

# The ENGLISH HOME

*Celebrating the essence of English style*

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## FABRIC FOCUS

Our edit of the most desirable new-season designs

### Style inspiration

- Window dressings
- Art deco influences
- Natural flooring

### Labours of love

From Tudor farmhouse  
to Georgian townhouse

## KITCHEN & BATHROOM STYLE

A special guide to the latest looks and innovations



Coir, made from coconut husk, is a coarser, more fibrous flooring choice. It is hardwearing, making it suitable for high-traffic areas, or as a robust rug.

Coir herringbone natural rug with double border, from £209.63, Alternative Flooring



# Natural FOUNDATION

In a tradition that dates back centuries, plant fibres transform into natural flooring that is durable and smart

Since medieval times, plant fibres have been used for flooring, although today they are available in more refined formats. Felicity Irons, founder of Rush Matters, the producer of English bulrush rugs and fitted carpets, reveals that this material was commonly used by both the rich and poor in the fifteenth century. "In grand houses, rush would have been woven as matting, and in lesser houses there would have been strewings thrown on to the floor."

Today, natural fibres have an appeal as they are "environmentally friendly, sustainable and ideal for people who suffer with allergies from chemicals, pesticides and dyes," says Guy Gibbon, director of Sisal & Seagrass.

Although the feel underfoot might require adjusting to if you are accustomed to the gentle softness of wool carpeting, the hard-wearing fibres can be remarkably comfortable and are suitable to use in almost any room of the house.

#### HOME-GROWN HARVEST

Many plant fibres can be transformed into woven matting, either to be used as rugs or fitted wall-to-wall, as carpeting. The most popular and commonly used are coir, sisal, seagrass and jute, but other fibres can be used. Many of these materials are from exotic climes, however, there is a local option: the bulrush used by Rush Matters is harvested in summer from the Rivers Ouse and Nene.

Irons explains that the rush is dried naturally on hedges on her farm before it is wetted again, to be plaited into 50 to 60 metre-long lengths, which are sewn together by hand. "If it is to be fitted wall-to-wall, we make sections of it, working to a floor plan. Then we go on site to sew it all together. I will take a bolt of rush with me, so that I can plait extra sections to ensure it fits perfectly." The edges are bound with another plait, or with linen. As it is made to fit the room exactly, the carpet is not attached using grips or nails, "it will not move, as it fits perfectly," Irons says. She adds that it feels very soft to walk on, compared to some natural floor coverings, so much so, that some clients use it for yoga mats. "I love the smell of it too," she adds. ▶



The silky texture of sisal makes it a soft enough choice for a smart bedroom. *Olympia Silver* from the *Sisal Collection*, from £35 a square metre, *Sisal & Seagrass*



#### NATURAL DEFINITIONS

● **COIR** is made from coconut husk fibres, softened in water then shredded, dried and woven. The result is a rustic look, with limited weave patterns. It may feel rough underfoot, but is extremely hardwearing.

● **SISAL** fibres, *Agave sisalana*, are white, enabling them to be dyed. Lustrous metallic finishes can be achieved, however, it is often used in a natural palette. The versatile fibre is silky when raw and can be woven into fine or chunky styles. Softer underfoot, yet still hardwearing.

● **SEAGRASS** has a green-like colour and a rustic finish, similar to coir. It is harvested from coastal meadows, and although it is a little softer underfoot than coir, seagrass is difficult to weave, so the available patterns are limited by comparison.

● **JUTE** is a much softer plant fibre, using fibres from the giant *Corchorus* plant. It is ideal for bedrooms but not as suitable for high-traffic areas. It can be woven into fine or chunky carpets.

All above swatches, *Alternative Flooring*

● **WATER HYACINTH** (pictured) and okra are among Flock Living's *Gaia* range, made from a diverse selection of plant-fibres. These can be in a natural palette or coloured in grey, blue and rose hues. Although less common, most plant fibres can be woven into carpets.