

**S.A. "Sam" Jernigan
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S.A. "Sam" Jernigan: Drip-dry decorating



Soggy days are plentiful but there are creative solutions to accommodate winter weather: perched atop a cheery-hued floor with a dual oil-based finish, a vintage enameled metal roasting pan makes an ideal drop-off spot by the back door for my snow-covered boots.

In the midst of our rain-soaked weather and with months of El Niño predicted ahead, we're now traipsing the soggy outdoors in.

So here are some drip-dry decorating tips — especially for mud rooms and entry ways where the primary assault on our floors occurs.

If winters past have taken their toll in these areas and you're needing to consider some replacement flooring, it's important to be aware that not all materials are created equal.

Strong performers include porcelain tile — which is rugged, affordable and has a high PEI (Porcelain Enamel Institute) rating.

PEI ratings for porcelain tile tend to be around 5, e.g. suitable for heavy residential and commercial traffic.

PEI ratings for ceramic tile can range anywhere from PEI 0 (no foot traffic) up to PEI 5 — but with most ratings being on the lower end of the scale.

However, if you decide to tile, don't forget to seal your grout as often as twice a year if the tile is used in a high traffic zone.

Green flooring options include Marmoleum, a linseed-based, next-generation version of mid-century linoleum which was actually invented nearly a century earlier in England in 1860.

Soft underfoot with a bit of cushioning and available in an array of patterns and colors, this product's produced in rolls (like sheet vinyl) as well as click-style panels or squares — ideal for DIY'ers.

For this click-install iteration, Marmoleum is laminated onto layers of high-density fiberboard (HDF) and cork — and qualifies for LEED points.

Cork itself is an ideal flooring choice for damp entries.

It too can be installed as easily as tile (but no grouting of course!).

It can be utilized on uneven floors (e.g. our area's vintage homes).

And, it can even be installed directly over existing flooring like wood or vinyl — just ensure the old flooring is in good condition and is roughed up with sandpaper to ensure the adhesive bonds well.

When installed over a substrate, cork provides additional insulation — and is also warm on the tootsies if you're kicking off your shoes as you come through the door.

In fact, cork can even be applied over a radiant floor system.

Cork typically offers a superior high-traffic finish and also qualifies for LEED points.

Growing as it does in moist environs, you’d think bamboo would be another good alternative option for bearing up under wintry foot traffic.

But while this sustainable tree-like grass is classified as “water resistant,” alas, it can scratch quite readily.

So it’d be quite inhospitable underfoot here in the country where gravel and rocky bits stuck in shoe treads are common.

A unique solution that’s performed remarkably well in my own home was something I noodled myself.

Having opted for wide-plank pine flooring in my kitchen, I used the same solid wood planks in the adjoining pantry-cum-mud room which serves as the back door access (see photo).

But for the finish I chose a durable oil-based paint that I thinned — as I didn’t want a solid opaque look but instead wanted to see all the distinctive woodgrain/knots (also helpful in camouflaging the country dirt being tracked in!).

After the paint cured, I top-coated the floor with tung oil — another green product which is easy to apply and provides a really rugged as well as low-luster finish.

Those were two key goals of mine for this high traffic thoroughfare where a tightly woven/reversible natural fiber area rug receives the bulk of the footfall.

The pop of red grounds the room’s tongue-and-groove paneled walls painted a warm ivory.

This red is the same hue used on a focal wall in the adjoining kitchen.

This floor’s held up phenomenally well for eight years now.

Another choice I made for my own dwelling was stained concrete floors for the main entry way (top-coated with a satin sealer) — and they look virtually new all these years later.

Utilizing drip-dry decorating solutions like these underfoot adds to a more carefree home, ergo homeowner.

So, duly armed (footed?), we say bring it, El Niño.

(Part II will be published on Jan. 23.)

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