



# Smooth, seamless and with amazing aesthetic appeal

One of the fastest-growing flooring categories in the world of flooring is almost indisputably seamless flooring systems. This is largely because of new innovations in technology and the clever use of tools and raw materials.

A seamless floor is a floor with no grout lines or continuity breaks, laid in one large panel sometimes hundreds of square metres in area. The benefits of a seamless floor are extensive and apart from their aesthetic appeal most seamless floors are also non-slip yet smooth, durable, hygienic and easy to clean, thus making them cost-effective and low-maintenance.

Floors that fall into the liquid-applied seamless flooring category are listed in the appendage to this article, and these are suitable across a myriad of flooring applications including industrial, commercial, retail, hospitality, and healthcare industries, together with the residential sector – with each product tailor-made for its specific purpose.

*FLOORS in Africa* will be covering many of these systems in future features throughout the year, but for the purposes of this article we will concentrate on just two distinctly separate types – seamless stone floors and polished concrete.

#### Seamless stone floors

Worldwide, vast amounts of money are spent annually on research by competing companies in this category to improve their product ranges. This competition not only provides for improved quality of the finished products but also makes them extremely cost-competitive which is ultimately great news for the end-user.

Visually, a seamless stone floor is peerless as the floor meanders effortlessly throughout the building with no breaks or joints. It provides a feeling of endlessness and simplicity that gives focus to other features in the room or building.

When used externally a seamless stone floor also gives one a feeling of spaciousness and openness that lets the eye wander to the far horizon. A floor should never attract attention to itself but should be used to complement everything around it and create the mood and ambience of the space.

However, specifiers would do well to note that there are seamless stone floors that do not always incorporate whole stones; some cheaper offerings use crushed local stones which have a similar look but are not as durable, soft, smooth and luxurious to walk on as the imported alluvial stones.

Whole quartz stones measure 8 out of 10 on the MOH hardness scale – in relation to diamond that measures 10, and this durability and strength may be an important consideration when selecting which brand to use.

Seamless floors characteristically have the benefit of being able to be applied round corners easily, so the finish can be right up to the wall or around fixed objects; the neatness and flow-ability of this is often sought after.

#### Installation

National manufacturers do market floor systems which have very



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similar offerings but, unfortunately, as good as their products may be, the desired look and workmanship lies with the flooring contractor. The best flooring contractors in the industry are generally more expensive as they bring a wealth of experience and quality workmanship to the installation.

This experience and flooring knowledge is invaluable and may actually save the client money at the end of the day and, of course, will deliver a world-class floor. Interior designers and architects alike should take time when deciding on flooring finishes and colours – as they are so essential in providing the ambiance to a project.

Where there is expansion in the slab or screed, expansion joints are cut and either polysulphide joint filler is used to fill the joints or a solid movement metal joint is installed. Construction joints do not necessarily need trims or expansion joints placed but they can be used to demarcate areas or to allow a change in colour.

Seamless stone floors are incredibly easy to clean and maintain. This is largely due to the lack of joints in the surface area that can harbour dirt and bacteria. Most seamless quartz floors are non-slip,

highly impact-resistant, as well as chemical- and abrasion-resistant. Certain floors are specifically designed for use where extremely different temperature fluctuations occur from spillages on the floor. These floor systems are designed to handle extreme changes in temperature due to fluctuations in the coefficient of expansion.

The popularity of seamless stone flooring has seen many local start-up operations entering the market without the full technical knowledge of the content of the products they are combining, and this has resulted in many customers becoming dissatisfied with yellowing, cracking, shrinking or flaking floors. Fortunately this is not typically characteristic of the sector, and the well-established market leaders still dominate.

The specialist companies in the stone flooring and resin industry can offer as much as 5-year product warranties – such is their track record, faith and commitment in their particular products. Stone flooring systems with their versatile seamless look work well in combination with wood, marble, slate, and even some tiles.

All in all, seamless stone flooring is a homeowner and a designer's dream.

### Polished concrete

Polished concrete is fast becoming the ultimate no-wax flooring material. With the considerable amount of new technology currently developed in polishing equipment and techniques, specialised contractors are now grinding concrete floor surfaces (new or old) to a high-gloss finish that never needs waxing or coating.

With the addition of advanced technology in the pigmentation and dyeing of concrete, these floors can provide the discerning architect or interior designer with an abundance of fresh ideas in the provision of smooth, high-lustre and attractively coloured floors.

Polished concrete is the processing of the concrete surface through a mechanical process that uses diamond abrasives, where each step is refined to its purest possible form on a microscopic level, from one progressively finer abrasive to the next, until the desired level of 'polish' is achieved.

The result is a beautiful, durable and efficient surface which eliminates the need for carpet, tile, sealers, or coatings that require expensive replacement and maintenance. It also dispenses with the need for using harsh cleaning chemicals.

The natural concrete floor can be customised to provide long-lasting beauty and ease of maintenance with environmental benefits. Homes, retail facilities, restaurants, offices and schools polish concrete for both functionality and aesthetics. Industrial facilities and warehouses polish concrete primarily for functionality but as a by-product they also achieve a truly aesthetic finish!

However, this is no job for the inexperienced, but specialist contractors are readily avail-



able, using heavy-duty polishing machines equipped with progressively finer grits of diamond-impregnated segments or discs to gradually grind down surfaces to the desired degree of shine and smoothness.

The process begins with the use of coarse diamond segments bonded in a metallic matrix. These segments are coarse enough to remove minor pits, blemishes, stains, or light coatings from the floor in preparation for final smoothing. Depending on the condition of the concrete, this initial rough grinding is generally a three- to four-step process.

The next steps involve fine grinding of the concrete surface using diamond abrasives embedded in a plastic or resin matrix. Even finer grits of polishing discs are used until the floor has the desired sheen or an extremely high-gloss finish.

During the final polishing step, some contractors spread a commercial polishing compound onto the surface to give the floor a bit more sheen, and this also helps to clean any residue remaining on the surface from the polishing process and leave a dirt-resistant finish.

Whilst almost any structurally sound concrete floor, whether new or old, can be polished, there are some exceptions. Existing floors typically require some surface preparation prior to polishing to remove dirt, grease, coatings, or blemishes.

However, floors that are wavy, extremely porous, or that need extensive patching may not be good candidates for polishing. An experienced contractor can usually determine the suitability of a floor.

With basic cleaning, polished concrete should keep its lustre for years. Eventually though the shine can dull, especially in high-traffic areas. Fortunately, it's easy to restore the gleam, and sometimes simply buff-

ing the floor with a commercial polishing compound will do the trick.

Stains and dyes are the most popular applications for enhancing existing polished concrete floors, although designers can play with other options such as scoring the surface to create radial lines, grids, bands and borders, and other designs.

If the decision is made to polish concrete in advance of the concrete being poured, there is a stunning array of available options. Integrally

coloured concrete can be used, or coloured aggregate can be applied to the concrete mix or 'seeded' into the top layer of the mix. The polishing process will reveal these aggregates. Glass can also be seeded into the mix, in fact almost anything small (nails, bolts, computer chips) can be added and then polished smooth.

The strength of the concrete is important, the higher the strength the better. One can decide to have the matt or glossy finish. There aren't many materials that can be as durable as concrete! There is also another product available with no expansion joints 400m<sup>2</sup> that is ideal for industrial applications and can be polished.

There is no doubt that together with the variety of designs, colours, patterns, aggregates and the sheer beauty of both seamless stone floors and polished concrete, together with the inestimable service life of these applications, architects, interior designers and end-users are really spoilt for choice. ■

*Acknowledgement and thanks are given to the following for information contained in the compilation of this article: [www.quartzcarpet.co.za](http://www.quartzcarpet.co.za); [www.concretedecor.net](http://www.concretedecor.net); [www.concretenetwork.com](http://www.concretenetwork.com)*

- Seamless floors are non-slip yet smooth, durable, hygienic and easy to clean.
- The best flooring contractors in the industry are generally more expensive, but they also provide peace of mind
- Seamless stone flooring is a homeowner and a designer's dream.
- Polished concrete provides a beautiful, durable and efficient surface.
- A stunning array of available options.



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# Seamless patterns



Floor patterns, logos and designs completed in Quartz Carpet can enhance the look of any room. However, most of us are stuck with the boring square concept of tile grids on our floors. What we do not realise is that there is a myriad of great floor patterns and designs which can jazz up your space without it having to hit your budget too much.

Patterned designer floors are always an option when it comes to the remodelling of any house, building or feature corporate reception area. Floor patterns seem to have prevailed through the ages and across different cultures. Since floors are the largest area of any room, it is natural that the design, logo or pattern on the floor invokes a sense of order, depth and vitality to the room.

“Corporate floor logos or motifs are another specialised and growing side of our business,” says Jeremy Stewart, owner of Seamless Flooring Systems. “Often when we apply Quartz Carpet to corporate, retail or hospitality industry floors we are asked to install the client’s corporate logo into the floor at their entrance. It makes such a statement as it really reinforces the brand awareness right up front and upon leaving,” says Stewart.

Interior designers look for inspiration for floor patterns in architecture, textiles and even quilt designs. However, there are certain simple rules that guide the choice of patterns on a floor.

A tightly focused pattern in lighter shades makes a room look larger. A strong large pattern can make a room appear quite small but large patterns in vivid colours can take your mind off the ‘boxiness’ of a room.

When choosing the floor colours, it is vital to consider the colours of the main area, because a dark floor creates an illusion of a higher ceiling. Elements such as the architecture of the room also determine the appropriateness of a floor pattern.

Recently Quartz Carpet installed 2 500 m<sup>2</sup> of patterned floors for the Multichoice Customer Care Centre in Johannesburg, the reception of the IDC Headquarters in Sandton, and the incredible design detail at the Government-sponsored Donkin Project in Port Elizabeth.

With Quartz Carpet there is unlimited design potential... let yourself go! ■

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