Light and easy
Abby Mandel sings the praises of pasta

Tiny treasures
The Art Institute’s Thorne Rooms are back

Self-contained
Gardening without a garden

Uncommon cuts
Tile takes shape as art, and you can stand on its merits

By Victoria Lautman
Tribune photos by Bob Fila

Genuine innovations are aloof, or underfoot, because of some enterprising Chicagoans who are taking their cutting edge to vinyl and rubber tile.

Those lowly, durable materials chiefly associated with school corridors, bowling alleys, fast-food emporiums and other unpretentious milieus are edging into the design world as stylish and creative alternatives to industrial carpeting and expensive hardwood. Cheap, easy to maintain and surprisingly versatile in the right hands, the tile can turn an ordinary room into a unique environment.

We’re all familiar with the vinyl-tiled “checkerboards” or highly textured linoleum favored by architects and developers in the last decade, but this is something new on the creative horizon: inlaid designs, hand-carved from 12-inch-square, flexible tiles that harken to fine craftsmanship rather than mass production. Because each floor is individually designed, it can be styled to anyone’s taste, furniture and accessories.

“Having something creative show up in every single surface of one’s home is a growing interest, and I think the direction is clear: People want art in their lives in an everyday way, not just as framed objects hanging on their walls,” said Robert L. Gross, senior vice president of Knapp Communications, which publishes a variety of home magazines and conducts many surveys on design-related subjects.
Glass works

Bottle collecting: A growing obsession

In balance

Work vs. home and other trade-offs

---

Zuleika Bannister with her in-laid floor at the Luna Park Cafe: "It took me about 40 hours to cut out the pieces... the total cost for materials was about $300."

---

Artist Eric Capotis: "To me, the real issue is how to use these common materials and not have the project come out looking like a carpet exchange."

---

Architect Peter Landon with his wife, Linda Patterson: "My wife and I wanted a real hands-on, Arts-and-Crafts approach to the details of the house," he said, standing in the custom-designed kitchen with its ceramic mosaic highlights. The floor, in shades of green, yellow, orange, blue, gray and black, took "one intense day to install, and my knees were much by midnight. But an inlaid rubber floor is a really great money-saving, creative opportunity, particularly for younger clients who like the look of a ceramic tile floor, which is much more expensive. I can buy rubber factory "seconds" for 50 to 60 cents apiece [compared to twice that for "firsts"], which is a lot cheaper than other floor coverings. And when it gets dirty, it doesn't look so bad you have to clean it every 15 minutes."

For Parisian-trained artist Eric Capotis, using rubber and vinyl for a commissioned floor last year was a challenge because "to me, the real issue is how to use these common materials and not have the project..."