



# Tantalizing Tiles

Remarkably versatile, tiles are becoming a favorite medium to transform ordinary rooms and furniture into something unique.

Aesthetically pleasing and many times intrinsically valuable, tiles add beauty to structures while, many times, offering glimpses into history. From beautiful mid-18th century Dutch tile depicting Christ and the Wise Virgins to New York City subway signs that are intricately bordered with tulips representing the city's Dutch origins, tiles have spanned many civilizations and generations making these historical stories as varied as the tiles themselves.

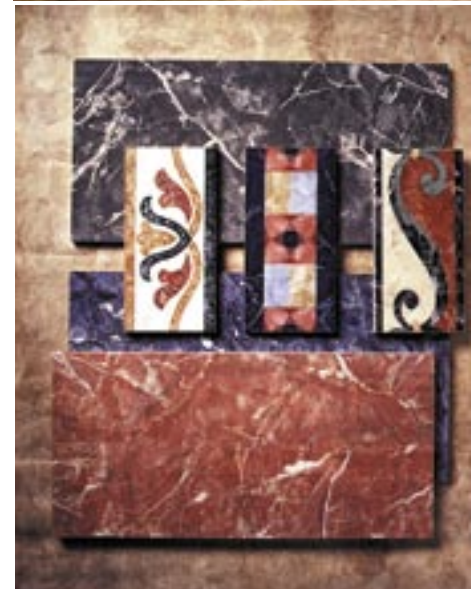
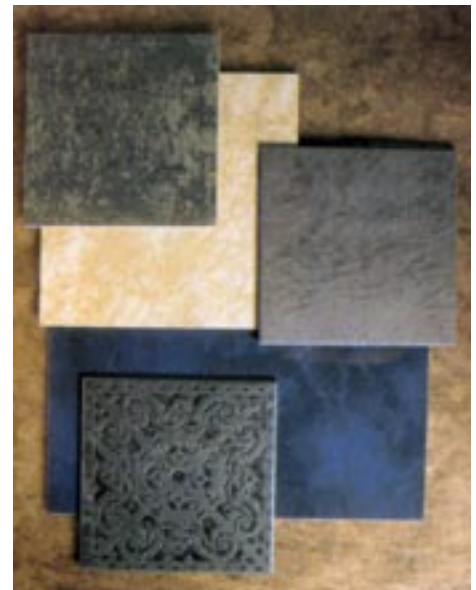
Whether raised delicately or immaculately glazed; colorfully ornate or geometrically simple, tiles are currently sought after for their shape, color, texture, and pattern by designers, architects, and homeowners. These decorative handmade and machine-made "artifacts" can make rooms in a home seem bigger, unify opposing elements in a room or add accent on fireplaces, floors, stairways, and swimming pools.

However, despite the abundant number of ways and places tiles are used, kitchens and bathrooms are the most popular, according to Michael Golden from the tile design firm Michael R. Golden Inc. If only finding a bathroom lined with a simple band of white tiles, it would be difficult to discover a house that does not use them in either one of these rooms. It is most likely no coincidence then that the kitchen and bathroom are two of the most-used rooms in the home where a pleasing visual element would be the most beneficial.

There is no correct way to decorate a kitchen with tiles. However, according to Golden, there are certain rules that should be adhered to in order to have a more cohesive design. Golden suggests not mimicking the floor design on the backsplash which has an active visual space of 6-12 inches above the countertop. "There should be some tie-in but not the exact design or it results in overkill," says Golden. One suggestion is to pinpoint one color from the floor tile and feature this color more predominantly on the backsplash.

Golden also points out that special attention needs to be paid to the available floor space in the kitchen because it is usually asymmetrical. "This does not lend itself well to borders or intricate grid patterns," says Golden. The best solution for this is to identify a few key areas such as in front of the backdoor or the range and place a decorative tile insert in those spaces.

Other possible tile design ideas for



■ *Opposite Page* Stonelook floor manufactured by Tile of Spain. *Above Top* Porcelain tile manufactured by Tile of Spain. *Above Center* Large format marble look manufactured by Tile of Spain. *Right* Terra cotta tile manufactured by Tile of Spain.



## Don't let the creativity end with just bathrooms and kitchens.



the kitchen include covering one entire wall with tiles, breaking the tile design only to accommodate windows, stoves, or sinks; tiling the inside of cabinets so that the tile shows through glass doors; or creating a tile design on kitchen countertops.

A similar but not undefeatable problem is encountered when using tiles in both a kitchen and bathroom: both have fixtures that need to be worked around. When tiling a kitchen backsplash it is best to decide where the electrical sockets will be placed beforehand. This same principle holds true for bathroom fixtures. "The largest tiling disasters I've seen happen are when homeowners do not make these decisions beforehand with an electrician or a plumber or at least simultaneously," says Golden, "You absolutely cannot wait until after the tiles go up to make these decisions or you risk ruining the design."

Decorating bathrooms with tiles is an effective way to make small, overlooked rooms seem larger and more grandeur, according to Jill Herbers, author of *Tile*. Bathroom tiles can be placed across a floor, up walls, onto the ceiling of a bathroom, continuing along the counters, splashing across the shower, and surrounding a bathtub. This is only for starters; tiles can even fill the bathtub, line cabinets and shelves, or frame the windows, mirrors, and doors.

Don't let the creativity end with just



bathrooms and kitchens. Fireplaces, entryways, sun porches, wet bars, swimming pools, and even living rooms and family rooms offer even more unique ways to use tiles. Whether as a wainscot, fireplace surround, or accents like baseboards, stair risers and window borders, tiles can add just the right touch.

After choosing what room to decorate with tiles and to what degree, a quick lesson in deciding what type of tile to purchase is necessary because the right tile can make a room seem more spacious, disguise awkward angles or forms, unify different parts of a room, or create a decorative focal point. The color, size, shape, texture, and pattern of a tile all make the difference in whether the tile enhances a room, or has the opposite effect, of detracting from the room.

Color is the most powerful of the

design elements because the color of a tile can evoke strong emotional and psychological responses based on culture and personal taste. These responses should be considered along with the basic visual effect of a color or combination of colors. Tiles are made in practically every color—reds, yellows, blues, greens, and variations of these primary colors—to meet any decorating requirement. Glazed tiles offer the most diverse color palette of all types of ceramic tile, according to *The Lifestyle Is Tile*, produced by Tilenet.

Some manufacturers provide tile that is color coordinated with other tiles, and other manufacturers provide tile colors that match other materials such as wallpaper and plumbing fixtures. Custom colors can also be made by many manufacturers depending on the square footage that must be made per production run, and the quantity needed.

Manipulation of size and shape can also alter the style and mood of a space. For example, using large 12" x 12" tiles has an overpowering, dramatic effect while using small 1" x 1" tiles produces a more quaint, inviting atmosphere. Tiles are available in many geometric shapes including squares, rectangles, triangles, diamonds, hexagons, and octagons. It is usually better not to use the same size tile on both walls and floors. Using different sizes makes up

■ Above Left Akros tile manufactured by Artistic Tile. Above Center Cement/antiqued brass tile manufactured by Artistic Tile. Above Right Artisan celine quemere tile manufactured by Artistic Tile.

for the imperfections in rooms that are not always perfectly square. The placement of the floor tile on the diagonal provides another solution since this also eliminates the need for wall and floor tile alignment.

Texture, or the surface quality of a tile, enhances the other elements of design: color, size, shape, and pattern. Texture can make colors appear brighter or more muted, patterns and sizes can enlarge or recede, and the shape can be emphasized or made less prominent. Ceramic tiles are available in two basic types of textures: tactile and visual. Tactile texture can be felt—the indentations of antique relief tiles, silky smoothness of glazed wall tiles, and the undulations of handcrafted terra cotta tiles. Visual textures only give the impression of texture through the use of color and glaze.

When decorating with tiles, texture can make the difference between an aesthetically pleasing room and a more mundane one since any changes can not only be visually appealing but also have a unique feel to them. The texture used on machine-made tiles can create a sleek, uncluttered atmosphere; but don't hesitate purchasing tiles at flea markets or antique stores because the scratches and small chips on old tiles can add character to



■ Above Etrusca tile manufactured by American Marazzi Tile.

a room, producing an antique look.

Pattern is created by combining and manipulating all the elements of color, size, shape, and texture. In the book, *Designing with Tile*, Carolyn Coyle mentions five common methods for creating patterns with tiles. 1) Combine different color tiles of the same size, shape, and texture. 2) Combine different sizes or shapes that have the same color and texture. 3) Combine different textures or finishes of ceramic tile that have the same color. 4) Use decorative ceramic tiles alone or combined with plain,

monochromatic tiles. 5) Use decorative ceramic tiles in a mural design.

By taking the time to think about each characteristic of tile—color, size, shape, texture, and pattern—before decorating a room, you will be more successful in achieving your desired look. However, remember when decorating with tiles, that many times, less is more. And above all, have fun with tiles because as tile designer Michael Golden says "they really are like architectural legos".



A pediment and column is created using special relief tiles and trims, and the tympanum is filled with fresco motif background tiles.



For this fireplace, tiles in a "flowing ivory" glaze, created by Falper Tile, meet with a Victorian lily border of "Chinese blue" glaze.



Adding color with tiles in a pool area can dramatically enhance a backyard. Flowered Malibu tile is used for this pool.