a try. I carefully read and followed the installation directions, in no small part because the flooring-store owner warned me that polyurethane grout works and tools differently than either standard latex-modified cement or epoxy grout. For me, the polyurethane grout was much easier to install than epoxy grout and seems to be just as durable and stain resistant.

I went to three local flooring retailers looking for information when I decided to write this article, and not one of them could tell me of a single tile job that used polyurethane grout. Two stated that they can't even get local installers to use the better-known epoxy grout, much less polyurethane. One retailer told me, "It's just too much harder to install than latex-modified cement grouts, and too expensive. The only time our installers use it—and not without a lot of groaning—is when it's called for on commercial jobs."

Almost nine years later, there are some stains on the polyurethane grout in our shower, but it is quite different from the epoxy grout discoloration to the right of our kitchen sink. I think I might know why after reading a tech sheet I found on tile in commercial kitchens from Mapei. Oleic acid in fats left in sustained contact with the grout is especially challenging, and something we were not aware of when we chose the product.

Though both epoxy and polyurethane grouts are far more durable than more commonly used alternatives, neither has proven to be completely stainproof. Wondering how they would clean up, I did some experimenting. I treated both the kitchen sink epoxy grout discoloration and black spots on the polyurethane grout with two different cleaners—Soft Scrub, as recommended by Bostik, and my own idea—OxiClean Max Force stain remover. I know that this cleaner is targeted for fabrics, but it has worked well for us to remove stains without damaging the substrate on more than just clothes. In each case, I applied the Soft Scrub and OxiClean generously to three different places (as shown in the photos on the facing page), leaving the cleaners to sit for 15 minutes before scrubbing each with a toothbrush, wiping them clear, cleaning and rinsing them with water, and then drying them with a hair dryer.

The epoxy grout staining around the sink showed only minor improvement after each cleaner was used. The discoloration was not much better after being treated with OxiClean; after scrubbing a portion of the counter with Soft Scrub, the results were more acceptable, particularly as the grout has been in place more than 17 years. It could be that more elbow grease is as important, if not more so, than the type of cleaner used. After using Soft Scrub on the entire kitchen-sink counter, and letting it throughly dry, the discoloration is less noticeable, but not gone entirely.

In the shower, the Soft Scrub pretty much eliminated the black spots on the polyurethane grout, doing a much better job than the OxiClean. And in general, after nearly nine years, our polyurethane grout is in really good shape. If I had to do any of this over again, I would use polyurethane grout without hesitation. I found it far easier to work with—plus, it appears to be holding up better than the epoxy grout, and it cleans easier.

If you follow my Wingnut Testing adventures on Green Building Advisor, you know that I am very curious, and that I believe all of us in the building industry need to be doing more personal product testing. It's hard to be scientifically accurate when testing at home, but we should try the best we can to understand how materials and assemblies perform through observation, monitoring, and tests. Without such testing, I never would have learned that a little-known product would be my go-to for durability and cleanability in high-stress areas. □

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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

The two big differences between epoxy and urethane grout are working time and cost. Otherwise, manufacturers claim similar benefits.

EPOXY GROUT

is flexible and durable, and manufacturers say it is nearly stainproof. Instead of water, a liquid component (or two) is mixed with the dry ingredients before application. Epoxy costs more than cement grout, but its big downside is workability. It has a pot life of 45 to 70 minutes at 70°F, and any haze must be removed soon after. Warm temperatures shorten the working time further (30 minutes at 90°F). Modern epoxy formulas are said to be easier to work with than early versions.

Laticrete SpectraLock Pro
PRICE $120 for 9 lb.

URETHANE GROUT

claims durability, stain resistance, and flexibility on par with epoxy. It is also easier to work with because the water-based formula comes premixed and has a three-hour working time in temperatures ranging from 40°F to 100°F. You can even seal up a partially used bucket and use it later. Application is similar to cement-based and epoxy grouts—the wet grout is packed into the joints with a float and then scraped away. Haze should be wiped after about 90 min.

Bostik TruColor RapidCure
PRICE $85 for 9 lb.