

The quick-reference guide to commercial vinyl flooring products




SPECTRA™
CONTRACT FLOORING

COMMERCIAL VINYL FLOORING AT A GLANCE

Vinyl sheet and composition tile (VCT) sales are up 3.8% and luxury vinyl tile (LVT) has increased an astounding 26.7%, according to [the latest flooring industry statistical report](#). Together, these three categories accounted for almost \$3 billion dollars in sales in one year alone — billion, not million.

VCT, LVT and sheet vinyl accounted for almost \$3 billion dollars in sales.

This growth goes both directions: Designers and facility managers are specifying vinyl more often for its commercial-grade performance and striking design options, and manufacturers are trying to catch up with demand by developing and improving their vinyl product lines.

Choosing a vinyl product

The exponential growth —and change— in the vinyl flooring category means that designers, architects and facility managers must work tirelessly to stay abreast of trends, advancements and product releases.

LVT is leading the category, with manufacturers focusing most of their R&D budgets on improving performance (think of the advent of [multilayer flooring](#) and [products with pre-applied adhesives](#)) and design (think of the astoundingly realistic imitations of premium



wood, stone and carpet tile products) in an effort to differentiate their products and grab more market share.

But amid the buzz about LVT, it's crucial to remember that VCT and sheet vinyl products are still viable, durable options for commercial facilities. And in fact, there are some applications where VCT (schools and warehouses) and sheet vinyl (operating rooms) are simply better.

This vinyl product guide will walk designers, architects and building owners through the benefits, disadvantages and applications for each vinyl product category —LVT, sheet vinyl and VCT— to help you determine which product is best-suited for your budget, performance and design needs.

Receive one-on-one product advice for your next big project

As the largest commercial flooring contractor in the United States, Spectra's team regularly meets with representatives from all of the top flooring product manufacturers to discuss design trends, product releases and installation best practices. If you'd like one-on-one advice about which specific product line is best-equipped to achieve your design vision and handle the day-to-day challenges of your facility, [reach out to us](#).

We'll help you choose a product that fits your budget and aesthetic need. And we'll walk shoulder to shoulder with you throughout the entire project, providing a quality installation that will last for years and ensuring the system is covered by the manufacturer's product warranty.

A quick comparison

LVT, VCT AND VINYL SHEET FLOORING

	LUXURY VINYL TILE (LVT)	VINYL COMPOSITION TILE (VCT)	VINYL SHEET FLOORING
Initial cost	\$\$ - \$\$\$	\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$
Lifetime cost	\$\$	\$	\$\$\$
Difficulty of installation	Low	Medium	High
Difficulty of maintenance	Low	High	Medium - High
Level of design versatility	High	Low	Medium
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus of innovation in industry. - Achieve multiple looks with one installation method. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good resistance to abrasions, sunlight and heavy traffic. - Lower upfront costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable for aseptic medical applications. - Truly seamless flooring with heat-welded joints.
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher initial investment than VCT. - More seams than sheet vinyl. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher maintenance costs. - Limited texture and design options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labor-intensive to install. - More difficult to replace than VCT or LVT.
Common applications	Corporate offices, restaurants, hotels, apartment complexes, retail.	Schools, warehouses, cafeterias, breakrooms.	Hospitals, ambulatory care facilities, doctor's offices, laboratories.
Why it's chosen	Form and function Facility requires blend of performance and design.	Economics Facility needs durable, low-cost flooring.	Performance Facility requires aseptic or seamless flooring.



Need help specifying the right product, underlayment and adhesive?

Feel free to call us or [request a consultation](#) for product advice tailored to the needs of your project.



LUXURY VINYL TILE (LVT)

Unparalleled design flexibility and performance

Although a newcomer to the vinyl flooring category, [luxury vinyl tile \(LVT\)](#) has quickly established itself as its leader. The LVT market is expected to grow faster than any other vinyl category, with a staggering [compound annual growth rate of 14.1%](#). And as LVT gains momentum and becomes the go-to product for designers, manufacturers are funneling more and more capital into R&D in an effort to differentiate their products in an increasingly saturated market. [LVT is the center of innovation in vinyl flooring](#), with a seemingly endless influx of better performing, more attractive products from every manufacturer.

Common applications

- Hospitals, ambulatory care centers, doctor's offices
- Corporate offices, conference rooms, waiting rooms
- High-end restaurant dining rooms
- Hotels, apartment complexes, multi-family buildings



What is LVT?

Three layers make up a base layer composed of vinyl to provide dimensional stability, a digital graphic film and an outer wear layer. With LVT, designers have near limitless design (stone, ceramic, wood, carpet, abstract patterns) and shape (tiles, planks, hexagons) options.



Installation

Commercial LVT is generally installed using the glue-down installation method: Where the individual tiles are adhered to your subfloor using the manufacturer-approved adhesive.



Maintenance

Regular sweeping, vacuuming, dry mopping and even wet mopping are often sufficient. While manufacturer maintenance requirements can vary from product to product, using aggressive chemicals or buffers is generally not recommended.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saves facility-wide installation time by allowing multiple looks (stone, wood, carpet, etc.) with one installation method. • Emulates premium materials in look and performance for a fraction of the price. • Despite its young age, being the industry's center of innovation has allowed LVT products to advance quickly in performance and design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher initial investment than VCT. • Due to its modular nature, LVT systems contain more seams than sheet vinyl.



VINYL COMPOSITION TILE (VCT)

Durable vinyl flooring for low-budget applications

Vinyl compositing tile (VCT) is a budget-friendly option where cost precedes concerns about design and longevity. While design innovation for VCT lags behind other resilient flooring categories, there are lines with bold colors and marbling designs which can be mixed, matched and custom-cut for more exciting looks. Because of the level of performance for the price, VCT still covers more square feet than any other resilient flooring category.

Common applications

- K-12 schools
- Corporate breakrooms
- Warehouse spaces
- Cafeterias



What is VCT?

VCT—which most commonly comes in 12" x 12" tiles—is comprised of limestone with vinyl, thermoplastic binders, color pigments and filler materials. Because of the porous nature of limestone, an outer layer of wax must be periodically stripped, re-applied and polished to protect VCT flooring from top-down moisture.



Installation

[VCT installation](#) is relatively quick: Snap your grid lines, spread the adhesive, lay the tile and refinish the surface. The primary hurdle during installation is surface prep: Because VCT is so thin, minor imperfections in the subfloor can telegraph to the tile surface. Installers will take special care to prepare the subfloor in addition to standard moisture testing and mitigation.



Maintenance

VCT is shipped from the manufacturer with a factory coat of polish to protect the tiles during shipment and installation. After installation, this will need to be chemically stripped and refinished. And because this polish serves as the protective layer for the flooring, it will need to be periodically re-stripped and re-finished as well.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally the least expensive resilient flooring option up front. • Resistant to abrasions, sunlight and heavy foot traffic. • Manufacturers often have quick ship programs for the most popular SKUs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires regular stripping, waxing and polishing, resulting in higher maintenance costs. • Typically will not last as long as LVT or vinyl sheet flooring. • Limited texture and design options compared with other vinyl flooring systems.



SHEET VINYL FLOORING

Seamless, anti-microbial flooring for the medical market

While LVT may be stealing the spotlight in recent years, sheet vinyl still has a strong foothold in the high-performance commercial flooring market. Manufacturers have developed [lines of homogeneous sheet flooring](#) (single-layered) designed specifically for aseptic applications such as operating rooms, pharmaceutical processing facilities or clean rooms. And for general use areas, there are many alluring [heterogeneous](#) (multi-layered) products worth considering.

Common applications

- Hospital operating and patient rooms
- Ambulatory care facilities
- Doctor's offices
- Laboratories



What is sheet vinyl flooring?

[Sheet vinyl flooring](#) can either be homogeneous or heterogeneous, and comes in 6' or 12' rolls. Heterogeneous flooring offers the greatest design versatility, as it contains a digital graphic film between its base and wear layers, though both varieties are well-suited to heavy-duty commercial environments.



Installation

Sheet vinyl is installed in 6' or 12' foot rolls rather than tiles. Rolls are cut to the length of the room and adhered to the subfloor using the manufacturer-approved adhesive. Seams are heat-welded using a vinyl rod and flashing is installed along the perimeter of the room — rendering the system about as waterproof and hygienic as flooring can be.



Maintenance

Heat-welded sheet vinyl systems are typically coated for enhanced scuff, dirt and stain resistance. Sweeping, vacuuming and mopping should be fine for day-to-day care. And because the welds and flashing are intended to aid in infection control —giving dirt and bacteria fewer crevices in which to live— the seams and flashing may need to be repaired periodically.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seams are heat-welded, preventing falls, moisture damage and fungal / bacterial growth. • Suitable for infection control and aseptic applications. • Good design versatility including bold colors and realistic patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More labor (heat welding, cutting) and materials (flash coving, weld rods) required to install. • Replacing damaged flooring requires ripping and re-installing the entire sheet rather than one tile. • More expensive than other vinyl flooring systems, both initially and long term.



REGARDLESS OF PRODUCT, PROPER INSTALLATION MATTERS

There's a skills gap in [commercial flooring installation](#) right now: There are more flooring projects than qualified installers. This poses a serious problem for designers and architects, who need to stand behind the quality of the projects they design.

There are more flooring projects than qualified installers.

Improper installation —failure to follow the manufacturer's installation requirements or [conduct the necessary moisture tests](#)— could void the manufacturer's warranty or cause premature failure of the flooring system.

At [Spectra Contract Flooring](#), we've addressed this problem head-on, developing a classroom and field training curriculum to sufficiently train installers coast to coast. In this way, we train and



align ourselves with only the most qualified contract installers — installers who have the passion and craftsmanship to fix things the owner would never see. And with field superintendents overseeing every project, you're guaranteed to receive the highest quality installation every time, no exceptions.

[Request a consultation today](#) for product selection guidance, or to learn more about the important role your installation team plays in the quality of your facility's flooring system.

DISCOVER MORE ABOUT COMMERCIAL VINYL FLOORING

Explore the Resilient Floor Covering Institute's (RFCI) Knowledge Center

The RFCI is an industry association championing the performance benefits and environmental impact of resilient flooring. Facility managers, designers, architects and even general contractors can turn to helpful content on the RFCI site to learn more about vinyl products — and the category as a whole.

[Learn more](#)

The vinyl flooring market landscape: Trends, innovations and predictions

As the market for vinyl expands, it's worth exploring how this evolution will impact the products themselves by taking a look at recent design and technology trends facility managers and designers need to know. From evolutionary design trends to performance innovations to the emergence of brand new products, this article covers it all.

[Learn more](#)

How the Multilayer Flooring Association (MFA) could shape the future of vinyl

Rigid LVT, or multilayer flooring (MLF) is a new subset of LVT promising further enhancement of the category. It's already penetrated the residential market, and with further research could enhance sound and moisture mitigation in the commercial market. The MFA consists of 14 flooring product manufacturers leading this charge.

[Learn more](#)

Floor Covering Weekly's (FCW) guide to LVT and sheet vinyl

FCW developed an in-depth, highly educational guide to vinyl flooring in an effort to help retailers and end users alike understand this ever-changing market. This is a must-read as new advances, technologies and products seem to be sprinting into market at a blistering pace.

[Learn more](#)



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