

Luxurious baths to fantastic floors - today's tile choices are terrific!

A landmark of luxury, tile has beauty and functionality. With a wealth of designs, patterns, and even types of tile, home builders are using tile to create one-of-a-kind bathrooms, kitchens, and more. Here are answers to questions about varieties of tile, as well as a glossary of tile terms to use when looking at your next home!



If you're planning on having one or more rooms accented by tile, you'll want to know some information about the basic materials, installation, and accent pieces available.

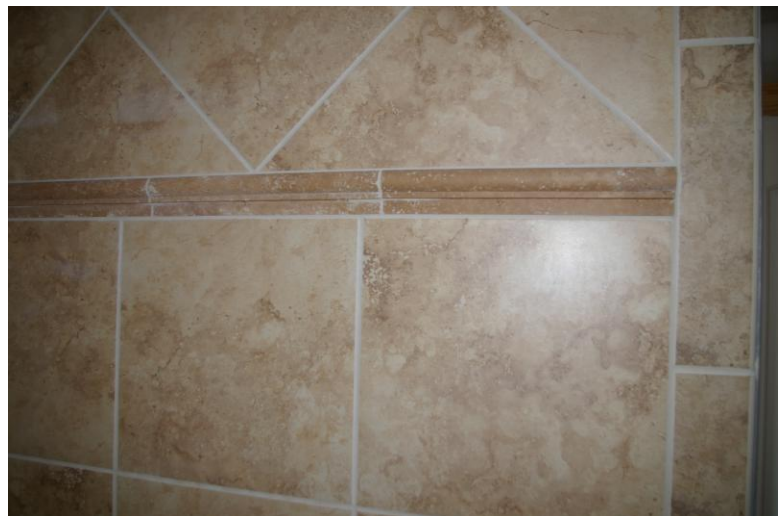
The master bathroom is often the first place in a home to receive a tile treatment. In custom homes, it's becoming common to see a tile floor, tile shower, and tub with tile surround.

Tile projects often start with simple squares of tile, whether 4"x4" on walls, 13"x13" on floors, or something in between. But even a

straightforward square tile application can be dressed up by placing some or all the tiles diagonally. This requires a more skilled and time consuming installation (and more costly), but the result can be interesting, and seems to draw the eye to the contrast with other surfaces or even with the natural horizontal lines of the walls.

But there is so much more to tile than square pieces - and depending on the budget allowed, a project can be composed of a multitude of different shapes and pieces. Here is a guide to some of the options:

Sometimes **medallions, or inserts**, are placed as accents at the corners of 4 tiles - a corner is cut from each of the four main tiles, and the medallion is placed in the resulting "square", at a 45 degree angle. These are small squares of tile that contrast with the larger main tiles to draw attention. They can be highly decorative 2"x2" squares with raised or inlaid designs, small mosaics consisting of 4 pieces on a backing,



metallic or glass, or even just a smaller version of the large tiles used in the main part of the project. The most basic inserts can be an inexpensive way to add variety to a project, depending on the number used.

Chair Rail can be used at eye level on a shower wall to add an interesting texture, or to mark a difference between horizontal and diagonal tile placement, as shown here. Chair rail is usually between 2 and 3 inches wide, and 8 to 13 inches long, and has a rounded, 3 dimensional look. It can also be used around a tub: either around the base, or around the upper part of the tub surround. Because a chair rail piece is fairly large and ornate, and must be made using a special process instead of a typical basic tile mold, using these will add a moderate to significant cost to the project.



Mosaics are quite popular accents as well. They have many uses. Sometimes used in shower floors, they can also be cut into strips two or three units wide and used as borders or accent pieces on backsplashes, across thresholds, or on walls. This can be a slightly less expensive way to add color and texture to any project. Mosaics can even be divided into squares of 4 pieces, and used as inserts as described above.

Listellos are decorative pieces used on floors or walls. These pieces are between 2 and 4 inches wide, and between 8 and 13 inches long. They are often etched with decorative floral or artistic patterns, raised or inlaid, and can be the most expensive pieces included in any tile project.

Listellos are often more colorful than the rest of the tile used, which helps them stand out even more. Care must be used in choosing listellos - because of the additional color applied to many of these, it can be difficult to find a color match to the main tiles.



Bullnose tiles are made especially for edges, such as on this tub surround. These tiles are generally 2-4" wide, but not as decorative as listellos or chair rails. There can be some color variations from the main tile.

Tile vendors now produce additional products as well - customers can order **soap dishes, shelves, and even towel bars** crafted

out of coordinating tile, for a luxurious and seamless master bathroom.

For the kitchen, **art accents** have been popular. These are really paintings done on tile, composed of anything from a single 4x4 insert painted with a grape cluster, to a 16x24 mural composed of 24 individual blocks and painted with a full Tuscan scene of grapes, wine bottles, and trailing vines. If you've already budgeted for a custom tile backsplash in your kitchen, adding a few inserts above the stove is usually a possibility. If you want a full mural, be prepared to increase your expenditure significantly.

Tile can be used in many different areas of the home. Some custom homes have **secondary bathrooms** with tile floors and tile tub surrounds with a standard porcelain tub. Tile floors can be found in **kitchens, breakfast rooms, laundry rooms**, even occasionally on **patios** or **foyers**. Fireplaces are another common place to find tile - a tile **hearth** and surround gives a polished feel to today's gas fireplaces.

There are many different kinds of tile available today. Ceramic tile is most commonly used, but it's useful to know all the basic tile types.

Ceramic tile is known for its durability, resistance to dampness, affordability, and ease of cleaning. It's safe to walk on when wet. Sealant should be applied every 4 years or so, but when sealant is properly applied tile is very water tolerant - you could even hose it off! Made from slabs of clay, ceramic tile is fired for hardness. Check before using ceramic tile outside - it needs to be extra strong to tolerate expansion and contraction from temperature changes. Glazed or unglazed, smooth or textured, and available in a wide variety of colors and styles, ceramic tile is the builder's choice for most tile floors, walls, or accents.

Natural stone - **quarried slate, limestone, flagstone, granite, or marble** - can be cut into tiles, even though all of these are better known as full countertop materials. Each has its own pros and cons - for instance, marble is known for its beauty, but it is expensive, requires a lot of maintenance, and can crack, stain, or mark easily. No wonder they don't let us touch the marble statues at the museum! Slate is noted for its beauty and long life, but it is soft and can split. Granite is durable, dense, and strong, but is mainly formed into basic tiles with few additional options. Natural stone is also one of the most expensive types of tiles, and some materials require more care and sealant due to natural permeability. Because these stones are created in nature, no two rooms will ever look the same.

Cement tile is created by pouring cement into molds, then finished by firing or natural drying. Color may be added. A strong sealant must be applied in order for cement tile to resist stains. This type of tile is not as common.

Porcelain tile is made from material similar to that used for ceramic tile, but it is fired at a very high temperature, which makes it denser and more resistant to moisture. It is fine grained and smooth, and can be matte, unglazed, or highly polished. It is stronger and more durable than

ceramic tile. As better processes for creating porcelain tile are found, it is becoming less expensive and more common.

Terrazzo - a cement or epoxy base is used, in which stone or marble chips are imbedded. The surface is then highly polished. Terrazzo is known for its unique beauty, style, and permanence, but it is expensive and can be somewhat slick to walk on.

Saltillo (Mexican tile) - these tiles are generally handmade and air dried, thus they are a little softer and less durable, but with a unique look from exposure to elements. When used indoors, the tiles must be sealed - some come sealed from the manufacturers.



Terra Cotta - think of "clay garden pots", and you'll have an idea of the natural rich reds and oranges from the clay base. These tiles are absorbent, and most often used on patios. They must be sealed for indoor use. Be careful, there are wide variations in quality.

Agglomerate - Another textured tile, created by mixing graded marble or granite chips with portlar cement, polyester resin or epoxy.

Glass mosaics - These are becoming very popular. In shades of blue, green, brown or even clear or translucent, glass mosaics provide a unique, if not natural, look. These tiles usually are $\frac{3}{4}$ "x $\frac{3}{4}$ ", and come in sheets roughly 12"x12" for application. This look can be expensive, but glass tiles can also be coordinated as medallions or accents with full size ceramic or other tiles.

Pictured is the Glass Mosaics Frosted Dimensions line, courtesy of Florida Tile.

A luxurious tile floor, shower, or bathtub surround provides long lasting beauty and durability in any home. Visit tile showrooms for ideas if you're building from the ground up or remodeling, or ask your local builder if they will work with you to provide just what you're looking for.

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