employees are spending more time in the office, and amenities such as interactive cafes, all-hands space, social hubs and active areas are a requirement—especially in today’s environment where talent attraction and retention are imperative. At the center of these spaces is the floor design, which experts say is trending toward familiar textures and colors to help workers feel more at home.

“We now look at flooring design as a catalyst for the various ways of moving through a space,” said John Stephens, vice president of marketing at Shaw Contract Group. “Current carpet tile collections feature styles that range in scale and pattern but can be used alone or together to create movement, inject color, assist in wayfinding, enhance the architecture and meet the overall design intent.”

Carpet tile has emerged as the top choice for offices, representing 65% to 68% market share, according to industry estimates. As aesthetics and formats evolve, the product is gaining further acceptance in workspaces that demand style. “The styling for carpet tile continues to improve,” observed Ralph Grogan, president and CEO, Bentley Mills. He noted even long-term holdouts—such as law firms and accounting firms—are switching to carpet tile for the same reasons everyone else is: design capabilities, ease of installation and recyclability.

“Modular carpets are gaining increasing popularity because they are easier to maintain and replace,” observed Julie Zeng, a vice president with VOA Associates, the New York-based architectural design firm that is now part of Stantec. “The end user can simply take out the soiled tile and put in a new one without special procedures or replacing the whole room.”

And pairing design flexibility with the modular installation capabilities allows employers to easily rearrange office layouts for a fresh look with minimal cost.

“Carpet tiles can be arranged into patterns that delineate space in an open environment and create zones for different spatial needs,” said Betsey Friedm, workplace designer, CallisonRTKL Architects, New York.

The design flexibility inherent in the soft surface allows designers to easily define spaces with creative layouts. Architects and designers use color, pattern and textural variations to delineate lounge work stations and collaborative spaces.

“Carpet can be used to identify collaboration locations—from directing users’ paths to defining area boundaries,” noted Pat Murphy, RID, vice president at Con New York. “Oftentimes, collaboration areas are designed to be flexible and can help define imaginary ‘walls’ to help maintain some order of the furnishings.”

INNOVATIONS IMPACT USAGE

Over the years, mills have invested heavily into improving different attributes...
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Advanced color and pattern options allow designers to incorporate a client's brand story into the floor design as seen in this recent CallisonRTKL project; geometric shapes are among the most interesting new developments in carpet tile as seen with Shaw's Hexagon line inside the American Airlines Integrated Operations Center in Dallas; Interface's needle-punching felted textures create fuzzy, hard surfaces that can be used in non-traditional spaces; and carpet tile's ability to interject bold colors help incite lively, healthy workspaces for active brands like Puma.

modular carpet, from construction, backing and yarn systems to dye type and color. For instance, tiles are becoming more moisture resistant due to advances in backings and adhesives. Recent innovations such as Shaw Contract's LokDots pressure sensitive adhesive allow quicker installations in occupied spaces because there are virtually no VOCs and the product dries fast.

These and other innovations enable modular carpet to be used in high-traffic and moisture environments. Mohawk's Ecoflex NXT backing and Flexlok Tabs virtually eliminate the need to test for moisture in the subfloor. "In the absence of visible moisture, the combination can be installed in high-moisture conditions," said Mike Callman, senior vice president of product management. "This allows the end user to move into their new space faster and saves significant costs associated with head blasting and sealing the floor."

Among the coolest new developments are non-traditional aesthetics and related geometric shapes – such as hexagons – which are great for soil hiding and seam masking. And the ability to graduate from one color spectrum to another within a single carpet line has taken tiles to a new level. "This gives the ability to change palettes gradually, creating an exciting experience moving throughout a space," Corgan's Murphy pointed out. "On top of that, the ability to customize colors within a standard pattern gives a greater variety of options and begins to speak to incorporating a customer's brand all the way.

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down to the carpet fiber color.”

Advancements in tufting technology, unique yarn processing capabilities and the introduction of different sizes – such as 24 x 24, 18 x 36, 9 x 36 and 12 x 48 formats – are all creating looks never seen in modular carpet before. “Increased availability of interesting patterns, colors and shapes not only allows designers to create a custom look,” CallisonRTKL’s Friedman said, “but also offers the ability to use carpet tile to enhance a client’s brand story.”

Interface continues developing needle-punching felted textures and microtufted carpet featuring fuzzy hard surfaces. “These are finding application in non-traditional carpet spaces,” said Chip DeGrace, executive creative director. “Additionally, we have designed plank-shaped collections that are biomimetically inspired to move on the floor like nature herself. And we innovated TacTiles as a glue-free installation system that allow our modular tiles to be floated as large area rugs that maintain their integrity in high-traffic workspaces.”

In the past, a major downside of carpet tile was it did not always appear as a cohesive, singular carpet, and the disjointed look was not suitable for certain applications. However, improvements in construction, color and pattern help minimize seaming between tiles and provide an even look. “If laid correctly, seams in tiles almost disappear and you can achieve a monolithic flooring surface just like broadloom,” noted Arjav Shah, LEED AP ID+C, interior designer at Perkins+Will, New York. “End users are loving it. Installation is quick, and tiles are great for covering tricky shaped floors, especially when you’re working with curves in the design.”

**LOOKING FOR GREENER OFFICE PASTURES**

Organizations are expected to continue creating environments that provide flexibility in how and where people work and mimic life outside the office – equating to thoughtful workplace strategies. Along with innovative design options, an increasing number of corporate office clients are asking for healthier products that enhance the productivity of their employees and take environmental stewardship into account.

The mills continue to develop products made from responsible materials, ensuring viable options for reclamation, recycling and reuse. Carpet tile’s modular quality makes it innately easier to remove, stack, reclaim, store and send to recyclers than its broadloom counterparts. While innovations in cushion backing help to reduce noise, add comfort underfoot and save energy inside commercial interiors – of which reduce modular carpet’s environmental footprint.

Transparency, however, remains one of the biggest eco-conscious efforts among manufacturers. “Transparency and product ingredient disclosure are areas of focus,” Shaw’s Stephen explained, “as manufacturers and specifiers both want to ensure product ingredients are sustainable and safe for us within commercial spaces.” Tools such as Environmental Product Declaration (EPD), Health Product Declarations (HPD) Declare and the Cradle-to-Cradle Certified Product standard are the primary certifications listed for commercial project risk schedules to meet LEED’s new product transparency requirements.