

Inspiring Great Spaces®



CASE
STUDY

Design meets performance
for education projects

photo: Tonda McKay

Inspiring Great Spaces®



Natural Creations® with
Diamond 10® Technology
Spettro® English Grey and Caspian Sand
with Blue Lagoon and Blue Hawaiian accents

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When you think of flooring materials for education projects, fresh and modern luxury vinyl tile (LVT) that mimics textiles, textures and natural wood might not be the first thing that comes to mind. But that's exactly what embellishes the hallways, classrooms and offices of the Franklin Elementary School in Williamson County, Tennessee. Aside from minor repairs and touchups, the school had not seen significant renovations since its original construction in 1952. Thanks to a well-timed conversation about flooring and an unexpected change in plans, the building now features a design-forward and unified blend of LVT. The resulting installation created a light, airy and

distinctly upscale experience for students, teachers and administrators. The design transformation is the most visible change, but the new floor also requires significantly less maintenance, which will save the district time and money for decades to come.

A sensible first spec

At the outset of the Franklin Elementary School project, HFR Design, the project's architectural team, called for vinyl composite tile (VCT) to be used throughout the facility. Not only did it fit the budget, this longtime go-to flooring material for schools had a familiarity and comfort associated with it that made it



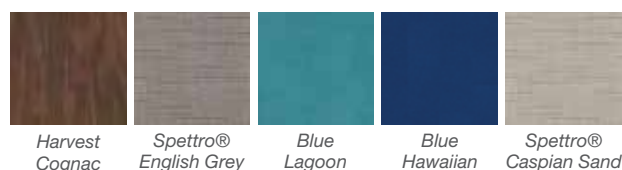
an easy choice. While VCT has the durability to withstand the heavy foot traffic of a school, it requires regular stripping and refinishing to maintain its performance.

While the team from HFR Design took that into account for their initial flooring design by creating variegated patterns that would help to conceal new replacement tiles in the future, something still didn't sit right with Franklin School District facility manager Chip Sternenberg. He discussed the project with Kelly Allem, a regional sales manager for Armstrong Flooring, who recommended Natural Creations® with Diamond 10® Technology as an alternative. Created to maximize design coordination for commercial interiors, this innovative and highly durable product could also provide the performance features the school required.

Designing for change

Armed with this new information, Sternenberg requested a scope change for the project. Design flexibility was important. But he also believed a cost-benefit analysis would reveal significant long-term savings by switching to Natural Creations with Diamond 10 Technology.

Changing the flooring spec in the middle of the bid process didn't come without complications, but the entire plan of VCT 12 in. x12 in. tiles was abandoned. What the team gained in that disruption was a wealth of new aesthetic options. No longer relegated to the standard squares of VCT, HFR Design could create using a variety of lengths and widths of the Armstrong Flooring Natural Creations product, and they had a whole new spectrum of colorways at their command.



They created an engaging palette from two Natural Creations with Diamond 10 Technology collections that included Harvest Ridge Cognac from the ArborArt® collection and Spettro® English Grey with Hawaiian Blue and Blue Lagoon accents; Mixer Blue Lagoon; Mixer Blue Hawaiian; and Spettro Caspian Sand from the Mystix® collection. The rich palette allowed the team to incorporate wayfinding protocols into their design, including highlighting each classroom entry with a consistent visual. Also,

by strategic orientation of the LVT planks, the design team softened the appearance of the school's long stretches of hallways, making them look wider and more inviting.

A startling realization

Even though the material costs of installing Natural Creations with Diamond 10 Technology were greater, the return on investment Sternenberg calculated was significant and made an impression on the board.

“Using actual cost differences between standard VCT and Natural Creations with Diamond 10 Technology on our 65,000-square foot project, the upfront price difference amounted to nearly \$90,000,” admitted Sternenberg. “However, by retrofitting the space, we will see return on investment in as little as three and a half years.” Sternenberg also presented additional value-added advantages that came with switching the spec, including eliminating potential workers’ comp claims associated with the stripping/waxing process and the dramatic reduction in maintenance costs and cleaning product usage thanks to the dirt and stain resistance of Diamond 10 Technology.

Putting the idea to the test

The numbers made sense. But unlike VCT, with its long tenure in educational spaces, this high-performance LVT product was somewhat of an unknown quantity. So the team decided



Natural Creations® with
Diamond 10® Technology
Harvest Cognac

to install a small area of test floor before completely committing to the project-wide change.

“We installed Natural Creations in a classroom and gave it a serious torture test.” recalls Walt Gordon, co-owner of BECA Commercial Flooring Group, who handled site prep and installation for the project. Over the course of three weeks, students, teachers and staff gave the floor their own version of heavy traffic – and the results spoke for themselves.

Beyond durability, though, the design team and school officials wanted to test other aspects of the flooring material: How would it look and feel underfoot? How would it sound? By the end of the trial period, Natural Creations with Diamond 10 Technology had passed every test.

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For installers, a non-issue

Fortunately, the change in flooring spec didn't disrupt the installation process. "There was really no change to the logistics on our end," says Gordon. "The LVT with Diamond 10 calls for a different adhesive system, but it's no harder than installing VCT." In fact, Gordon was pleased to learn of the change. "I was thrilled," he says, "because LVT is a great product, and it's so much more affordable to own.... If you look at the total cost of ownership, you're making that [initial] investment back within 3-5 years. And every year after that, you keep saving on all those maintenance costs and hassles."

"It looks fantastic, The teachers keep coming by to see the updated wing, and they love the floors."

***—Walt Gordon, co-owner of
BECA Commercial Flooring Group***

Worth the effort, and the investment

The first phase of the renovation wrapped up in early 2018, and the early reviews are outstanding. "It looks fantastic," Gordon says. "The teachers keep coming by to see the updated wing, and they love the floors."

A similarly positive take on the project comes from a member of the HFR Design team. "The new space feels so much better. The roof doesn't leak anymore. The new windows let in natural light. And I think the flooring is one of the biggest improvements. The kids notice it. It's a place they can be proud of, and that inspires more engagement with their education. It's a good feeling."

To learn more about Natural Creations with Diamond 10 Technology and how it can help transform your next project, visit www.armstrongflooring.com/commercial/en-us/products/diamond-10.html.