



Materials used in interior design



By Michael Jumba

As stated in one of our earlier articles, interior design is an industry that relies on the expertise of other trades among other professions. For instance, there are areas that a carpenter will work on, others a mason while others a painter or tile fitter. All these trades require their unique materials. It is therefore important to an interior designer to know the different categories of materials used in interior design.

Materials are the basic components interior designers use to create and recreate interior spaces. To do this, they give materials shape, form, variety and distinction using various tools. While some materials are an integral part of a building's structural shell such as stone and mortar, others are used as a surface treatment such



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as paints and varnishes. Further, other materials such as wood are used on components such as furniture or cabinetry and shelves.

In the interior design industry, materials change from time to time. This is a consequence of technological advancements. Thus, every other year, new materials emerge with new methods of using them. These new materials have given rise to new interior design ideas. It, therefore, goes without mentioning that failure by an interior designer to keep track of changes in materials globally will mean that they will be lagging behind in interior design advancements.

Initially, and more so before the 19th Century, building and interior design materials were sourced from the immediate environment. For example, if a region abundance of building stones compared to trees, most buildings would be constructed of stones. However, in other instances, interior design materials had to be imported from far away places. A good example here are the materials that were used to construct churches or a palace.

With better manufacturing processes and opportunities for materials in the 21st Century, new better materials have been developed. For example, the new building technology that seems to have hit the Kenyan market aside from brick and mortar is the EPS technology.

With the increased speed at which new materials in the interior design industry are emerging, new standards of constructions doing interior design have also emerged. This is especially relevant in the environment field where sustainable construction and interior design materials and methods are being advocated. The selection and use of "environmentally friendly" interior design materials help in reducing the environmental impact resulting from extraction, processing, fabrication, transportation and installation of these materials. Furthermore, the use of these materials also promotes conservation of non-renewable environmental resources and encourage reuse and recycling practices.

There are three main categories of materials in interior design. They are natural materials, converted materials and artificial materials. Natural materials are those



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materials that are found in nature either in organic or inorganic form. Organic materials are derived from plants and animals while inorganic materials are mostly non-living such as clay, natural stone or sand in their natural states.

Converted materials are those that were processed or manufactured into various forms. For example, ceramic tiles or manufactured boards such as gypsum boards or plywood. In their new processed or manufactured states, these materials possess new characteristics and offer possibilities that were non-existent in their natural states such more strength, durability and better resistance to weather elements.

Artificial materials are created by man-made processes that produce substances. A good example here is Expanded Polystyrene Sintered (EPS) which are made by combining various chemicals. EPS as a material cannot be found naturally as a distinct product in nature but is derived from a combination of natural elements.