

TILE TIPS

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COMMON BUYING MISTAKES

Select the correct tile for the job!

Don't go by looks alone! You need to select a tile that will holdup for the use that you will be subjecting the tile. You can pretty much use any tile that you want for walls. Countertops require tile with greater strength and stronger glazes to withstand food stains and acids. Floors require more strength and stronger glazes to withstand grit on the bottom of shoes women in high heel shoes (a 125# woman in high heels exerts 500#/square inch pressure on a floor, much more than a refrigerator!). Interior bathroom floors can use smaller wall tiles as your carpets will clean your shoes of outside grit before they get to the tile. However smaller tile will make small rooms look small and result in much more grout to maintain.

We find that larger floor tiles (16x16 up to 20x20) are well suited for not only floors but countertops, shower walls and ceilings! The larger sizes allow you to obtain drastically more tile at greater strength with dramatically lesser number of grout lines. Less grout lines means a less busy pattern which will make the floor, countertop and/or wall look bigger and also will give you less grout to maintain!

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR BUDGET

Buy from a retailer that you trust! Tile is a "blind" item - just like diamonds, you can't tell quality by looking at it! Work with a retailer who knows tile, shows it well in his store, has many samples to select from and represents different brands so you can mix and match and therefore get more value for your money. You must take samples

home or to the job site. The retail store is not the place to make your selection. You need to have a number of different sizes, colors and textures to select from in order to make a good decision. Just as you wouldn't want your eyes to be tested with only one lens, you need to see a variety of tiles in the setting where they will be installed to determine your best choice. Often the first choice in our shop is the third choice when you get it home! We recommend two trips. In the first visit 5-6 tiles should be checked out that are truly different from each other so that a valid "better-worse" situation is created at the job site. On the second trip another 4-5 samples should be selected based on the tiles that looked the best in the first visit. Much like eating an elephant, a slow methodical approach is best !

Watch out for "do-it-yourself" stores where their only goal is to sell as much tile as quickly as possible or where the only person to help you is the plumbing department guy who was the paint guy yesterday! Cheap price can mean cheap quality. There truly is "no free lunch"! A poorly designed layout with the wrong quality and size of tile can quickly result in paying too much and getting less than you would if you were dealing with a retailer who knows tile and its application. You want to deal with someone who is interested in your continued use of tile for this and many future projects. Someone who is interested in your experience and how it reflects on his relationship with you and your friends and neighbors for many years to come.

INSTALLATION

Tile doesn't just get slapped down- it needs to be installed. Floors, walls and countertops need to be prepared before the tile can be installed. It is exacting work and if you are going to do it yourself you should start with a small project first to see how you like it and how it turns out in not only your but the "boss's" eyes.

If you are going to do-it-yourself, make sure that you are dealing with an establishment that can and will provide assistance to the do-it-yourselfer. Setting tile is not brain surgery but particularly for the first timer it sure helps to know someone who has done it before

and is willing to give free advice and counsel. We offer all of our customers computer generated drawings to assist in selection and layout of the tile.

If you are going to use a professional installer, ask to see pictures of his work and if you feel a need, ask to visit a few jobsite to see how his work looks to you and how happy the homeowner is with the final job. Find out if the installer is insured and if he is affiliated with a company or works out of the back of his truck and might be in Florida or California next winter when you have a problem! Working through a contractor as opposed to direct to the installer means that, as insurance, you will have someone on your side to protect the long term reputation of a business in resolving disputes. You should also then be dealing with a company who is a member of the Better Business Bureau and organizations like NARI who have ways to resolve difficulties if they arise. If you deal direct you will be in conflict with the very person who will have to come back into your house and readdress the problem!

CARING FOR TILE

Tile is easy to clean, but how often do you clean?! If you are prepared to damp mop daily, then a high shine solid color will work for you. If you are not prepared for daily maintenance or you are troubled by floors that look dirty and demand attention you might not want solid colored floors. I recommend that clients who want a white floor put an old white sheet on the floor for a few days and see what the sheet does for the room and its maintenance requirements!

A floor and indeed, countertop and shower walls, will require much less maintenance if the tile used is large, has a rustic mottled look and has some color ranging in it so that it doesn't provide a background for dirt and smudges to show and require attention.

TILE TERMS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Monocotura:

All this means is that the tile is fired only once in the kiln and that the glaze is applied in this single firing. It results in a thinner, denser, stronger tile. Older style "bicotura" tiles had little buttons on the bottom of them and generally were thicker but less dense and subject to chipping and cracking as they were not as strong. You still see "button backs" in imported wall tiles but do not use them for flooring.

Edging:

Bullnose: A specially manufactured and fired tile trim piece to finish off edges of an installation. If they are the same size as the field tile they are called bullnose: if they have a finished edge but are of a rectangular size (2"x6" etc.) they are usually called "**caps**". **Metal or vinyl** are now also used in various shapes to finish off tile, particularly when large floor tile are used for countertops and shower walls. Often the metal and vinyl will be less expensive than the ceramic edges and have the added value of masking whether the material that is edged is ceramic, marble or stone. With a nice brass edge you can make a relatively inexpensive rustic tile look like a very expensive stone installation, similarly shiny marbled tile will look like marble with metal rather than ceramic edges.

Deco:

Used to describe a decorative tile that is of the same size as the surrounding "field" tile. Sometimes these are referred to as "**inserts**"

Listelli:

Sometimes called "**Linners**", are elongated pieces of ceramic or metal that have decoration or are of a contrasting color to the field tile and are inserted for decorative purposes.

Square Feet:

Tile is sold on the basis of square feet and not by tile. (Deco tile and Listelli are however usually sold by the piece). Any retailer that quotes you tile prices in terms other than square feet is not helping you make a rational buying decision. You are not buying pieces of tile but covering area and unless you are given the square foot price it is very difficult to evaluate prices between different sized tiles. Be very cautious of per tile quotes as they often cost more per square foot than a traditional tile store would charge. A typical 4x4 bathroom tile costs about \$2.00/square foot. There are roughly 9 pieces per square foot. A retailer offering these tiles at "Only 25 cents each" is in fact charging you \$2.25/square foot for the tile!

Grout and grout joints:

Traditional Grout is Portland cement, colorant and sometimes silica sand. Sanded grout is required when the grout line is greater than 1/8th of an inch in width. Unsanded grout is used with narrow grout joints and with marble and granite so the sand will not scratch the polished stone. Grout is required to be placed between tile, marble or granite tiles so that the normal expansion and contraction that occurs will not have the edges literally chip themselves apart. We recommend that the grout be mixed with a latex additive to make it more dense, that it be sealed after installation to fill in the pores and assist in maintenance. More important we encourage the use of larger tiles which will minimize the use of grout and the use of mottled colored tiles so that the grout will not be as noticeable as it ages.

Caliber:

Tile is a baked product and is virtually impossible to manufacture so that it will be precisely uniform in size. The more expensive the tile the more that the factory calibrates the batches of tile in to various groupings of like sizes. An inexpensive 12x12 tile might have ranging from 11 7/8 to 12 1/8 in size within a box. A more expensive tile might be separated and packaged into boxes that have ranges of only 1/16 of an inch or so between tiles. Again, as is often the case, you get what you pay for! Obviously tile with a large range of size will be

much more difficult and expensive to install and will require a much larger grout line to accommodate the variances. Often quality contractors will not install tile that they have not sold themselves to avoid dealing with lesser quality tile with and the resultant difficulty in installation.

Shade:

Just as the baked tile has ranges in size it will also have ranges in color. The less expensive tiles will have more ranging in color shading within a package than a more expensive tile which will be graded into more shades and packaged and sold accordingly. You will then have more uniformity (if the tile is meant to have uniformity) in more expensive tiles than less expensive one.

Rustic:

Tiles are now manufactured to have textured, patterned and sculptured surfaces to mimic stone, slate, granite and marble. Often such tiles will be packed and sold with a very wide range of colors within the box so the floor will have the look of natural stone or slate which has similar variation.

A well designed, properly sized ceramic tile installation will often be the least expensive approach in the long term. With a bit of knowledge and some care your experience with ceramic tile can be one which gives genuine value, and pleasure!

Carlo Americo Odella, has owned Europamerican Tile and Marble for over 11 years and has published articles on ceramic tile and grout in national trade magazines. Prior to ownership of Europamerican, Mr. Odella was a Certified Public Accountant with Price Waterhouse & Co. and a Fortune 500 Vice President in Finance, Manufacturing, and Marketing. Europamerican Tile & Marble is located at 96 East Franklin Street in Centerville, about 5 miles directly east of the Dayton Mall. Hours are Monday 10-7, T-Th 10-6 and Sat 11-4. Telephone is 937 339 1485/ Fax 439 6671/ Email: tile@dnaco / Website: www.europamericantile.com