

Bathroom-Tile Design

■ BY LYNN HOPKINS

Walk into a tile showroom, and you may be overwhelmed by the sheer number of colors, materials, finishes, and sizes available. The best way to keep your wits about you is to develop a strategy beforehand for the style of bathroom you plan to create. This plan will help to guide tile selection and installation.

Before going to the store, think about the character of your new bath. Are you interested in a traditional bathroom with historical references, something with fixtures and finishes that remind you of an earlier time? Or are you dreaming of something more sleek and modern?

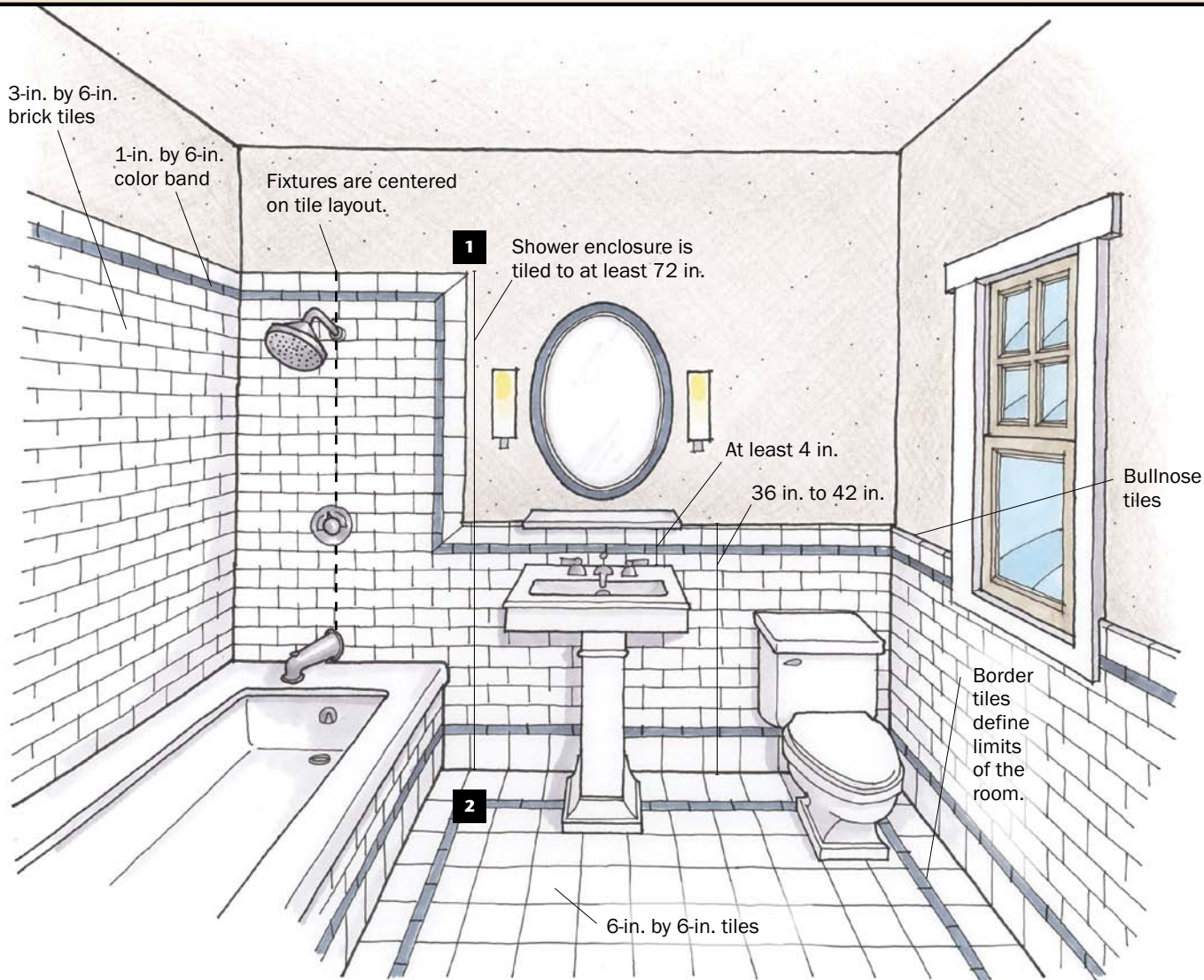
Regardless of the style of bathroom you choose, designing a tile installation requires forethought. The accompanying drawings illustrate key areas to consider when developing a tile design and show how the traditional or modern character of the room might influence tile selection and layout. As part of the planning process, I recommend making detailed drawings that show which tiles go where on both the floor and the walls. An accurate, scaled sketch of a section of wall and floor, plus any special corner conditions, makes it much easier to order, lay out, and correctly install the tile.

Start by Planning the Walls

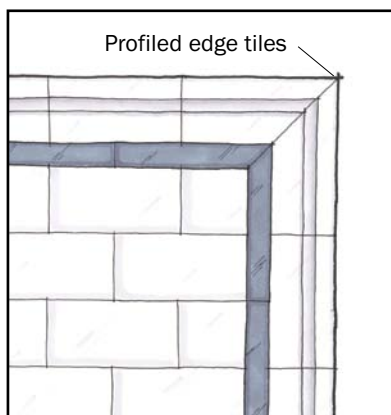
There are three standard heights to consider when tiling a bathroom wall: wainscot height, shower height, and full-wall height. You may use one, two, or all three of these heights in a single bathroom, depending on the look you are trying to achieve and on your budget. Because tiled walls are more expensive than wallboard, tile often is used only where it is needed most: on the lower portion of the wall that requires water protection. This wainscot is usually between 36 in. and 42 in. tall, enough to provide a backsplash of 4 in. or so above the sink. Tile protects the walls below towel bars from wet towels, and the walls around the toilet from the spray of rambunctious kids.

Tiling to wainscot height may be adequate protection around tubs without showers as most splashes occur below this line. In a shower area, however, all enclosure walls should be tiled high enough to protect the walls from water spray, at least 72 in. and preferably to the ceiling.

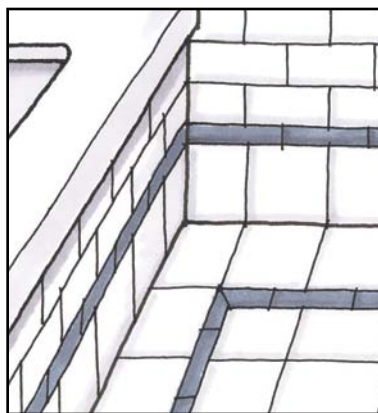
Details for a Traditional Bathroom



1. TURNING CORNERS



2. INSIDE CORNERS



A bathroom with traditional characteristics has plumbing fixtures that take their styling cues from an earlier era, generally the 1920s or 1930s. The tile should reinforce these historical references. Small wall tiles, such as 3 in. by 6 in., 4 in. by 4 in., and even smaller mosaics, were typical in the old days, in part because the adhesive available could not support tiles that were much larger and heavier than 6 in. sq.

Traditional styles often celebrate the edges where tile meets wall or where wall meets floor with a border or fancy molding profile. Borders run around the perimeter of the floor and/or walls, defining the limits of the room.

Choose the Right Tile

Tiles finished on only the front face are called field tiles. When installed, they are butted next to each other with grout filling the spaces in between. Wherever wall tile stops short of the ceiling, field tiles should not be installed on the top row because the raw, unfinished edge of the tiles will be exposed. For these locations, use tile with at least one finished edge. Typically, the finished edge is a rounded bullnose shape that makes an elegant transition from tile to wall surface. In bathrooms with traditional styling, this transitional edge frequently is celebrated with a decorative border that intro-

duces a band of color, a pattern, a texture, or a special profile (see the drawings on p. 79).

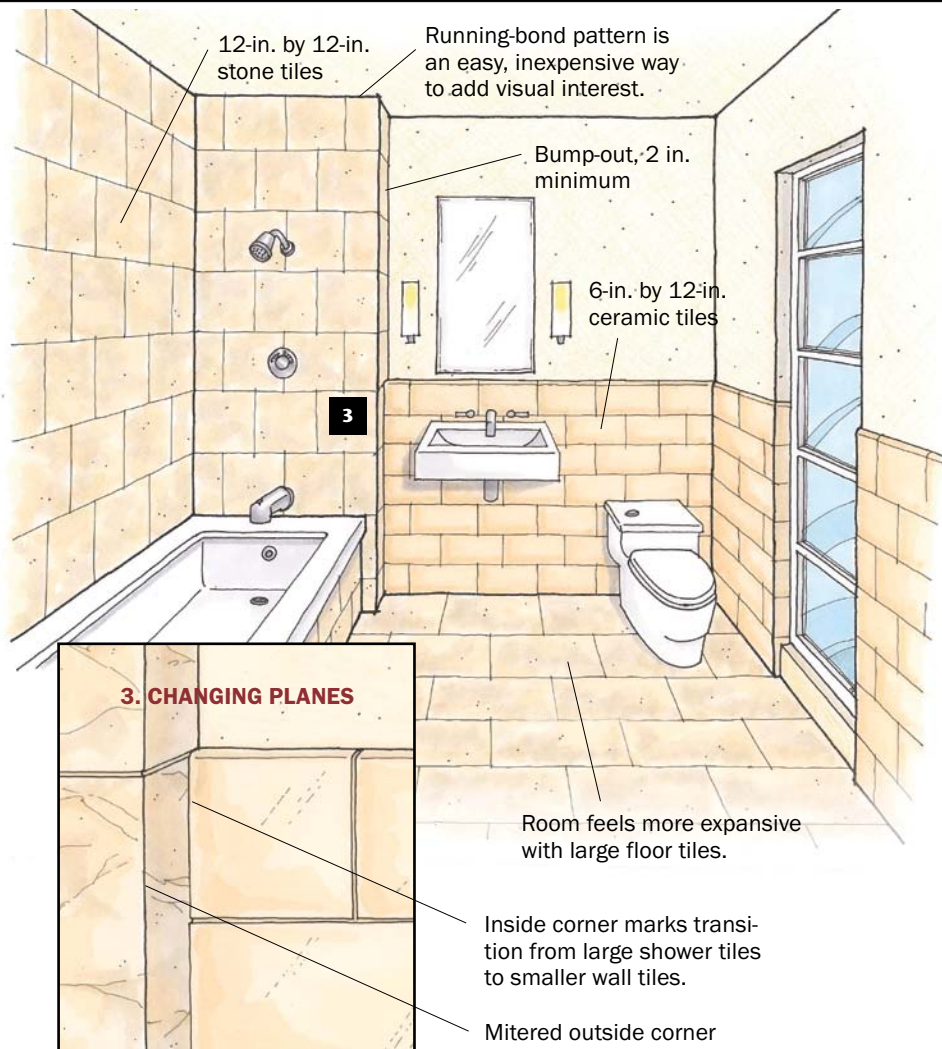
Borders Create a Transition

Although a decorative border is a great way to handle the tile-to-wall transition, you'll need to consider how to handle the border when the tile goes from a lower to a taller height. In a traditionally styled bath, I prefer to turn the edging and keep the border moving up, over, and down again, using mitered corners at each turn. I find that a miter creates a crisp, clean look and allows the flexi-

Details for a Modern Bathroom

The details in a modern room imply expansiveness and continuity. Tile frequently runs continuously from floor to ceiling or from corner to corner. Borders like those found in a traditional bath are seldom used because they would feel constrictive. Luxurious materials, such as stone, are treated simply so that nothing competes with or detracts from the beauty of the material itself.

Modern designs often use larger tiles—8 in. by 8 in., 6 in. by 12 in., 12 in. by 12 in., or 16 in. by 16 in.—because they feel more expansive. Visual interest comes from the use of multiple materials, patterns, textures, and plane changes. In this example, the height change at the shower area is emphasized with a bump-out separating the plumbing wall into two different planes. Within the shower, 12-in. by 12-in. stone tiles run floor to ceiling. The side edges of the stone tile are mitered to finish the outside corner. Outside the shower, 6-in. by 12-in. ceramic tiles are used on the walls. The running-bond pattern helps to tie the different materials together.



bility to use border designs without a special corner tile (see the inset drawing on p. 79).

Other areas that demand careful planning are corner borders at wall intersections. If your bath has only inside corners, you will need tiles that are finished only on the face and one edge. Outside corners—those that project into the room—require tiles finished on the face, the top, and one side. If you use tile with a profile, you'll need a special outside-corner tile. Not all tile manufacturers or lines include these special pieces.

The baseboard area, at the junction of wall and floor, is another opportunity for a decorative border. If you used a color band at the top of the tiled wall, a second band of color would work well at the bottom. If not, consider a base tile that is taller than the wainscot tiles. You can choose base tiles with a profile that incorporates a radius to meet the floor tiles.

Floor Tiles Take a Cue From the Walls

Floor tiles need to be more durable and slip-resistant than wall tiles, so be sure to select a type intended for floor installation. The safety and durability characteristics of floor tiles may give them a different look than that of wall tiles. To tie the two surfaces together visually, use the same color, texture, pattern, or other design feature from the walls in the flooring. In a traditional bath, for instance, you might use a border of the same color on the walls and the floor.

Another strategy is a floor patterned with a mix of small and large tiles, where the color of the small tiles matches that of the wall tile. Smaller tiles result in more grout lines, which give the floor more texture and make it less slippery. The additional grout is more susceptible to dirt and mildew, however.

Center Tile Layout on Entries and Fixtures

Many tile-layout guidelines suggest positioning the layout on the center of the room and

cutting the tiles around the perimeter to fit. These guidelines recommend centering the pattern on either a tile or a grout line, depending on which choice results in the largest tiles around the edges of the room. This is a good place to start, but you may want to adjust your design in response to other features in the room.

One of the typical ways your eye determines whether a pattern is centered is by comparing the end tiles: If the tiles on each end are equal in size, you assume the pattern is centered. However, if your eye cannot easily compare the end tiles to each other, you'll look for other cues, such as alignment.

Sometimes, especially in large rooms, it is preferable to center tiles along lines of sight or movement. By following this strategy, the tile pattern is centered on the person using the bathroom. Tiles centered on the entry door are centered on the person who walks through that door; wall tiles centered on the sink and on the mirror above are centered on the person looking in that mirror. Tiles centered on the showerhead and control valves also are centered on the person using the shower.

If tile has been centered on the key sink and shower walls, the layout frequently is mirrored on the opposite wall. Centering tile on the sink and the shower controls may be difficult if the sink and the shower are on the same continuous wall; but this design should be possible if the distance between the centerline of the shower or tub fittings and the sink is a multiple of the tile size.

Mark out the tile design before any rough plumbing work is done; then adjust fixture placements as required for the most attractive finished room. Alignment and centering of fixtures, tiles, and sightlines reinforces the organizing principles of the design. People subconsciously find that reinforcement reassuring and, consequently, attractive.

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Details from Great Bathrooms



Benches, shelves, and hooks. Don't overlook the convenience of a small bench where you can sit and shave, shelves that can hold soap and shampoo, and some open wall space for towel hooks and bars.





Tile put to good use. Variations in tile size highlight architectural details, while glass-block tiles let in plenty of light.

Bold and beautiful. The play of light and color in this bathroom isn't an accident. It's what happens when an architect plans a bathroom remodel with an artist.

Accentuate the positive.

Large, rectangular porcelain tiles installed vertically draw attention to the shower's high ceiling while the mosaic-tile floor provides plenty of traction.



Liven up a bland room. Blue and white mosaics splash color across the sink wall in this St. Paul, Minnesota, remodel.



Color coordination. Staying in the same color family ties together the mosaic pebble floor and the wall of sleek subway tiles.



Updating a tradition. Designed to capture the calm richness of traditional Japanese architecture but with a modern focus, this bathroom was created with wall and shower tiles by Casalgrande Padana and custom-cut slate floor tiles.



Balancing the budget. Saving on white ceramic floor and wall tile freed up money for the aqua-colored glass mosaic wall tile.



Use tile to differentiate. On the floor, a switch from 13-in. ceramic tile to 2-in. tile (by Cerim Ceramiche) distinguishes the shower from the dry part of the room. On the walls, a mosaic strip (by Cerámica Tres Estilos) adds zip.



Let loose. A child's bathroom is a great place to have fun with tile. This bathroom features a whimsical countertop of brightly colored tile.

Putting Tile to Work in the Kitchen

■ BY LANE MEEHAN

Our black Lab, Bogey, is a walking mud factory and sheds so much that he should be bald. When it came time to choose tile for our kitchen floor, we looked for tile that would help disguise evidence of Bogey and our three active boys. We chose a tile that looks like stone but in a color and finish that could hide dirt and dog hair until I had a spare moment to run the vacuum.

Our choice was based primarily on ease of maintenance, just one consideration when choosing kitchen tile. As a tile-store owner with a background in design, I field questions all the time about incorporating tile into clients' kitchens. This chapter addresses the questions I am asked most frequently.

What Types of Tile Can I Choose From?

The two most basic categories of tile are stone and ceramic. Stone tile is a natural product, mined or quarried directly from the earth. The three most common stones used

for tile are granite, marble, and limestone, with granite being the hardest.

Stone in its natural state is porous, so wherever it's used in a kitchen, it must be sealed to resist staining and discoloration. Stone tile has color all the way through, so deep scratches won't expose a different base color. However, a highly polished surface on a stone tile seems to accentuate even the smallest scratches. Stone can be installed on floors, countertops or backsplashes; however, it does tend to be a high-maintenance product.

On the other hand, ceramic tile is made from clay rolled flat and either sun-baked or fired in a kiln. There are hundreds of different clays, each with its own characteristics that can vary the tile's performance. Color is applied to ceramic tile in the form of baked-on glazes that also seal the tile.

In the past, ceramic-tile finishes had problems standing up to heavy use and abuse, but with recent technical advances, ceramic tile now performs better than it used to. With most ceramic tile, the color is



Tile outlines and defines kitchen spaces. A tile border gives the island in this kitchen, designed by Tim Quigley of Minneapolis, its own separate visual space. The backsplash behind the stove forms a functional accent.

just on the surface, so deep scratches expose the clay below.

Porcelain is another manmade tile product. Porcelain is much denser than ordinary ceramic, making it harder to scratch and break. But as with stone, the shinier the surface of ceramic or porcelain, the more scratches will show. So I try not to use high-gloss tiles anywhere in a kitchen except on backsplashes, areas that are less susceptible to scratching. In the past, porcelain has been more expensive than ceramic, but improvements in technology have reduced the price.

Beyond the amount of gloss, tile finishes can vary greatly. Tile finishes are graded by their ability to resist wear due to traffic; a

light-industrial tile has a higher durability rating than most residential-grade tiles. Industrial-rated tile is a bit more expensive, but the extra cost makes sense if your kitchen resembles a freeway. In addition to a durability rating, the Tile Council of America (see “Sources” on p. 94) gives tile a coefficient of friction (COF) rating, which indicates how slippery the surface will be underfoot. But if the tile feels too smooth or too slick to the touch, it will probably be too slippery to use on the floor.

How Do Lifestyle and Lighting Affect Choices?

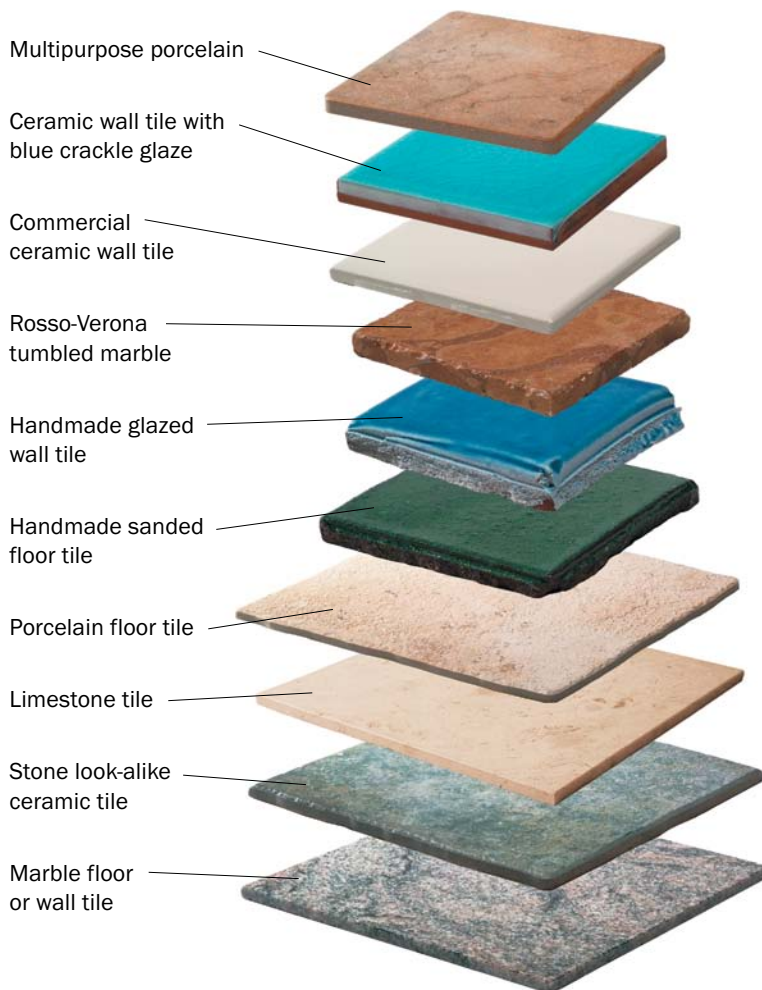
The first thing I ask clients about is their family, their lifestyle, and the way their kitchen is going to be used. For example, for a client who has a large family or who does a lot of entertaining, the kitchen is a busy hub with a casual atmosphere. For this kitchen, I might suggest warm-colored tile with perhaps a softer stone look.

After the client’s lifestyle, I look at the type of lighting in the kitchen. If it is blessed with a great deal of natural light from windows or skylights, tumbled marble tile or tile with a matte finish will absorb light and create a softer look (see the photo on p. 90). A textured surface on the tile softens the effect even further.

On the other hand, tile with a glossy finish reflects light and helps brighten areas of a kitchen that are dimly lighted or that receive little or no natural light. Remember that glossy tile used in a kitchen with a lot of light, either natural or artificial, requires more frequent cleaning because fingerprints and water spots tend to show up more.

When choosing tile, I also look at the color and finish of the cabinets and countertops. If the counters and cabinets have a matte or satin finish, then I try to keep the same feel in the floors and the backsplash. By the same token, if the kitchen has the

Tile Offers Almost Endless Options



Ceramic Tile: Porcelain vs. Nonporcelain

All tiles made of clay and cured by heat are ceramic tiles. However, ceramic tile is best understood by dividing it into two product classifications: porcelain and nonporcelain. Their availability and look are roughly the same, but their durability is not. Thanks to a balance in the market, porcelain tiles can now be had at nearly the same price as nonporcelain products.

Porcelain tile is more durable

Porcelain tiles are created by mixing porcelain clay and very finely ground sand, and curing them with high heat and pressure. Porcelain tile is denser and harder than nonporcelain tile and has a lower water-absorption rate of 0.5% or less. Porcelain's density makes it highly resistant to physical damage, while its low absorption rate makes the tile frost resistant, allowing it to be used outdoors. Unglazed porcelain tile is sought after for its full-body characteristics, which means its color remains consistent throughout the tile. Surface scratches and damage are less noticeable as a result, a benefit that diminishes

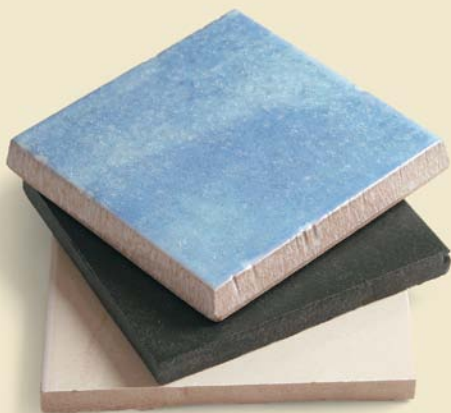
when the tiles are glazed. Also, when some porcelain tiles are glazed, they are no longer guaranteed to be frostproof.

Nonporcelain tile is easier to work with

Nonporcelain tiles are made primarily of clay mixed with minerals and water. The material is then fired to solidify the tiles into a bisque form. This process creates tile that isn't as hard as porcelain, so it can be worked more easily with basic snap cutters and nippers instead of a wet saw.

In most cases, a sealer and a glaze are applied to the surface of nonporcelain tile to create color and texture before the tile receives a second firing. The glaze applied to nonporcelain tile can make it extremely durable, but never as durable as porcelain.

Nonporcelain tile's main weakness is that it has a water-absorption rate of greater than 0.5%. As a result, the tile doesn't perform nearly as well as unglazed porcelain tile in outdoor freeze/thaw environments.



The top choice when strength matters most. Although nonporcelain tiles can be quite durable, none are as resilient as porcelain.



Buy what looks good. Even though damage to nonporcelain tiles is more noticeable than with some porcelain tile, they can be purchased in grades that are perfectly suited for high-contact areas like kitchen counters and floors.

Tile can act as a dimmer switch. This kitchen gets lots of light from two sides. The natural colors and matte finish of the tumbled-marble countertop and backsplash help soften the light and cut down on glare in a kitchen with a lot of windows.



polished, streamlined look of many contemporary kitchens, I suggest a straightforward tile pattern with a glossy finish.

Tile color can make a large contribution toward a warm or cool feel in a kitchen. The earthy tones of limestone or tumbled marble are the warmest of the tile colors, while bright whites and blues tend to be quite cool. But even cool colors can be warmed with colored grout. For example, an ivory or off-white grout color can take the cool edge off bright white. The reverse can be true if you're trying to achieve a formal or industrial feel with gray or blue tile. A steel-gray grout helps create a crisp, cool look.

Will My Three Boys and the Family Dog Hurt My Tile Floor?

A client's lifestyle has the biggest bearing on the choice of floor tile. If you'd rather spend time with your three growing boys than take care of your kitchen floor, I suggest tile that hides a multitude of sins (and dirt) and always seems to look nice, such as a ceramic-stone look-alike (see the photo on the facing page).

A quick vacuum and an occasional mopping, and you're off and running.

If cooking and entertaining are big parts of your life, then I'd suggest tile that won't stain if hot grease and oil or an occasional glass of wine is spilled on it. A glazed ceramic tile works best in this situation, but for an Old World look, you can use a real stone, such as limestone. If you select a stone-tile floor, be sure to treat it with a good sealer according to the manufacturer's directions. We recommend either Miracle Sealants' Porous Plus or One Master Marble and Stone Care's Gold Shield (see "Sources" on p. 94) for sealing stone tile.

No matter what tile you choose for your kitchen floor, the grout should also be sealed. To make the grout more impervious to spills and stains, I recommend starting with a latex-modified grout or one that is mixed with a latex additive instead of water. Once the grout has cured properly, a sealer such as Miracle Sealants' Porous Plus will fight off most food incursions.

Another grout option is epoxy, which is stain resistant and does not require sealing. But because epoxy is harder to work with for the installer, we generally use it for smaller



No time for cleaning? For busy, active families with kids and pets, consider a tile floor with a lot of color variations such as this stone look-alike. It stays better looking longer between cleanings.

areas, such as countertops. With some tile, such as limestone, epoxy grout is not recommended, so be sure to check with manufacturers' suggestions.

How Does a Tile Floor Relate to Adjacent Rooms?

The kitchen-floor tile should help establish a visual flow into the surrounding areas, so I ask clients about the colors and materials on the floors of the rooms that are adjoining the kitchen. For example, if the kitchen floor joins up with a dark wood floor in the dining room, consider using tile with a warm, medium color to cut down on the visual contrast between rooms. If the kitchen floor meets colored carpet in an adjacent room, keep in mind that you'll probably change the carpet at some point, so choose a neutral tile color that will go with future carpet choices.

Tile thickness is another consideration. Whether the kitchen floor butts up against other existing tile, hardwood floors, or carpet, the tile installer will need to install

some sort of threshold to create a clean transition into the next room. Tile thickness can also affect doors that swing into the kitchen, as well as appliances, such as dishwashers or trash compactors, that have to fit under the countertops in a kitchen.

Can Tile Make My Tiny Kitchen Look Bigger?

Tile layout can have a big impact on a room's appearance. While a parallel or straight pattern can intensify the narrowness of a kitchen, a diagonal tile pattern makes a room look wider (see the sidebar on p. 93).

Tile size can also affect the appearance of the room. The smaller the tile, the busier the grout-joint pattern. The simple grout-joint pattern you get with larger 10-in. to 12-in. tiles can make a small room look larger. Smaller 4-in. to 6-in. tiles on a floor can have the opposite effect, creating a mosaic pattern or a cobblestone look.

Clipping the corners of square tiles creates hexagons or octagons with small square spaces left between. The small tiles (called

dots) that fill the spaces can introduce a dash of color to the floor in a pattern that breaks up the simple straight lines.

Irregular tile patterns such as block randomness (using three sizes of tile) or a pinwheel pattern can help unify a kitchen that has many entrances and exits. These patterns also work well to blend together tile that is highly varied in color. A tile border on the floor can make a kitchen look cozier by bringing the eye in or by creating a frame around the kitchen table or an island (see the photo on p. 87).

Is Tile OK for a Kitchen Countertop?

Granite-slab countertops have long been popular in high-end kitchens. Tile countertops, both ceramic and stone, have some of the same attributes as slabs, such as durability and heat resistance, but at less than half the cost, depending on the tile you choose.

Granite tile can be installed with tight grout joints to give the impression of a solid

slab. And with granite tile, it's easy to add a border to accent or complement the color of the stone. One drawback to stone tile on a countertop is the edges. Although you can round over the edges, granite tile is thinner than a solid slab ($\frac{3}{8}$ in. to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. compared with $1\frac{1}{4}$ in., normal thickness for a granite slab), so it's tougher to get the same full-slab look. Another drawback is not being able to install an undermount sink with granite tile.

Although the tight grout joints of granite tile create a good, smooth work surface, machine-made ceramic tile with standard grout joints makes a slightly rougher work surface.

Handmade tile is usually installed with wider grout joints that are charming, but its inherently bumpy surface can be difficult to work on and can cause wine glasses and bowls to tip over (see the photos at left).

The edges of a tile countertop can be addressed in various ways. Continuing the tile over the edge gives the countertop a thick look. Relief tile, such as a rope pattern, can turn countertop edges into a visual focal point. Wooden edges that match or complement cabinets are also popular.

As on floors, borders on countertops can add decoration. But if it's used in too large an area or if a lot of items are stored on the counter, a border can be lost or distracting.

Tile can also be combined with other types of surfaces for a dramatic look (see the photo on p. 90). For instance, the savings from tiling most of the countertop might leave enough money for a solid slab of granite in the sink area for an undermount sink. A stone slab or a wood surface on only the island could make a bold statement while providing a smooth surface for an informal eating area.

Handmade tile is pretty but uneven. The irregular surface of handmade ceramic tile is a challenge to work on and can be hazardous to wine glasses. Cutting boards should always be used on tile countertops.



Tile Patterns at Work

The right pattern can make a kitchen look wider. Floor tile installed in a straight pattern makes a narrow room seem narrower (see the left photo below) while tile in a

diagonal pattern softens the tunnel effect of a long, narrow kitchen, making it seem wider (see the right photo below).



Can Tile Be Used as a Cutting Board?

Although few tile or stone surfaces can stand up to a sharp kitchen knife, most hold up well under other kitchen rigors such as abuse from pots and pans. Limestone scratches easily, but those scratches can be sanded out. Surfaces such as glossy tile or highly polished granite tend to show marks more readily, and their scratches are harder to remove or cover up. Stone or ceramic tile with a matte finish tends to hide scratches and surface abrasions better.

Stone tile is also porous, so it has to be sealed properly to resist staining from things such as red wine and grease. And some ceramic tiles, as well as polished stone such as granite or marble, can lose their shine when exposed to some food acids.

As in floors, latex-modified grout should be used on tiled countertops along with a

good coat of grout sealer. Again, epoxy grout, which costs a little more and is a little harder to install, will make the grout impenetrable.

Should the Backsplash Blend or Make a Splash?

A tile backsplash is the spot where you can be really creative with tile in the kitchen (see the photos on p. 94). Because a backsplash functions to protect the wall from splashes and splatters that come from cooking and preparing food, the only prerequisite is that backsplash tile be easy to keep clean. Beyond that, the choices become mainly aesthetic.

I always ask clients how much stuff they plan to keep on their countertops. Toasters, microwaves, and canisters tend to block the backsplash, and in that case, the backsplash just provides a backdrop of color and tex-

Sources

Miracle Sealants Company

800-350-1901
www.miraclesealants.com
Porous Plus

One Master Marble and Stone Care

760-406-1097
www.onemastermarble.com
Gold Shield

The Tile Council of America

864-646-8453
www.tileusa.com

ture. I usually recommend extending the tile from the countertop all the way to the bottoms of the wall cabinets so that the backsplash acts as a visual connection between the upper and lower cabinets.

Borders usually work best above long stretches of counter that are uninterrupted by windows or appliances. And when installed three-quarters of the way up the backsplash, a border won't get lost near the countertop or under the wall cabinets. At that height, a border will usually clear the height of the toaster or a bowl of fruit for a continuous line.

If the client is thinking of having decorative tiles scattered randomly throughout the backsplash, I suggest taping playing cards to the wall at random to see if the effect works in that particular kitchen. Playing cards can also be used in a line to test the visual power of a border.

Isn't Tile Expensive?

Tile varies greatly in price, and budget is a concern for the vast majority of my clients. So here's my strategy for keeping costs down. First, use reasonably priced machine-made tile for large areas in the kitchen. Then there will be money left for those handmade borders, small murals, or strategically placed accent tiles that will give your kitchen a rich look without breaking the bank (see the right photo below).

Installation prices can vary greatly depending on the type of tile, the layout, and the conditions of the existing floors and walls. A tile installer can explain what your options are and how much each option costs. Even if you opt for a less expensive installation, always seal the tile. Sealing tile is pretty easy, so you can save a little by doing it yourself. Spend some money on a good sealer.

Lane Meehan is a tile maker and designer of decorative tiles. She and her husband, Tom, own and manage Cape Cod Tileworks in Harwich, Massachusetts.

Tile Art and Accents

The backsplash of cows in a pasture (see the left photo below) in this kitchen designed by Randy Fritz of Lakeside, Calif., combines the art of Roger Dunham of Petaluma, Calif., with the practicality of

ceramic tile. Random decorative tiles in a backsplash of less expensive, machine-made tile (see the right photo below) give this kitchen a colorful accent.

