



# THE THREAD

Unraveling the Mysteries of Fibers, Fabrics and Floor Coverings

## FABRIC CHALLENGES... Our Picks For "Most Difficult" To Maintain

It could be argued that there are no "bad" fabrics or floor coverings, only less than practical choices. Starting with this premise, there are several types of fabrics used for interior furnishings that are best suited to minimal-use areas such as formal living rooms and guest bedrooms. The fabrics discussed in this article should be specified only in such low-use areas.

### Rayon

Rayon goes by several different names...viscose, Bemberg, Art Silk etc. No matter the label, rayon fabrics have many inherent problems.

Rayon is 50% weaker when wet, shrinks and rings readily. This greatly limits the spotting and cleaning techniques which can be used. Shrinkage from wet cleaning can be significant on flat-woven rayon fabrics. Because of the extreme nature of the shrinkage (most noticeable in draperies or the skirts of chairs and sofas), this problem should be considered before installing rayon in a high-use area.

Rayon must be cleaned with more delicate methods to

prevent fiber damage. This can result in inferior cleaning results, especially on moderately to heavily soiled fabrics.

When rayon is woven into a pile fabric (chenilles and velvets) the problems are compounded. When any water-based substance comes in contact with a rayon pile, the nap flattens, creating a shiny spot that can appear to be a "bleached" spot. Attempts to raise the nap can be difficult if not impossible.

***"... there are no bad fabrics or floor coverings, only less than practical choices."***

Rayon sometimes finds its way into pile rugs and carpets, usually when blended with other fibers. These floor coverings tend to respond in the same way as rayon pile fabrics (nap flattened by moisture and "shiny" spots) so the same caveats apply.

### Sisal

Sisal is a very popular floor covering but is unsuitable for high traffic areas. Unlike most carpet and rug fibers, sisal does **not have** the ability to hide soil. Making matters worse is the fact that these floor coverings are woven in a flat pattern, leaving the sides of the fibers exposed. Soils and spills easily impregnate the fibers, resulting in unsightly traffic lanes.

Sisal carpets and rugs are difficult to clean because they are prone to cellulosic browning and can shrink when water-based cleaning methods are used. Dry cleaning methods are most often recommended but often are ineffective in removing water-based spills.

### Linen

Linen is actually a very durable fiber unless it is used to create a pile fabric or floor covering. As part of a pile construction, linen can become a maintenance nightmare.

In a velvet construction, linen makes an especially elegant and lustrous fabric. One problem specific to velvets in

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general is the tendency to develop shading, based on the crushing of the fibers. Because they are so lustrous, linen velvets are particularly susceptible to this type of shading. Regular brushing with a velvet brush can help minimize this problem.

Even more difficult to care for are linen floor coverings. Linen can be found in both broadloom and rugs, most often as a loop pile. Resiliency is poor and these rugs will tend to show crushing in traffic patterns.

Cleaning linen floor coverings is complicated by the fact that water-based cleaning can cause cellulosic browning and can sometimes stiffen linen yarns, causing texture changes. Therefore, dry cleaning is the suggested method of cleaning for these floor coverings. However, as stated earlier, water-based stains generally do not respond well to dry cleaning methods.

### **Silk**

Like linen, silk is generally a durable fiber but its positives are lost when it is used in a pile construction.

Silk has poor resiliency and tends to crush easily. Like rayon, water-based substances also distort silk pile fabrics. When the nap is flattened, it can be difficult to raise it.

### **Be Careful Of Imposters**

Oriental rugs sold as “silk” are often made of rayon. Even though rayon orientals feel soft and are lustrous, it is almost impossible to keep them looking good unless they are hung on a wall.

True silk orientals are difficult to maintain but real silk fiber responds much better to traditional cleaning methods than does its counterpart made of rayon. Both silk and rayon orientals are considered “dry clean only” because water-based cleaners can

cause significant pile distortion.

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