

# covering **installation**

*Stair treads provide safety and a profit centre*

## Step on it

*By Christopher Cappobianco*

**With growing attention** being paid to the safety of floor surfaces, more designers and owners are looking to installed stair treads as a safer walking surface in stair wells as opposed to carpet, paint or plain wood or concrete steps.

Stair treads are mostly rubber or vinyl, but newer products like aluminum treads are another option that are great-looking and starting to grow in popularity. Although most often used in commercial applications, residential use of stair treads is growing as a more durable option to carpet. In the resilient category, rubber treads are the choice for heavy traffic areas and vinyl treads are for light duty use. What kind of use the stairs will be subjected to must be considered so the product installed has the maximum possible life span. Another important criteria for selecting treads is the shape and angle of the nose. Most wooden steps have a round nose and most concrete or metal steps are square. Many newer stairways have an angled nose designed to minimize tripping hazards.

These considerations show the importance of making a site visit to see what the steps look like. Substrate preparation is another reason to make a site visit. Even on new construction, the steps may need some prep work before the job is done and having a look may prevent you from undercharging for the time needed to do the job right. It's important that paint, spackle, old adhesive, dirt or other foreign material is cleaned off, and high spots should be carefully sanded or ground down. Low spots and other irregularities must be patched with a high quality, floor patching compound. Steps will take a pounding like no other floor covering, so it is important that stair treads be installed over a smooth, solid substrate.

**Down time** is another factor that needs to be discussed with the owner or builder. How much

time is needed after the stair treads are installed for the adhesive to set? On jobs where a quick turnaround is important, there are tape systems available that bond immediately. However, a standard adhesive installation usually costs less and allows the installer the ability to move the tread around once it is set in the adhesive. If you have the ability to shut the stairs down for 12 hours or so, this option may be preferred. Knowing which adhesive systems you'll use can help you to price the job accurately and budget the right amount of time for the job.

**Another part** of the adhesive question is the nose of the step — the very edge where feet hit as people are walking up. If this surface is damaged or wavy, this will be a point of weakness that could cause the tread to crack and might cause someone to trip. One of the unique parts of stair tread installation, compared to other floor covering products, is the use of epoxy nose filler, also called nose caulk. This material is used at the nose of the step to fill in any voids between the edge of the step and the nose of the tread. Since epoxy cures to a very hard material, the filler helps provide a solid surface so the tread will not crack. Some stair tread manufacturers say their products don't need epoxy at the nose, which is a time savings. However, it is important that the step is in good condition so there is a tight fit.

**Although** stair tread installation has a lot of detail work, it's not that difficult once you get the hang of it, and as more and more treads are being sold now for safety and aesthetic reasons, it pays installers and dealers to learn about these products so they can take advantage of this potential growth area in the floor covering industry. ●

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