

WATCH OUT FOR THE TILE!

**Carlo Amerigo Odella, President
Europamerican Tile & Marble**

Actually tile isn't what you should be watching out for! ***Tile is almost always a good and positive thing to have in a home!*** However, you do need to be aware of how it was installed and what it was installed upon, to determine if the tile is a blessing or potential costly curse!

Grout, and not tile, **is the usual potential source of**, or at least indicator **of difficulties**. Standing water will penetrate Portland cement at about ¼ an hour! Since grout is made up of mainly Portland cement it is not waterproof (even if sealed)! As a result all grout will allow water to pass through it in wet areas! Shower walls and seats, particularly opposite of the shower head, are potential costly trouble spots. When water penetrates the grout it should hit cementitious backerboard or water proofing membrane, in which case no damage or trouble will occur. If it hits plaster or drywall, problems leading eventually to replacement of both the wall and tiles will occur! If the problem is ignored, difficulties with water seeping to a lower level of the house or termite problems are the inevitable result!

Grout is not flexible and will crack if the tile moves. ***When grout cracks however, it is a sign that the tile may not have been properly glued to the underlayment or old floor.*** If the grout is cracking or crumbling and you hear a hollow sound or crackling under your tile, that means serious trouble and most of the time calls for full replacement! If mastic rather than thinset glue was used, if Luan or other inappropriate underlayment was used, the tile and glue will separate and the floor tiles will stay in place only due to the pressure between the tile, grout and walls. Often even if only one tile or even a grout line, is removed, the **whole tile installation can pop up off the floor** when the pressure is released!

Dirty grout or widely varying grout color is ***not necessarily an indicator of poor housekeeping*** by the former owner! In the past, fairly small tiles (8x8) were used on floors. These often were solid color tiles and it was a practice to have fairly wide grout joints and more importantly not to seal the grout after it was installed! When a mop was wiped across the ceramic tile it absorbed the water and dirt and then when it rubbed across the rough grout surface the mop released the dirty water into the pores of the unsealed grout joint, much like pouring dirty water on a piece of cake! The grout would then absorb the dirty water and become dirty and discolored from top to bottom! The old dirty grout needs to be replaced or at least steam cleaned and then sealed to restore its proper color.

On occasion, you will note that ***tile has cracked along the outer perimeter*** of a room or that a crack will run across two or three consecutive tile. ***Tile is not smart enough to crack in unison!*** An exterior cause has forced the

tiles to crack. Often cracks on the outer perimeter are an indication of a slippage between the poured slab floor and the outer foundation walls. This “slippage” can often be caused by drought or a long wet rainy period or a prolonged period of extreme cold. The foundation is forced upward by ice or water or falls due to drought. Any tile that is glued to both the slab and the foundation wall is then sheared off as the floors and the foundation move in opposite directions. ***There is no easy and clearly not an inexpensive fix for this problem*** unless a sufficient quantity of the original tile was kept in reserve for use for repairs! Use of alternative or replace tiles that are not of the original shade and caliber (size) will cause the problem to be amplified as the replacement tiles will “stick out like a sore thumb”!

When examining a tiled shower or tub surround take note of what has been used to fill the space between the tiles whenever the direction of the surface changes. As an example, the ***interior corner of a shower must be caulked!*** If gout is used, it will inevitably crack as the two walls move differently due to different impacts of temperature and humidity. Similarly the area between a tub deck and the backsplash or face must be caulked or that joint will inevitably will fail. The failure might allow moisture to get behind the walls or beneath the tub surface to cause damage that can go undetected for long periods of time and cause extensive and costly repairs.

Lack of caulk is also often an indicator of an ***installation by an amateur*** as opposed to a professional. If an amateur is indicated, you then need to question whether cementitious backerboard was used so as to avoid a costly repair from wall failures due to moisture. Other indicators that cementitious underlayment was not used are: (1) ***The grout and /or caulk is black*** (Moisture is getting through to behind the tile and is residing in warmth, darkness and bacteria. Mold is then developed on the inside and going through the grout or caulk from behind the walls.) (2) ***Leaking around shower or tub surround doors.*** If they have not been properly caulked and affixed to the walls with rust resistant fasteners, leaking will often result because they are attached to drywall or other water fail prone materials.(3) ***Fixtures and or tile fall off the wall.*** Once drywall or plaster becomes wet, it starts to fail and portions of the wall will fall bringing the fixtures or tiles down as well. All of these indicators generally lead to full replacement of the wall and tiles.

If you have any of these potential difficulties, call me at Europamerican Tile and Marble 937 439 1485, Email: europamtile@aol.com or visit our website at www.europamericantile.com for prompt professional advice and counsel. We have addressed all of the above problems and have been able to fix the consequences of all of them over the past 20 years of our existence as a dealer/contractor specializing in tile.