particular, can seem made for the short-term, install/use/replace cycle. While it may feel like a no-brainer replacing these finishes for every fit-out or at the first sign of ugly wear, resisting this temptation can pay off. Recent industry advances can not only solve some of the appearance issues of worn vinyl flooring, but can also have the added benefit of very low maintenance going forward. According to Beedie, new Micron sealer technologies form a durable yet refreshable micron-thin layer comprised of inorganic compounds. “The result is a revitalized floor with a ceramic-like surface, requiring less maintenance budget dollars, while avoiding lost productivity and downtime associated with demo and replace renovation” Beedie says. Not only is this technology extending the useful life of Luxury Vinyl Tile but also Linoleum, Rubber and even Ceramic/Porcelain surfaces.

In high-traffic commercial and public environments, it can be hard to assess when flooring or tiling is beyond saving. Durable finishes such as tile or stone provide a long life cycle and therefore a wonderful return on investment. There are, however, times when stones’ natural beauty may be obscured by years of coatings and improper maintenance products or when surrounding grout is severely discolored, dirty or degraded. Time to demo and replace, right? Not necessarily. Stone, tile and grout can be restored beautifully and protected against further wear. According to Carlos Loyola, director of Higgins Flooring Services, in addition to stripping and washing away buildup, “use of new technologies, such as those offered by NeverStrip have led to great success in restoring and sealing tile and grout to a like-new appearance.”

These advances bring a clean slate and “we even have the ability to recolor existing grout, big design impact without an overhaul!” says Loyola.

As a leader in the commercial flooring industry since 1952, M. Frank Higgins & Co. knows the value expert installation of new finishes can bring to property ownership. There are certainly times when carpet is too faded or matted to be saved, when a hard surface is cracked or scratched beyond repair, or instances when structural or design issues necessitate replacement. However, the many benefits of saving and refreshing worn existing finishes have inspired Higgins to use their industry expertise in leading the charge to bring maintenance and restoration technologies to market, thus creating Higgins Flooring Services. No matter the project, partnering with an experienced project manager can help guide you through any restore or replace dilemma.

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