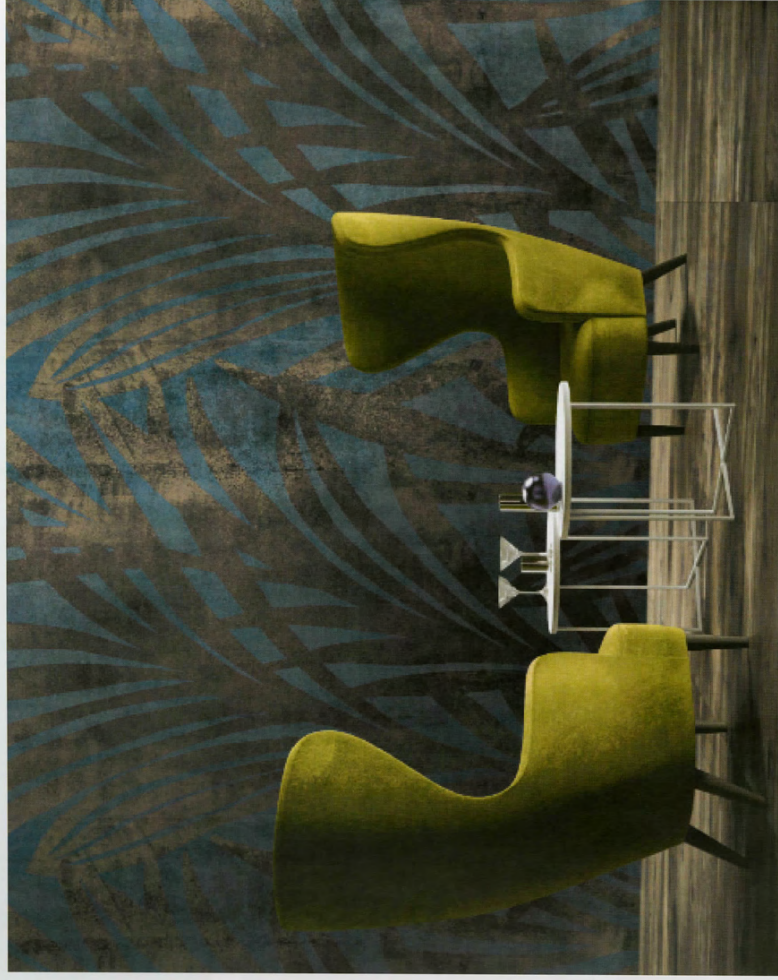




Supreme surfaces: Technology takes ceramic tile to a totally new level

Tile Design Trends

By Joe Simpson, Editor, The Specifier's Guide

Ceramic tile is perhaps the most dynamic of all the surface finishing sectors. There are three main drivers for this. The first is the continuous and significant advances in tile manufacturing technologies - continuous pressing, digital inkjet decoration, rectification, polishing, and body prep, frit and glaze evolutions, to name but a few - that have facilitated accelerated the technical and aesthetic evolution of ceramic tiles.

The second is the overarching design trends that encourage ceramic tile designers to continually update and enhance their tile portfolios. Be in no doubt, ceramic tiles is a highly fashion- and design-conscious market, that now often sets, rather than follows, the global interior design agenda.

Jungle from ABK's Impressive Wide & Style collection.

And, thirdly, there is the dynamic competitiveness within this truly global market. The past few decades have seen European dominance of the sector, notably in Italy and Spain, challenged by the emergence of world-class manufacturers in China, Brazil, Turkey, India, the USA and a raft of other countries, especially in Eastern Europe and Asia. Indeed, there are very few developed or developing economies that do not now have at least one significant tile manufacturer. A great example is the United Arab Emirates which is home to one of the true global tile giants, RAK Ceramics. Similar large scale and highly commercial manufacturers can also be found in Mexico, Germany, the Czech Republic, The Netherlands, Portugal, Vietnam - the list goes on.

The rapid pace of product development is most clearly seen at the international tile exhibitions that are the key commercial drivers of this global industry. The top event is Cersaie, held annually at Bologna, Italy; but there are also important trade exhibitions in Spain (Cevissama), Turkey (Unicera), the USA (Coverings and Surfaces), and Brazil (Expo Revestir) - as well as China, India and several other emerging markets.

These exhibitions reveal that, for 2018, the key tile product areas are larger formats for porcelain floors, the

new generation of ultra-large panels, 20mm pavers, and overlays with effects to deepen aesthetics of graphics or traditional glazes, planks and metallics. Alongside today's massive tile (or panel) formats - up to a mind-blowing 4.8m by 1.6m - the past year or so has also seen a higher profile for small format glazed wall tiles: a retro trend that looks to the future.

Unseen to all but the most expert eye: the most important thing to understand about the latest tile designs is what goes on underneath, within and on top of the glaze layer. The proliferation of new glaze, ink and frit technologies over the past few years has seen many manufacturers employing these new tools to enhance what were already exciting collections. At the top end, therefore, the bar has been raised significantly. Manufacturers who are simply employing a single glaze and printing a digital image on tile in ceramic inks are now behind the curve. Selecting a good design, and understanding the optimal colours for the target marketplace, is now just the starting point for a creating a winning collection in 2018 and beyond.

New digital inkjet printers are becoming commonplace. Featuring 10 to 12 bars of heads, manufacturers can use five heads for colour (six if they are employing white inks) and then

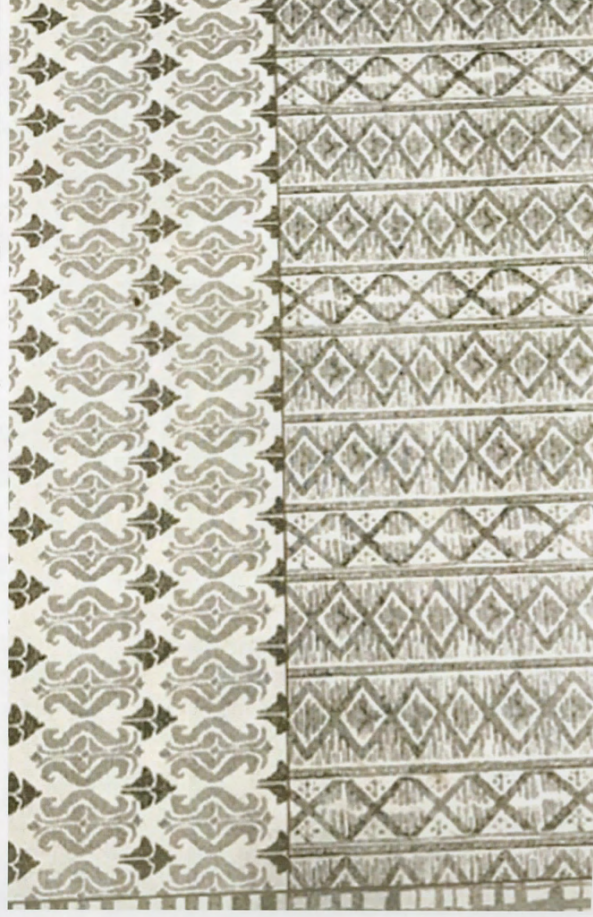
use the remaining four to six heads for special effects.

Available effects include:

- Reactive inks that sink through the glaze creating relief, or rise up creating structure
 - Lustre - which can be in multiple colours
 - Metallics - which can be feature different metals
 - Inkjet glue - which is used to adhere a granular frit or dry glazes
 - New glazes - gloss, matt, or satin
- The staggering array of possible effects available today are forcing manufacturers to decide on a design language and specialise in certain looks since they only have so many open channels available to them in their printers.

What this means for specifiers, and the specialist distributors that supply them, is the most nuanced and sophisticated tiles ever seen. Stone-effect tiles can now have sunken veining or mica flecks, just like the real thing. Timber-effect tiles can feature a gloss effect on the raised grain structure, as if burnished to a deep glow by generations of slipped feet. Classic ceramics can now be created with the wabi sabi elegance and grace of an ancient piece of Raku pottery.

Tex, a new textile-effect design by Aparici.





Prevailing palettes and fashion

Grey, white, and black remain the top three colours, in that order, for both floor and walls; with greige a close fourth depending on the design inspiration for the collection. The only real departure from this is in wood-effect tiles; where classic wood tones still reign supreme. The complementary colours of choice have shifted from the oceanic blues, teals and turquoise of the past two years. The accent tones of choice for 2018 are denim blue and deep wine bottle or British racing green.

And, for 2018, as far as tile manufacturers are concerned, black is the new black. True black, saturated black, absolute black ... call it what you will, but deepest true black was the accent colour of choice at Cersaie 2017. It appeared as a textured finish in basalt-effect tiles, as a luxurious

gloss in tiles emulating nero marquina and other black marbles, or as a simple matt, satin or gloss glazed tile. There was even pure black wood grain tiles; a contemporary painted timber-effect totally on-trend with today's interior styles. And, of course, where there is black there is also white. And Cersaie was awash with white faux marbles inspired by carrara, statuario, calacatta, volakas, thassos, colorado yule, alyon, sivoc, mugla and all the rest.

It terms of coloured wall tiles, it seems as though the rich, greyish pastels of the 1950s are among the hottest hues out there. These range from ever-popular blues and greens, through to shocking reds, dusky yellows, pinks and restrained purples. What really stands out in the colour arena is that the leading tile manufacturers are now taking great efforts to colour balance their ranges, by using complementary palettes across seemingly disparate collections. This means that a white body wall tile with a sculpted 3D form will sit

happily against an aged wood-effect, or polished concrete style floor tile.

Regarding tile formats, almost without exception, manufacturers are reporting their top sellers to be plank formats. This seems to hold good for most global marketplaces but is perhaps most obvious in North America, where design and architecture strongly features native timber.

However, stone-effect, metallics and even the new generation of cotto tiles are all finding success with planks formats. The popular format appears to be around 200 by 900mm, although some factories now offer wider formats, up to 300mm, that emphasise woodgrain and knot detailing. In commercial contracts, longer formats, 200 by 1,200mm, are also gathering real momentum.

There appears to be a trend away from the go-to 300 by 600mm format. For 2018, the bridge size is 450 by 900mm; with more progressive markets favouring 1,200 by 2,400mm. In simple formats there has been an incremental jump to 600 by 600mm and 900 by 900mm for the more design-led and avant garde ranges; but even larger formats are now widely available.

In contrast, small formats are enjoying something of a renaissance. Much of this appears to be down to the enduring popularity of the metro or subway tile. Interestingly many manufacturers are also starting to promote smaller format floor tiles.

In small format wall tiles, the key size appears to be 75 by 300mm, a kind of elongated subway shape; but 200 by 200mm, 150 by 300 and slim rectangular sizes up to 100 by 750mm are also on the money right now. There are also probably more 100 by 100mm tiles on the market today than in any other year this century.

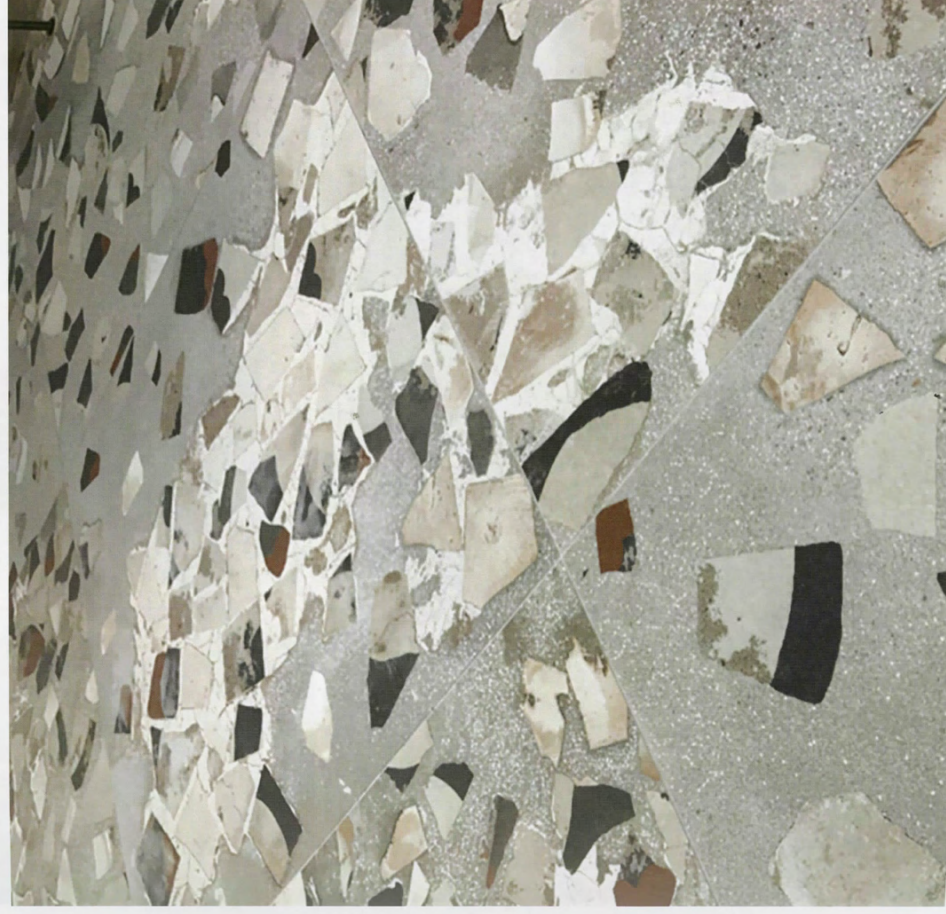
The market has been trending away from rectified edges for a couple years now in all styles bar traditional marble and flowing textured wall tiles in 300

20mm porcelain pavers

On the external tiling front, most major manufacturers now offer 20mm exterior grade tiles in a range of slip-resistance finishes; suitable for both domestic and high traffic commercial applications. The design options have increased, with wood-, concrete-, and stone-effect tiles, rubbing shoulders with some more decorative and unexpected options. Overall, exterior tiling has truly come of age.

Once available almost exclusively 600 by 600mm formats, now there is a cornucopia of 400 by 800mm and 600 by 1,200mm pavers on offer, with some being cut to 300mm or 200mm planks.

▶ I Codi terrazzo-effect by Fioranese.



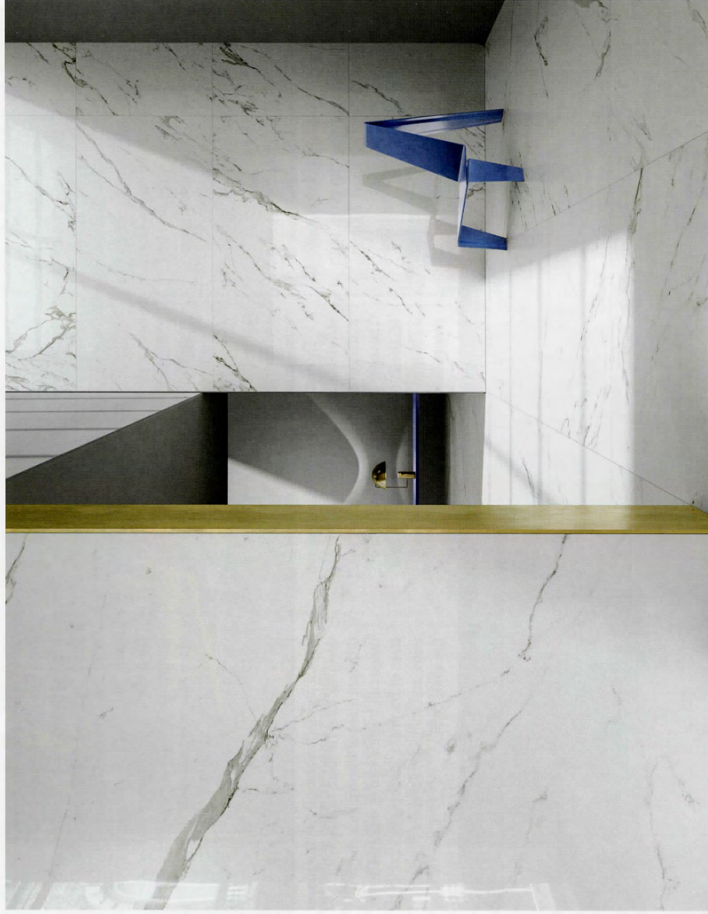
Key material trends

Terrazzo: Terrazzo-effect tiles are the really hot ticket today. Some of the better versions used printed gloss glaze to pick out the chips (inclusions), just as happens in the original material. If your preference is for uniform chips or multi-sized inclusions, there is a version offering the look you require. Some of the most effective terrazzo designs feature some variation, with a mix of larger and smaller chips and an imperfect spacing or chip coverage across the tile's face.

This reinvention of terrazzo, or the stracciatella look, has been gathering a head of steam for the past two years. The early pacesetter was Peronda's FS Ofelia collection, but there is now a plethora of strong terrazzo-effect ranges out there.

With digital decoration, tile designers can interpret terrazzo in many different ways. As well as the classic look much favoured in UK supermarkets and Italian colonnades, today's fragmented tile designs span the trencadis style through to surfaces peppered with minuscule particles, often referred to as 'salt and pepper'.

The latest collections of ceramic tiles feature many variations of the stracciatella or conglomerate stone look; with any colour used as the base or for the inclusions themselves. Digital decoration also allows the tile designer total freedom to play with different sizes of inserts, so a single range can include two or more different sizes of fragment, so designers can play with, and combine, different finishes in the same colour.



Cotto: Larger formats (600 by 600mm and up) are moving to a cleaner and more contemporary look and often have connotations of cement, especially when composed in grey or white tones. For the more traditional looks, true to form with the macro trends, cotto-effect producers seem to be going to a more vintage, rather than weathered, look. Broad variation in the more traditional cotto aesthetic proved effective, mainly due to the smaller formats adopted for this classic look, with the prevailing sizes being 200 by 200mm and 150 by 300mm.

Marble and other natural stone-effects: The addition of printed effects, metallic or mica flecks has really enhanced the realism of stone-effect tiles. Marble, quartzite and limestone, in that order, are the prevailing trends in this well-established design space. Glossy marble-looks continue to be strong in subtle, classic stones like the ubiquitous white marble varieties. In the whites, there seems to be a shift from the stark/dark veined Statuario in favour of softer and more

diffused Calacatta or Macael options. In contrast to the whites, a new range of blacks hit the right point this year. The use of digitally and mechanically printed 'effects' overlays are deepening the marble looks and creating varying stratas of interest within these new collections. The use of sinking inks is especially effective in marbles. With the addition of a separate channel to the design file, manufacturers can now print a texture onto the surface where this ink with sink down through the glaze and create a depression. Often used to create depth and subtle shadow in the vein structure of the stone, this effect creates some of the most realistic, vintage marble looks ever seen. There is also a small but striking trend toward rare or endangered stones in the high end collections this year. Most of these are finding their way to the larger panel formats, often in book-match options. With less vein structure and more a monochromatic appearance, the limestone looks seem to be in subtle

The striking Kontinua collection by Casalgrande Padana.

decline this year. The next major medium of choice being the cotto and cement or hybrids mashing up the two looks seems to be taking the place of a lot of the traditional limestone looks as they fill a similar design space. That said, there does seem to be a return to the classic French limestone look typical in the Basque region. These French limestones seem split between clean looks with a square edge and softly rusticated versions. In a matt finish they tend to crowd the cotto/cement space but do very well when employing a granilla (dry frit), often with a lapatto finish. If you picture heavily clefted, skidged look when thinking about slate or quartzite, it may be time to think again. Today's collections range from elegant and subtly varied Brazilian slates to a similar take on quartzite. The looks are refined, with digitally applied gloss glaze in the clefts for the slates and mica flecks, subtle metallics and sugar glazes for the quartzites create layers of interest in these new ranges.

Wood: In line with the softening in other design spaces, the same seems to be true of wood-effect planks. This year saw a departure from heavily distressed timber towards a more subtle take on aging in the form of sand-blasted and hand-scraped looks. One of the biggest trends in the wood planks space seems to be an ultra clean and minimal Scandinavian take on woods in soft, light tones.

Digitally printed effects, such as the application of gloss glazes to portions of the plank to mimic a natural aged patina or simply picking out the raised grains in the more structured sandblasted looks, have raised the wood-effect design bar.

3D forms: Architectural and decorative wall cladding collections continue to boom in the space of heavily structured ceramics. With multiple directions being followed, there is a suitable dimensional cladding option for any design language; the most prevalent being small format geometrics in white, black and metallic. These ranges are a perfect accent for the plank format in traditional ceramic, wood, stone or metal.

Continuous Pressing Technology: A true game changer

Over the past 30+ years the world's tile industry transformed from a largely Eurocentric, semi-automatic, artisanal activity into the truly global hi-tech industry it is today.

Production technology has advanced in a series of significant leaps, including monocottura (single firing), monoporosa (dense body single firing), Rotorcolor rotary décor, atomised porcelain body prep and, latterly, digital ink jet printing technology.

Manufacturers have fought an escalating manufacturing arms race based on ball mills, atomisers, lances, cyclones, power co-generation systems and digital surface inspection. The resulting low-labour factories offer the balletic beauty of laser-guided kiln cars and pallet stacking robots; or awe-inspiring, ultra-fast and precise rectifying lines and polishing stations.

The progressive technical evolution of ceramic tile manufacturing shows no sign of slowing down. In the past few years the latest step-change has been the development of continuous compaction, where rollers - rather than moulds and vertical ram presses - compress the porcelain slabs or, as our today's mega-format slabs do, as our

colleagues in the USA now term them, gauged porcelain panels.

Two of the giant's of tile manufacturing technology - Sacmi and Sit B&T - led the way. Sacmi, with first Continua and now Continua+ developed an innovative compaction technology that broke through productivity barriers for large size tiles.

Continua+ allows the manufacture of porcelain slabs and tiles in a wide range of sizes and thicknesses, decorated both on the surface and in-body, at far higher output rates than those attainable with traditional processes.

Sacmi offers Continua+ lines with powder-based digital decoration systems and 'on the move' tile cutting systems. At the heart of each Continua+ line is a continuous compactor that allows manufacturers to form slabs that have a strength and density even greater than those attainable via traditional pressing. Cutting stations incorporated into the line allows manufacturers to produce a full range of sizes simply by adjusting a few settings.

Iris, Ariostea, Graniti Fiandre, Cooperativa Imola, Iris, Fincibec, RAK, Nord Ceram and Steuler are just some of the leading manufacturers that use this technology.



One of this year's best terrazzo-effect tiles: Terrazzo by Co-Em.



Until recently, the main rival was Supera by Siti B&T. Supera is highly flexible and versatile in terms of thicknesses (from 5 to 25mm). Rather than just a pressing technology for large-size tiles and panels, Supera is the heart of a complete production line consisting of cutting-edge technological solutions. It is highly flexible and can produce ceramic slabs up to 1,200 by 3,600mm; and their submultiples.

Supera is equipped with three hydraulic pistons designed to guarantee uniform shaping on the edges and splitting of the panels to minimise deformation during pressing. A key feature of Supera is XXL Green Cut, a cutting machine for unfired ceramic slabs up to 4,000 by 1,350 mm equipped with a transverse and longitudinal row of disc cutting units to cut the slabs in both directions and at positions that can be set via the touch-screen control unit.

As a result of these technologies, thin, large porcelain slabs - which can be used to cover all manner of surfaces including worktops and furnishings - are now available in sizes up to 1,600 by 3,200mm from companies like Floor Gres, Fondovalle, Caesar, AVA, Casamood, Flaviker, Floor Gres, La Fabbrica, Leonardo and Mirage.

The latest player in this cutting-edge market is another giant in the world of ceramic production plant; System. Developed by

System's Lamina division, Lamgea is a mouldless press, capable of manufacturing slabs up to 4,800 by 1,600mm using standard atomized porcelain powders. It is possible to create any effect on the slabs, even structured surfaces with a relief up to 2mm, digital decorations and 3D effects. Since the belt slides on the press, users can create different structures on a slab surface up to 16 metres long. This means that three concurrently produced slabs, each

4,800 by 1,600mm, can each look completely different.

Lamgea is billed as a revolutionary way of creating ceramic products, without moulds and with no format limits. A key selling point is the flexibility regarding thickness: from 3 to 30mm, depending on the product's intended use.

So Lamgea proposes that tile companies, using a single large slab, can produce all the sizes required, in any thicknesses required. The secret is Lamgea's ability to 'green' cut the unfired slabs, measuring up to 4,800 by 1,600mm, into the desired sub-formats. Manufacturers can also choose the thickness of the slabs depending on the intended use: floors, walls, worktops, furniture, architecture or interiors.

Lamgea claims to offer many benefits including thinner slabs that need less raw material, less firing energy and produce less waste. The resultant slabs are also lighter per sq. metre and thus easier to install. They are also easier to cut.

System claims that when a Lamgea slab comes out of the kiln, the shape is 100% regular without any gauge defects due to this perfect and uniform pressing method.

There are already more than 20 Lamgea plants operating globally; and the last statistics show that more than 35,000,000 sq. metres of tiles are already being made annually using Lamgea technology.

And adoption of this hi-tech system is far from being concentrated in Europe, as one might expect. For instance New Pearl, billed as the largest ceramic tile manufacturer in China, has selected Lamgea technology to enter the ultra large-format ceramic panel segment, aiming to become the main local producer of this type of product.

Another convert is Gold Medal, a Chinese company that specialises in

the production of high quality glazed tiles. It has installed the Lamgea system in the Guangdong Gold Medal Ceramics factory at Foshan.

On stand after stand at Cersaie, wall and floor tiles were shown alongside kitchen worktops, bathroom vanity tops, tile-clad furniture, tables and one-piece ceramic tops, and more. This was also true of factories, like Grespania, who have in-house Laminam plants. Once again, this 3mm material is now being produced in the same designs as porcelain floor tiles and white body wall tiles.

Today's ceramic tile factories can not only compete on size and price with composites and natural stone, but digital printing technology means that simulations of really fragile stones, or minerals rarely found in large enough seams for a one piece worktop, can now be simulated in a material with better technical performance, especially in areas such as stain- and scratch-resistance.

While there is definitely a place for these mega-formats in the traditional tile installation segment, architects and other specifiers will need to adopt radical new material strategies if to take full advantage of these incredible new mega tiles. Kitchen worktops is one obvious starting point, but the range of potential applications is extensive and growing.

Metro a go-go

The metro tile is a long-established tiling classic, and remains one tile format that continues to reinvent itself. Now available in a wide variety of designs, colours and finishes, the metro tile is chameleon-like, adapting to its surroundings to create a multitude of different looks from rustic chic, through to industrial minimalism. Plus, with the current

trend for coloured grouts showing no signs of fading, the plain metro tile can be easily given a contemporary makeover.

Often called the 'subway' tile, the look and feel of the metro tile was inspired by the iconic walls of the London and New York underground in the early 20th century. Today's modern day metro is well suited to kitchen walls, delivering design impact while offering walls a durable, practical surface covering solution.

Classic white metro tiles with a handmade look and feel offer a timeless elegance, whilst monochrome shades of grey and black are still holding strong as some of the best sellers within metro collections. Bolder colours are being incorporated into design schemes, including vibrant jewel shades of blue and green.

Metallic metro tiles are also gaining momentum, featuring lustrous shades of silver, gold and pewter for a feminine take on the industrial look.

Layouts and patterns have shifted from uniform designs to reflect a more eye-catching aesthetic, incorporating herringbone and basket weave patterns to add design appeal to walls.

According to Topps Tiles: "While neutral coloured brick-effect tiles, such as the metro tile, will always have a place in the retail and home environment, bolder, more eye-catching shades are gaining momentum thanks to the trend for more dramatic colours. Thanks to its simple and elegant characteristics, it will always have a place in stylish commercial and home surroundings, but there's been an undeniable shift this year towards deeper and brighter colours for this tile essential."

"There can be no doubt that the use of colour is one of the easiest ways to update a room and rich and bold jewel tones are set to be a huge trend for the

remainder of 2017 and into 2018 and beyond" says O'Neill. "This means we're seeing metro tiles in a range of fresh new hues including beautiful jade or emerald green, which works especially well when paired with contrasting but complementary ochre accents."

Bevelled Metro tiles, such as Tilefair's Marylebone range, emphasises the pattern when tiling a wall. Options include the classic brick-bond or subway pattern, stack-bond or off-centre. Because of the elongated format of the Marylebone tile, off-centre is a particularly good design option.

The Reverse Metro adds a new twist to this classic. Benefits of using a bevelled edge include framing individual tiles to place more emphasis on each tile. These reverse Metro tiles look stunning when fixed in a brick bond pattern, as the structured design is simple yet creates textural interest and a contemporary vintage feel on walls in any room throughout the home.

Specifiers should consider a staggered mix of Reverse and Plain Metro Tiles in the same colour, allowing the light in the room to create the subtle design. Or designers can mix and match contemporary colours, such as the light and dark grey, for a cool Scandinavian look.

With the trend for distressed and industrial styles still strong, many home owners want the look of exposed brickwork but with the practical benefits of porcelain tiles. Verona's Brick by Brick range offers just that, featuring 74 by 310mm glazed porcelain tiles with a realistic brick effect texture and pattern in a choice of three colours. These porcelain brick tiles can also be used on floors making them a great choice for hallways, kitchens or conservatories.

100 by 200mm InMetro white wall tile by Verona.

Pop Job: A dynamic design statement in tile

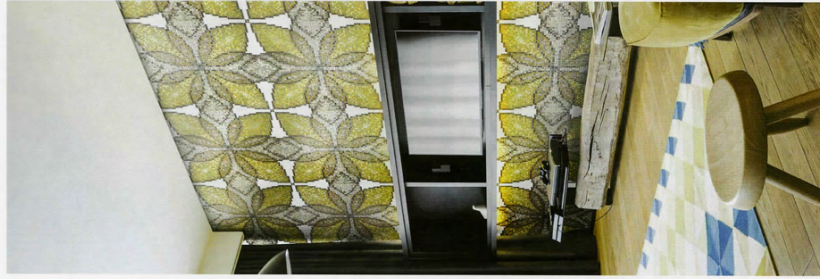
Pop Job, a striking collection created for Mirage by Studio Job, has almost no imitations in the ceramic sector, and explores an alternative graphic, coloured and provocative style.

The colour range includes six colours characterised by neutral and pastel tones. The shiny, smooth surface is obtained through the innovative 'twin-surface' technique, which involves the use of thick glass applied on porcelain stoneware surfaces through an absolutely innovative technology for an industrial material, ensuring unparalleled colour intensity.

There are seven shades available, ranging from more neutral tones such as white, beige, grey and black, to more vibrant colours such as green, pink and blue.

Pop Job designed by Studio Job for Mirage





Top 10 Tile Design Trends for 2018

Botanical: While floral designs have been around since decorative tile was invented, botanical is a new trend that reflects two movements in the design industry. The first is a focus on health and wellness and the incorporation of the natural world into interiors. Meanwhile, the influence of tropical modernism has seeped into interiors and product design, which can be seen the abundance of palm, cacti and other flora-inspired patterns.

Collections include Wide & Style by ABK, Verde Verticale by Ceramica Francesco de Maio, Abitare la Terra by Cerasarda, Dream by Fondovalle, Pulse by Keope, Botanical Tale by Mosaicor+, Overlay by Refin, Natural by Roberto Cavalli Home Luxury Tiles, Incipit by Valentino by Ceramichie Piemme and Decorandum by Vallelunga.



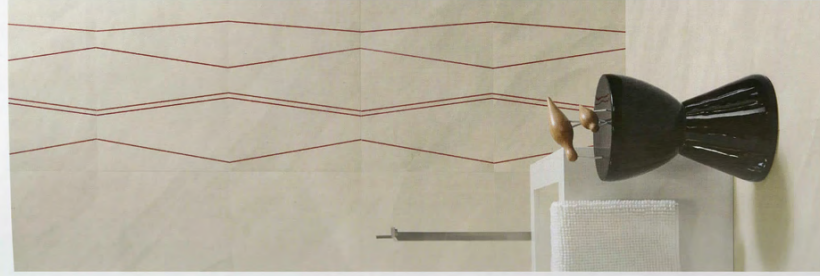
Deconstructed: Tile companies are constantly seeking new ways to add movement and volume to the flat surface, whether by texture, pattern, or tromp l'oeil effect. Deconstructed is the most recent example, featuring a breakdown and reconstruction of shapes that transcend the traditional rectilinear format of a tile.

Many of these collections are created by designers known for their eclectic approach like Studiope and Paola Navone; and range from kaleidoscopic patterns and floating geometric shapes to fragments of seemingly broken tile. Collections include Studios of Casamood by Casa Dolce Casa, Shades by Casalgrande Padana, Corrispondenza and Palladiana by Ceramica Bardelli, Fragments by Ceramichie Piemme, Bonbon by Decoratori Bassanesi, I Cacci by Fioranese, Metafisico by Ornamenta and Vanguard by Pastorelli.



Earth Tones: Drawing their main inspiration from natural elements, a wide range of Italian tiles fall into this theme. Colour palettes range from dirt, clay and sand inspired browns; forest, moss and grass-like greens; red and golden tones reminiscent of the sun; and shades of blue to evoke an oceanic feel. This trend has become popular partially due to a revival of 1970s style, along with a greater focus on mother nature and its ability to create a sense of natural serenity.

Collections include Wide & Style by ABK, Corrispondenza by Ceramica Bardelli, Frammenti by Ceramica Rondine, Terre Vietrese by Ceramica Vietri Antico, Graph by Ceramica Vogue, Omni-Touch by Edilcuoghi, Cozy by Flaviaker, Res Art by Fondovalle, Blecker by Marca Corona, Lamelle by Ornamenta, and Geomat by Tonalite.



Globalism: Designers and brands frequently look to other cultures for inspiration, which are exemplified in some 2018 tile introductions. For Marazzi's Grand Carpet collection, Antonio Citterio and Patricia Viel turned to the orient to create large ceramic slabs enhanced with the tactility of oriental carpets. Indian temporary ritual tattoos and the Kolam tradition of ephemeral rice floor decorations.

Meanwhile, LaFaenza was inspired by a specific cave in Slovenia to create the Radika collection and Inola's Koala is a doppelganger for eucalyptus wood, typically native to Australia.

Additional collections include Frenchmood by Ceramichie Supergrès, Brooklyn by Fap, Greek by Gardénia Orchidea, Sicily by Imola, 65 parallelo and W Zone by Leonardo, Vienna by Unica and Seamless by Unicom Starter.



New Typologies: While some companies recreate the look of wood or stone to an impressive degree of realism, others mix different materials or handpick certain characteristics to form a whole new typology. This fusion of material-looks and themes result in a surreal, imaginative interpretation of tile and a potential new language for interior design. For Nextone, Lea Ceramichie combined stones from four different quarries; while Sicis' new iteration of Vetrite infuses marble designs with metallic veins to create unique materials that can't be found in nature.

Additional collections include Marmo Mix by Moraitaliana, Essential by Astor, Horizon by Ceramica Panaria, Gems by Isla, Konkreta by LaFaenza, and Square by Settecento.



Nostalgia: People often look to design for an escape and in this current political climate it is unsurprising that companies are turning to the past to bring people a euphoric boost. For their third comic-inspired collection, Del Conca recreates the feminist world of Guido Crepax on ceramic tile with his 1960s comic-strip heroine, Valentina.

Meanwhile, other companies were inspired by simpler times, using square formats, candy colours and retro patterns reminiscent of the 1950s, like Happy Days by Cevi, and Confetti designed by Marcante-Tegla for Ceramica Vogue.

Additional collections include Wide & Style by ABK, Metrica by Appiani, Blu Ponti by Ceramica Francesco da Maio, Cementine Boho by Fioranese, Swing by Petracer, Aquarel by Tonalite and Vienna by Unica.



Painterly: Everywhere you look there is an overarching softness and romanticism in the design world with gentle curves, washes of colour and the unmistakable touch of an artist's hand. Tile is no exception with 2018 collections featuring hand painted patterns, sketches and illustrations, marbled effects and watercolor designs. Standout ranges include Pad by Patrick Norguet for Lea Ceramiche whose irregular lines and delicate shades create a soft, sensual effect, and Corrispondenza by Dimore Studio for Ceramica Bardelli whose hand-painted decors create a polychromatic kaleidoscope of soft tones.

Other collections include Wide & Style by ABK, Verde Verticale by Ceramica Francesco de Maio, To Be by Cercom, Paintwash by Elios, SpazioChiaroScur by Litokol, Manifesto by Ornamenta, Sketches by Settecento and Kora by Unica.



Pastels: Moving beyond the celebrity of millennial pink, shades of blush, lavender, sea green and pale yellow can be found in dozens of floor and wall tiles. Less saturated than primary colours, pastels create a light, soft and calming effect, which dovetails with a few other trends from this year from Painterly to Nostalgia.

Collections include Mek by Atlas Concorde, Palladiana by Ceramica Bardelli, Confetti by Ceramica Vogue, I Filati by Ceramiche Brennero, Colorline by Fap, Slash by Imola, Chalk by Marca Corona, FineArt by Sant'Agostino and Nurburgring by Tonino



Concrete-effect tiles: The stand-out tile specification

Concrete-effect floor and walls tiles cemented their position as one of the dominant trends in ceramic tiles around five years ago. Although minimalist, masculine, urban-edged, cement-coloured floor tiles have been a feature for some years, 2013 was when manufacturers truly started to explore the softer side of concrete tiles, aiming more towards the residential market with what had been, up until then, a product strand that for commercial and retail applications.

These more feminine concrete-effect tiles offered greater variety, both in tone and texture. The outcome was a plethora of distressed-faced tiles, chalky-look stucco effects, aged care-worn decors, fresh neutral greys of different intensity, greys with hints of blue and green, polished and semi-polished surface treatments



(often combined); and narrow plank formats with surfaces moulded to look like shuttered in-situ concrete, recalling 20th century Brutalist architecture.

Today manufacturers offer concrete-effect tiles of every shade, tone and texture imaginable: dark and light greys; grey with beige, blue and green hues; textured and smooth; plain and patterned.

There is no doubt that one of the drivers has been the growing popularity of the industrial/urban look in domestic settings. Here, concrete is the obvious choice; but concrete-effect porcelain tiles provide a versatile, durable and lightweight alternative that can faithfully mimic this aesthetic. Today, concrete-effect porcelain is favoured by many designers, due to its easy application and low running-maintenance costs.

And, with the growing availability of modular formats from 3,200 by 1,600mm down to 300 by 300mm, and everywhere in between, this modularity offers even more design flexibility.

As grey has overtaken beige as the go-to colour palette for tiles, this plays well for the cement-effect look, which is now offered in everything from an off white through to dramatic anthracite.

It should be noted, however, that with texture and overlaid tones adding surface sophistication to these now concrete-effect tiles, colour no longer the overriding factor when it comes to making a declaration of design intent.

And concrete-effect tiles have

broadened to encapsulate spatulated plaster finishes, distressed stucco looks, aged hydraulic tile decors, concrete/timber and concrete/metal composites, and a whole host more concrete-inspired designs that take industrial chic in a variety of fresh directions.

One of the most eye-catching new ranges of recent years, notable for its exquisite surface detailing, Trame by Lea Ceramiche comes in three different surfaces - Plaster, Matter, Canvas - all available in a neutral and harmonious colour palette.

Plaster recreates a soft and spatula textured surface. Matter is rougher and opaque with the grainy finish of real concrete. Canvas has a linen texture with a delicate graphic relief. Each of these three material surfaces come in six different colours, making a combined total of 18 surfaces.

In the Dwell collection by Atlas Concorde, porcelain floor tiles, and white-body wall tiles, deliver sought-after surfaces inspired by brushed concrete and synthetic resins. Ideal for contemporary styled venues and avant-garde architectural spaces, the colour palette includes natural and neutral colours, co-ordinated for floors and walls, and two synthetic nuances, for daring flashes of colour on walls.

Petitot, from Novoceram's Charme collection, also explores the design possibilities of cement-effect tiles. Petitot can evoke plaster, cement or metal, depending on which part of the design you are looking at. The range pays tribute to the work of Ennemond A Petitot, an eclectic French artist of the XVIII century.

Casalgrande Padana's Resina is one of the more complex designs from the concrete-effect stable; with surfaces distinguished by flashes of light, brushstroke markings and splashes of colour interspersed with a body of neutral tones inspired by the homogeneity of resin. This collection of porcelain stoneware transcends the modular nature of tiles to increase the potential of ceramics and create contemporary, original flooring.

The Resina collection allows designers to a fresh new feel to any room, creating a metropolitan style synonymous with fluid spaces such as lofts and former industrial buildings. It is available in grey, black, white, tobacco and havana and ivory in 450 by 900, 900 by 900 and 900 by 1,800mm formats. Decor options include Mosaico Penta (pentagons in black, tobacco and havana), 300 by 300 and 300 by 600 mosaics in all colours, and the 225 by 900mm Fascia Resina, also available in all colours. Bullnose and step tread pieces also form part of the range.

Contacts

www.mirage.it
www.studiojob.be
www.veronagroup.co.uk
www.toppstiles.co.uk/trade
www.tileflair.co.uk
www.sacmi.com
www.sitibt.com
www.system-ceramics.com